

## Artists bring a bit of country living to the city



Mark Hoffman

Ryan Foat (from left), Jeffrey Folstad and Chet Rosales are the creative energy behind a produce stand that will be located near N. 35th St. and W. Lisbon Ave. in Milwaukee. The stand, modeled after iconic roadside vendors from years ago, will bring fresh vegetables and fruits to the city.

### Roadside stands selling vegetables hold on to rural memories

By Karen Herzog of the Journal Sentinel

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Chet Rosales / Laorosa

An artist's rendering of the produce stand.

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Artists, like farmers, reap what they sow.

With that in mind, a group of Wisconsin artists is trying to take a little bit of the rural landscape into the city by creating what amounts to one-person farmers markets with flatbed trailers as their canvas.

On a practical level, farmers will sell fruits and vegetables straight from the farm in city neighborhoods.

On a more esoteric level, they will try to make a cultural connection by bridging land and asphalt.

The goal of the so-called roadside culture stands is to remind city residents that vegetables come from a landscape other than grocery store produce aisles.

One stand, created by Wisconsin native Tory Tepp, will be parked later this week next to the marinated herring company Baensch Food Products Co. at the corner of N. Humboldt Blvd. and E. Locust St. Another stand will arrive in July at a lot beside Amaranth Bakery and Café on W. Lisbon Ave., just east of N. 35th St.

The stands are modeled after the iconic "homegrown" vegetable stands that, for generations, peppered the countryside during the growing season, as farmers sold their produce along gravel roads and in parking lots on the edge of town. Wisconsin artists will make their stands roadworthy so they can be parked in both urban and rural settings.

Some of the stands, including one being built on a farm near the Town of Vernon, incorporate actual pieces of a farm. This stand is sided with boards pulled from a dilapidated barn.

"I bet there's one nail you could pull off that barn that would cause enough stress for the whole thing to come down," said Jeff Folstad, an architect with Solid State, who is helping build the stand that incorporates barn wood.

"It's like a large Jenga game," added Chet Rosales, a designer for Laorosa, who also is working on the project.

The barn is part of a farm that has been in Ryan Foat's family for decades. Foat is creative director of Oxbow Studio, his own fabrication design firm, and the three men are friends.

Foat spent much of his childhood on this farm, following his grandpa as he did chores and playing in the hayloft of the barn that once held cattle. Foat said he's sad to see the barn fall apart, but he's glad he can give pieces of it a new purpose.

"There's a lifestyle here that's crumbling," Foat said last week, as the three artists nailed barn wood onto the "Home grown" stand. "A few of us are trying to hold on to little pieces, and all the memories we can."

The roadside culture stand they're creating will last for decades, while the barn may disappear within years, reclaimed by the landscape where it has weathered wind and rain. This stand is destined for the lot beside Amaranth Bakery and Café.

"Culture means to till the soil," said Donna Neuwirth of Reedsburg, who, with her partner Jay Salinas, created a nonprofit organization called the Wormfarm Institute, which came up with the idea for the roadside stands and other artistic endeavors to reconnect consumers with the source of their food.

"We're mainly reminding people how connected food and culture are," Neuwirth said.

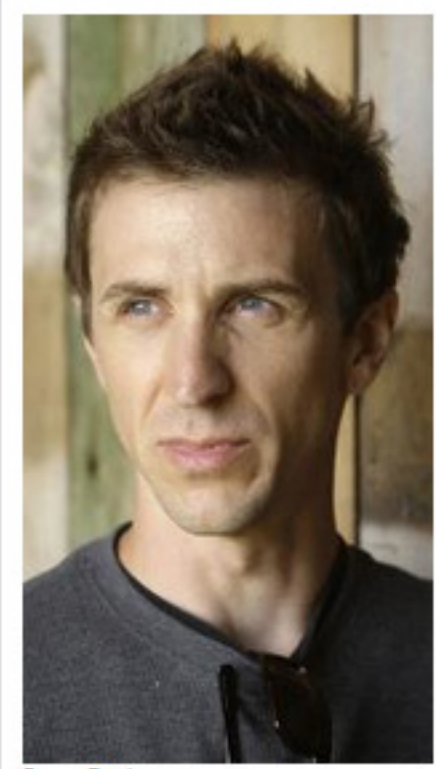
The Wormfarm Institute got its name from Charles Darwin's suggestion that every grain of fertile soil passed at least once through the gut of an earthworm.

"It's both literal fertile soil for the growing of organic vegetables, and metaphorically fertile for the creative work of writers and artists," Neuwirth said.

If you want to preserve the scenic beauty of an agricultural landscape, you must eat from the food chain that created the landscape, says Neuwirth, who also quotes Kentucky farmer-author Wendell Berry: "Eating is an agricultural act. We are all participants in agriculture."

The roadside culture stands are funded by the Wisconsin Arts Board, the Kohler Foundation, Brico Fund and Wisconsin Farmers Union.

Two stands are to be located in Milwaukee, one in Mineral Point and one in Baraboo. Each will have a home base and will travel to local festivals and county fairs.



Ryan Foat



Jeff Folstad



Chet Rosales

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