

AGRICULTURAL MONUMENT

Monument Circle event introduces local products to new customers

BY KATHLEEN M. DUTRO

More than 120 farmers and other businesses were on Monument Circle June 28 for Monumental Marketplace, an event that encourages consumers to discover and sample some of the best locally produced food, drinks and other wares the state has to offer. “Our goal was getting people in one place to see a snapshot of Indiana agriculture,” said Heather Tallman, program director for event sponsor Indiana Grown, the state’s local branding initiative. “I feel like we’ve succeeded there,” she added. Hundreds of Indianapolis residents and office workers sauntered around the Circle buying, sampling and collecting information from Indiana Grown members on products ranging from wine to cheese, from pasta to popcorn, and from soap to nuts. Among the exhibitors were a number of Farm Bureau members, who came to the event with products to sell and stories to tell.



INFB PHOTOS

Clockwise from top left: Jacob Baird offers samples of his family's popcorn brand, Groomsville Popcorn, to a Monumental Marketplace customer; Tim Vanzant introduces a potential customer to Risin' Creek Creamery's goat cheese; Kris Brock preps meatballs given out as free samples from Brock Farms Angus Cattle; Jeff and Andrea Mitzner use the marketplace to network with customers, potential partners and other vendors.

GROOMSVILLE POPCORN (BAIRD FAMILY)

SHARPSVILLE, INDIANA

The Bairds raise commercial corn and soybeans, but they also produce sweet corn under the My Dad's Sweet Corn label and have spent lots of time at farmers markets. Jacob Baird said the family got in the popcorn business because they needed something to sell at farmers markets in the pre-sweet corn months of May and June.

So they took a small field that wasn't suitable for commercial crop production, planted popcorn, and in the first year harvested 2 tons. Farmers market sales are still an important part of their business, along with online sales.

At Monumental Marketplace, the Bairds gave out samples of popped corn and sold bags of both popped and unpopped popcorn and on-the-ear popcorn kits. “It's an absolute blast for us,” Baird said. “It gets our name out there and exposes us to new customers.”

BROCK FARMS ANGUS CATTLE

STILESVILLE, INDIANA

The Brocks raise row crops in Hendricks and Putnam counties, and they've “always had Angus bulls,” explained Kris Brock. Their freezer beef operation started in 2002, and they sell wholes, halves and quarters as well as individual cuts that can be ordered or picked up directly at the farm.

“We were really excited to be part of Monumental Marketplace,” she said. “If we as farmers let other people tell our story, it may not be the story that we want to tell.”

Monumental Marketplace occurs in the middle of the workday, so it's not conducive to sales of frozen meat because people are going back to offices where they don't have a place to store it, Brock explained. Instead, the Brocks handed out flyers and business cards and offered free samples of meatballs.

“We gave out all 6,000 meatballs by noon,” she said. “We would definitely do it again.”

RISIN' CREEK CREAMERY (VANZANT FAMILY)

MARTINSVILLE, INDIANA

The Vanzants have been in the goat business for more than 30 years, and for most of that time, they focused on producing prize-winning Nubian goats.

“We had a very successful show herd, but we wanted to do something a little bit more,” Tim Vanzant said.

So they started Risin' Creek Creamery, now in its fifth year. Milking 60-65 goats, they produce several flavors of chevre (a soft goat cheese) as well as feta (a crumbly cheese) and cajeta (Mexican caramel sauce). They sell goat-milk soap and lotion as well.

Aside from a few wholesale markets, all of their products are sold through local farmers markets. For the Vanzants, Monumental Marketplace was a way to get their products in front of new people – and to get them to taste it.

“Goat cheese can be pungent, but ours doesn't have that,” Vanzant said. “That's why it's really important to get people to taste it.”

MITZNER MEATS WANATAH, INDIANA

Jeff and Andrea Mitzner grow corn, seed corn, wheat and soybeans, but they got into the cattle business through their kids' involvement with 4-H.

Originally the meat business “was a way to get some profit from unusable show animals,” Jeff Mitzner said. They started selling beef and pork privately back in 2010, and in 2018 they started selling through their local J-Mart in Wanatah and then at farmers markets.

Among their big sellers are specialty burgers, including bacon cheddar, jalapeño pepper jack and pizza burgers. They sell through Market Wagon Michiana (a service that operates local food delivery hubs), but they still sell through farmers markets and from their farm.

“We tell people that if we're here, we're open,” he said.

They got involved with Monumental Marketplace because it was an opportunity to network with potential customers, other vendors and the folks from Market Wagon Michiana. However, much like the Brocks, Mitzner found that people don't generally buy frozen meat at Indianapolis farmers markets held during the work week.

Nonetheless, he said they might go again next year if Mitzner Meats starts selling by mail order, which they hope to do by winter.



The Baird Family
groomsvillepopcorn.com
mydadssweetcorn.com

Brock Farms Angus Cattle
brockfarmsanguscattle.com

Mitzner Meats
mitznerfarms.com/
mitzner-meats

Risin' Creek Creamery
risincreek.com

Indiana Grown
indianagrown.org