



**MICHIGAN SOYBEAN
PROMOTION COMMITTEE**

a new release



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Soybean Meal Puts Middleville Chickens on the Local Food Map

Across Michigan and around the country, people are discovering local flavor and recognizing the benefits of buying their food locally. Gary Otto of Otto's Chicken in Middleville, Michigan, has become a favorite supplier in the local food movement by raising high-quality chickens his way.

Otto's parents started raising turkeys in Middleville in 1950 and his family still raises turkeys up the road. In 1998, Otto saw an opportunity to start raising chickens on his own by applying the principles and values his parents had taught him as a child. "I learned that the best-tasting birds were treated with great care and fed a palatable, high-quality protein diet," he explained.

Otto's attention to his birds has paid off. Otto's Chicken has become the favored chicken of chefs at some of Michigan's best-known restaurants. Food Dance, a popular Kalamazoo restaurant, uses only Otto's and even names the brand in its menu. "My chickens look and taste the way they do because of the soybean meal they eat and the care they get," Otto noted.

Food Dance's founding partner Julie Stanley agrees. "Otto's chickens have a very full, clean flavor," she asserted. "And they're very meaty, just like chicken was 50 years ago. Once you taste his chicken," she continued, "you can never eat another brand again. He treats his chickens like they're his babies."

Stanley started buying locally produced ingredients in the 1980s, which was unusual in Kalamazoo at the time. "My focus was on flavor and freshness—still my top priority." But now, she said, "I'm also satisfying a growing demand for local foods." She believes passionately in supporting local farmers and food producers like Otto.

Buying locally supports farmers and agribusinesses, as well as the state's economy. According to the Michigan Department of Agriculture, "if every Michigan household spent just \$10 per week on Michigan-produced food, it would generate nearly \$40 million to the state."

"I'm excited that the move toward local foods means more people are discovering my chickens," Otto noted. His experience is part of the explosion in the demand for local foods of the past five years. Growing numbers of celebrity chefs are incorporating local food into their shows, cookbooks and restaurants. This growth is evident in the numbers of farmers' markets. In 1994, the USDA counted

1,755 farmers' markets in the nation. As of 2006, the number had grown 250 percent to 4,385 farmers' markets.

Otto sells at farmers markets, delivers to restaurants and sells from his own shop on the farm. "I don't consider raising chickens as my job," he said. "It is my great privilege, a chance to serve my community its most basic need—food."

The Michigan Soybean Promotion Committee works to enhance the profitability of Michigan's soybean producers through investment of soybean checkoff funds. MSPC works to build markets for soybeans through educational programs, promotion of biodiesel and other new soybean uses, and funding agronomic research. MSPC is led by a board of farmers elected to direct the investment of soybean checkoff funds on behalf of the more than 10,000 Michigan soybean farmers. For information about soybean checkoff results, call (989) 652-3294 or visit www.michigansoybean.org. To learn more about good stewardship practices and the connection between crop production and animal agriculture, visit www.animalag.org.

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