

berkshires week

Thursday, February 5, 2009 — D6

Berkshires

Now it's Berkshires Week! BerkshiresWeek.com daily updates on the Berkshires.

Here are some of our on today:

✓ What's there to do? Nightlife, the calendar's Best Best for the ✓ Interest with us: See a Daily Photo, or visit www.blogtheberkshires.com

Berkshire Organics



Emma Davis packs mushrooms at Berkshire Organics, which delivers farm-fresh fruits and vegetables to customers' homes and businesses weekly throughout the county.

Fresh produce ... even in snow

Organic fruit and vegetables on the doorstep

By Susan Geller
Special to The Eagle

DALTON

Summertime, with its farmers' markets, gives shoppers a chance to roam from stand to stand, admiring and buying fresh squashes, tomatoes, many kinds of lettuce, apples, and berries.

There are no farmers' markets in winter, when the snow is knee-high and the ice is caking, but fresh vegetables can still arrive at the front door.

Aleisha Gibbons recently started Berkshire Organics, at 720 Main St., to deliver baskets of organic farm-fresh fruits and vegetables to customers' homes and businesses weekly throughout the county.

Bobbi Cohn of Pittsfield is one who received a Gibbons' basket as a gift.

"What a delightful surprise upon opening my basket," she said. "Inside was the most luscious array of gorgeous fruits and vegetables, complete with recipes. The delivery is convenient, the prices competitive and the produce top quality."

Customers order for various reasons — health, convenience. One client even makes her own organic baby food.

Lynn Arsenau, a local Realtor, has



Aleisha Gibbons takes a delivery from Ted Debono of Egoinox Farms in Sheffield. Gibbons started Berkshire Organics last year on a business model she heard about.

been helping Gibbons each week.

"This is an awesome idea," Arsenau said. "I have a friend who is being treated for cancer, and she is on an organic diet. I also heard another friend talking about Berkshire Organics, and this is how I decided to get involved. The more I hang out with Aleisha, the better I feel. We all want to live longer."

Gibbons, a 30-year-old Berkshire native and graduate Berkshire School

and Roanoke College in Virginia, moved back to the Berkshires after she married, Brian Gibbons, a Great Barrington native and landscape designer.

Then she took a job that prepared her to be a business owner, she said. It was as executive assistant to the owner of Auto Revenue in Lee.

"While I was still working there, my sis-



BY TH

By Kat

A clo day n early

On Monday, came out to of The winter is m

We make a ga divination now, into it. I found shadow. Grou halfway between stice and the Celtic tradition: halfway holiday solstices and to still remember May Day; we a holiday in early

The old pages celebrated the f this halfway day of spring — purification. Po dies and watch badges to leave

At Tara, in Ire shines down the chambers to the

Among the G was Brigit's day part goddess, a and fire and hee

She could ab one person to an She sounds a unerving as th spring. Maiden corn husks to r held all night vi

Young men wo The next day, I walked in proc married women made them welc

In the Christian is Candlemas. It ing Mary brough son to temple 5; and it is also call meeting, for Sin prayer of thanks child. Choirs still the Nunc Dim eyes have seen li

Priests also bl dies on Candle ing familiar? L blessing of light, young mother bri the community, I walks on earth.

I had no ide stories, with sad roots to them. T of winter, the f growth in the q night on Tu B'she of the trees in the families will eat thanks for the bu that will come in

In December, light candles ag dark; this week, candles for the re

ORGANIC, continued on D8

Organic produce-delivery business has become a family enterprise

ORGANIC from D3

ter-in-law, Stephanie Gibbons, told me about a company in the West that did home delivery of fresh fruits and vegetables," Gibbons said. "Once she told me this, I couldn't get the thought out of my head. So, I started to look online at different companies out West that had developed the concept, and then I discovered one in Boston, and I decided, if I didn't do this now in the Berkshires, someone else would seize the opportunity. I thought it was a great idea."

Gibbons said she had wanted to join a community supported agriculture farm, but never signed up in time. She loved visiting farmers markets, but with her full-time job, she found it a challenge to get to them, too.

"In the winter of 2008, outside of work, I devoted all of my time to developing the concept of Berkshire Organics," she said. "I did this totally on shoestring budget, less than \$1,000. My start-up cost was the investment of 84 green bins."

Her company has grown to 420 bins made from recycled materials. She delivers produce in them.

"Everything I do is environmental friendly. I am proud that I am creating a green business in the Berkshires," she said, "especially now with the challenges of the economy."

Her business is also a family effort. She created her own Web site — berkshireorganics.com. Her dad designed the logo for her, and he and her husband deliver produce.

Gibbons employs one person full time, Scarlet Patti. Six more



Susan Getter / Special to The Eagle

Ted Dobson of Equinox Farms in Sheffield delivers a shipment of fresh greens to Berkshires Organics for distribution to customers.

people work in exchange for a weekly grocery bin.

"The customers enjoy seeing me bring their food to them," said

Brandon Gibbons, Aleshia's brother-in-law. "This is a great service that Berkshire Organics is providing, but Aleshia is also stim-

If you go ...

What: Berkshire Organics.

Where: 720 Main St., Dalton.

Service: Year-round door-to-door delivery of fresh organic fruits, vegetables, mushrooms, nuts and other produce.

Hours: Store hours are Thursday, noon-6 p.m.; Friday, noon-5 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.; and Sunday, noon-4 p.m.

Delivery: Customers order food baskets by Tuesday. Delivery Thursdays and Fridays. Any produce left over goes to the Pittsfield Food Pantry.

Contents of baskets vary from week to week.

Area farms that supply

Berkshire Organics:

Equinox Farm, Sheffield
Holiday Farm, Dalton
Leahy Farm, Lee
Bradley Farm, Lanesborough
Cricket Creek Farm, Williamstown
Ioka Valley Farm, Hancock
Hancock Shaker Village, Hancock
Hilltop Orchards, Richmond
Steadyland Farm, Ashfield
Sidehill Farm, Ashfield.

Cost: Baskets come in seven sizes, beginning with the bachelor basket for \$32.

Information: www.berkshireorganics.com, (413) 446-5510.

ulating the local economy by helping the local farmers. Berkshire Organics is a lot of hard work, and Aleshia deserves the credit.

"You are getting relatively the same prices or less as in the grocery store," he said. "And this fresh organic food is being delivered directly to your door. You don't have to wait in line, and you

help the environment by not wasting gas."

In the warmer months, Gibbons would call farms to find out what they had in season that she could pick up.

She worked with several farms in the Berkshires throughout the summer, and she drove to the Pioneer Valley once a week, to farms along the Connecticut River valley.

"I was trying to collect the best of what is grown within a 50-mile radius of driving distance," she said.

As the summer faded, Gibbons formed a relationship with Enterprise Farm in Whately, as they have their own winter CSA with produce from the Carolinas and Florida.

Gibbons said she and Enterprise Farm are trying to change the food distribution system so that consumers are not totally relying on the West Coast produce, she said.

In the Berkshires, Gibbons has a relationship with Equinox Farm in Sheffield, where she gets fresh greens throughout the winter — mixed mesclun greens, spinach, and some root crops. She is always looking to develop and expand relationships with additional local farms, she said.

Sometimes, the contents of the baskets are exotic.

Marcia Mandel of Pittsfield said, "I was a little hesitant about accepting vegetables that I was not comfortable cooking, but Berkshires Organics anticipated my needs by providing recipes for all the uncommon and unusual vegetables in the weekly baskets. All was successful."

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