Food Day promotes glocalization

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Staff Reporter

AMENIA — During the hugely successful inaugural Food Day celebration sponsored by the Eastern Dutchess Rural Health Network, roughly 500 people filled the hall at the Immaculate Conception Church to learn about local agriculture, nutrition and healthy living.

Gertrude O’Sullivan, the director of communication and special programs at the Foundation for Community Health, was one of the event’s organizers. She explained that the event was part of a national initiative that draws attention to food-related issues in the local community.

The event focused on food and health while highlighting related issues, like reducing obesity and resources, such as local farmers’ markets.

O’Sullivan said the bilingual event was designed with everyone in mind because everyone eats and everyone cooks to some degree.

[An event like this] makes sense in this area because we have so many different resources,” said Ed Frederick, the community outreach coordinator at Hudson River Health Care. He went on to note that one of the goals of the event was to help people become more involved in agriculture and more self-sufficient through initiatives like community gardens.

Frederick said he believes that agriculture is an important part of rural life that brings life back into the community while creating healthy residents.

He explained that one of the themes of the event was glocalization. “It’s like the bumper sticker says, ‘Think globally, act locally,’” he said.

In the main hall, live music serenaded the crowd. Zumba dancers got their groove on and restaurants, farmers, merchants and local organizations had colorful booths offering wide varieties of fresh produce, food samples and hands-on demonstrations for agricultural activities like beekeeping and making sauerkraut.

The Meli Farm booth had a display case full of live bees crawling through a honeycomb. A steady stream of children drifted around the display.

“Kids love it,” said Sophie Meli, one of the owners of Meli Farms, as she gestured to two children intently inspecting the case and asking questions about the bees.

“It’s neat to introduce people to beekeeping. Bees are really incredible little creatures, and it’s great to be able to share that with people,” Meli said.

She explained that there are very few wild hives left, so it’s up to the beekeepers to maintain the honey bee population, which is critical for crop production.

Meli said that beekeeping is a relatively low-maintenance agricultural endeavor because bees don’t need as much attention as chickens or cows. “Anybody can have a hive or two in their backyard,” she said.

Meli has been a beekeeper for 10 years, but said that this was her first chance to show her bees to the public.

“There was no way we weren’t participating,” Meli said of the event. “This is amazing. It’s very encouraging to see how many people have come.”

A few booths down, people from the Adamah Farm at the Isabella Freedman Jewish Retreat Center were helping attendees make their own sauerkraut.

Shamu Sadeh said that the group chose to do a sauerkraut demonstration because cabbage is a great autumn food that is cheap and has wonderful health benefits when it’s turned into sauerkraut. Sauerkraut is also very fast and easy to make.

“It’s an example of a very simple thing you can do for yourself, for the environment and for the planet, and it’s really tasty,” he said, noting that preserving cabbage as sauerkraut is also a way for people to eat locally throughout the winter when fresh local food is not available.

Adam Sanoguere, the product manager for the farm, said the organization participated in Food Day to help educate people about traditional foods and sustainable agriculture, as well as the health and environmental benefits of both. They also wanted to encourage people to become more involved in their own food.

Elsewhere in the hall, attendees were sampling dishes from local restaurants. Many of the dishes were made with locally grown ingredients donated by farms in the area.

Many of the recipes were included in a free cookbook created for the event.

“The food has been phenomenal and the demonstrations have been so informative,” O’Sullivan said. “What a great way to get information!”

For more information about the event or to join the event mailing list, call Ed Frederick at 845-373-9006.