

Fresh fruit & vegetables: Maine Grange Store a first for Fryeburg Fair

For the first time at Fryeburg Fair, a group of Grangers has united to provide fresh garden produce for the thousands of campers and fairgoers that descend here during fair week.

The Maine Grange Store will offer potatoes, squash, root crops, apples, cider, corn, jellies, jams, pickles, syrup and anything else still in season daily from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. during the Oct. 3-10 fair.

“We’re going to try and keep it with basically local farmers,” said Debbie Day of West Baldwin, president of the store, which will be located between the Agricultural Exhibition Center and the milking parlor.

At one of the spring Grange meetings hosted annually by Fair President Roy Andrews and Agricultural Expo Supt. Ann Michele Ames, Andrews asked what the fair can do to help the Granges. Day posed the question about a farm stand providing fresh fruit and vegetables. Andrews agreed it was a great idea.

Seventeen Granges throughout the area were contacted. Those that agreed to participate are Mt. Etna in North Baldwin, Maple Grove in Sebago, Porter, Excelsior in Poland and Saco along with the state Grange Agricultural Scholarship Committee. In the Agi Expo, as it is affectionately called, Ames said there will be eight domestic Granges represented along with four agricultural, one junior and the state Grange display.

It took time organize the effort and establish a committee. Day went to past state Master Steve Verrill, who has a farm stand in Poland, along with Dave and Jeanne Burnham of the Agricultural Committee for the state Grange. Verrill serves as secretary, Marilyn Holland from Porter is the treasurer and Dave Burnham is the general manager and will be at the store throughout the week. Profits from the endeavor will be shared on a percentage basis based on the amount of time each Grange volunteers.

Despite the local enthusiasm, the Maine Grange Store ran into difficulties at the national level. A recent battle to protect its name forced the National Grange to establish strict rules regarding use of “Grange.”

“This is the first time that they’ve ever been confronted with this at National Grange,” Day said of a group of local Granges going into business.

The Grange battled the railroads in the 1870s and the federal government in the 1950s, but in 2009 was forced to protect itself against Tyson Foods, the largest meat producer in the world. The Arkansas-based company filed a trademark application to sell its “grange and grassland” line of chicken, pork and beef. A year into the fight as outraged Grangers from across the country prepared to mount an aggressive public-awareness campaign, Tyson withdrew its application.

Day said she is thrilled that her dream of a Grange store at the fair is coming true. Her grandfather, Albert Locke, was a fair trustee from West Baldwin and showed cattle at the fair.

She has worked in the Agi Expo for the last eight years and has been coming to Fryeburg Fair for 60 years.

The National Grange was founded in 1867 by Oliver Hudson Kelley as the Order of Patrons of Husbandry to preserve and support farming. The Grange helped establish the Interstate Commerce Commission, rural free mail delivery, progressive taxation and community farming. Today, there are about 250,000 members in 2,700 local Granges.

Still pending are battles with a large European-owned supermarket chain that is using the term “Granger” on a line of meat, a dairy producer that wants to market milk under the mark DE LA GRANJA which means “from the Grange,” and a winery that wants to label its product LA GRANJA, which means “The Grange.”