

TSET Better Health Podcast Transcript

Episode 4: Farmers Markets and Summer Nutrition

June 17, 2020

Summary: Better Health is bringing healthy, local food to you in this episode. Your hosts James and Cate explore the sights, sounds and people at the Scissortail Park Farmers Market, have an informative conversation with Abbey Owens, Meredith Scott and Jade Owen of the Oklahoma Nutrition Information and Education (ONIE) Project, and dive into the story of Shelby Sieg, chef at Lua Mediterranean and Bottle Shop and a featured chef with Shape Your Future. Tune in to learn more about local farmers markets and the importance of nutritional food for the body and soul.

[Theme music]

[0:15]

James Tyree: Hey, hello, everybody. We are here at the [farmers market at Scissortail Park](#) in Oklahoma City. This is James Tyree of TSET.

Cate Howell: And this is Cate Howell, health communication intern.

JT: And welcome to the TSET Better Health Podcast!

CH: It is so beautiful outside right now. A little warm, but –

JT: Yes.

CH: [laughs] But there's so many people out and great local foods to look from. Tell us some conversations that you've had, James.

JT: I've had conversations with farmers – there are farmers here who've come from miles, miles away to come here because this is such a vibrant market and they are pretty excited to be here on this beautiful day. I've talked with shoppers, people who've come from near and far just to find all kinds of really, really fresh foods and other types of items here. As you said, Cate, it's a really beautiful day and so people are happy to be here. And so you not only get shopping for nutritious foods, but you get people who are pretty jovial because they're pretty happy to be here. It's a great atmosphere here.

CH: And so this was formerly the OSU-OKC farmers market, right?

JT: That is correct. It was there for a long time. It moved here to Scissortail Park, and they were going to have a grand opening today, but they're going to push it back just because there's so much going on in the world around us and stuff. But it's hard to tell that it's not a grand opening, because it's opening here and it's grand. [laughs]

So in this podcast, we will hear from Mary Bixler, who kind of coordinates this farmers market. You'll hear from farmers and customers who are here in terms of why they like being here. You will hear from people from ONIE, Oklahoma Nutrition Information Education, in terms of what they do for nutritious foods, farmers markets, all kinds of stuff throughout the state. And I hear that you had a pretty righteous interview too.

CH: Yeah, we're going to talk to Shelby Sieg. She was our featured chef with Shape Your Future. We recorded a [video](#) with her that'll be available on the website, but we also got a little background into who she is, her story, why she chose to be a chef and the background of the Lua restaurant in the Plaza District as well.

JT: Oh really?

CH: Yeah.

JT: How cool is that?

CH: Very cool.

JT: [laughs] Very, very nice. Okay, well, enjoy the sights and sounds of this farmers market, and we will get right to Mary Bixler. I had a chance to talk with her a little bit ago right before the market opened, and so here are her comments.

[02:50]

JT: Alright! Hello Mary, how are ya?

Mary Bixler: I'm very good. How are you, James?

JT: Pretty good. We're here at Scissortail. What's it like? It's the grand opening, so what are we expecting today?

MB: Absolutely. So we did change our grand opening ceremony just a little bit in light of everything that's going on socially. We didn't feel like it was exactly the appropriate time to be celebrating when there's a lot of reflection and, you know, intentional thinking. So we wanted to scale back a little bit on our grand opening and just provide a safe space for folks with some music. We will have a few remarks from our CEO this morning, Maureen Heffernan, that'll be a little later.

So we added a couple of vendors this week, so we have a couple more produce folks, but you can also expect to see lots of plants, lots of ready-to-eat food. We have a few artisan folks, so we have some folks that are making some really cool stuff with local products. We also have Oklahoma State University passing out resources for their [horticultural program](#), as well as [Hunger Free Oklahoma](#). They're with us this morning, and they're passing out resources for SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) and resources for how folks have been affected financially with COVID, as well as some recipes and nutritional assistance programs.

So that's basically what you'll see here today. So, a little bit scaled back on the grand opening but we're still, you know, really really blessed with such a beautiful space. We felt like it might be more appropriate to have a celebration maybe at the end of the season and kind of wanted to show our solidarity with everything going on right now.

JT: Okay. So, for a scaled back event, it still sounds like there's a lot going on here. There are so many places to shop for foods and items; why should people come here?

MB: Great question. Yes, we do have a lot of folks with us. With our increased safety precautions, we needed to limit the numbers at first, but now we're steadily increasing to accommodate more of our members.

The really, really beautiful thing about local food systems is that, you know, we look at this as an environmental aspect, but it really encompasses economic and social equity. So when we're able to purchase from folks who are growing and making their products locally, we're keeping that money circulated in the Oklahoma economy, and we're lifting up local small business owners. And as far as quality of food, you can tell a difference once you taste any of these items. It is different. These are value-added, nutrient-dense products. Most of these products are not coming from any further than 50 miles, so thinking about that as far as environmental, that's so much less "food miles" we call it, because with planes and vehicles, there's a lot of emissions it takes for our food to get to our grocery store and then to the consumer. So the food miles are much, much shorter. The growing practices are also significantly better, and these folks are paying their workers as they should be. They're providing a working atmosphere that is not exploitative to the environment, to the land or to people that usually work the land that in those large-scale farming operations can be, you know, not the greatest working situations.

It's such a wonderful experience to be able to talk to people that grow and make your food or your items, and that kind of feedback is very unique to a farmers market in that you're asking people and you're getting that feedback and you're learning versus just picking it up off the shelf. There's so much more connection to the land and how that's grown or how that's made. So it's just a lot of multifaceted but really holistic and in the way that we look at food.

JT: And finally, I guess TSET and Shape Your Future will have a partnership here. What's that going to be about?

MB: Yeah, we are very, very excited for that partnership. So what we've started to do is TSET and Shape Your Future are sponsoring our [Farmers Market Cooking Series](#). So, right now what that looks like, given everything with COVID, is we are digitally making a video of local chefs in the community that are using seasonal ingredients to make a healthy meal that's filling, fun for the family to get involved in, but also workable on a budget, and so we're looking at SNAP guidelines. We have an awesome recipe book that's like 'how to have great recipes and filling meals on four dollars a day.'

So we're showing folks how to prepare these items. It can be really overwhelming when you come to a farmers market and you see so many things that you don't know what to do with them, or how to utilize a whole plant, like the greens on carrots or beets, and so we're having these chefs show us little tricks on how to make sauces or how to make stock with those extra bits, as well as ways to cook these ingredients where you get the most flavor and nutrient density.

So we're going to be airing those videos digitally on our social media, and then when we're able to do live cooking demos, we're going to have those chefs come over and do this live, and then folks be able to get the ingredients at the market to make those recipes at home.

JT: Excellent.

MB: It's very great.

JT: Well, thank you Mary. I appreciate it so much. It's so nice having you here on the podcast.

MB: Thank you. I so appreciate you all being here.

[07:27]

JT: Well, as I mentioned, earlier this week, a few days ago, we were able to catch up with Meredith Scott, Abbey Owens and Jade Owen of the ONIE Project, and they are fantastic to speak to because they are very involved with agribusiness and farmers markets and spreading nutrition to Oklahomans throughout the state. So we were able to catch up with them. I think we had a really good conversation. Would you like to hear it now, Cate?

CH: Yeah, let's roll it. [laughs]

JT: Alright.

[07:56]

Meredith Scott: Hi, I'm Meredith Scott, and I'm the ONIE program manager.

Jade Owen: Hello, I'm Jade Owen, and I am ONIE's community outreach coordinator.

Abbey Owens: I'm Abbey Owens. I am ONIE's operations coordinator.

JT: Very good to have you guys. Thank you for your time with us, too. We really appreciate it.

Just to get started, can you tell us, in a nutshell, what is ONIE? What does it stand for? What's your mission? And what are your main programs and activities?

MS: Well, ONIE stands for [Oklahoma Nutrition Information Education Project](#). We are 100% grant-funded. We have started out primarily as a SNAP education program, but throughout the years, we've grown into a lot of other different projects as we've received other grants. But our main goal is to make the healthy choice the easy choice, and that's what all of our programs are focused in on. That's honestly how we got involved with farmers markets. We saw that vegetables at farmers markets are the best they can be, and we wanted to give all Oklahomans access to that quality food. So we started working with farmers markets to help improve that access through SNAP and other tools.

So that's a little bit about us. We do have different projects, but we do, of course, love our farmers market initiative.

JT: Well, how exactly does ONIE support and promote farmers markets, not only for the farmers and producers, but also for people out there, the consumers?

AO: Each year, we host the annual [Oklahoma Farmers Market and Agritourism Conference](#) in partnership with [ODAFF](#) (Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry). This conference helps bring together around 500+ growers, producers, agritourism sites and support organizations to network, gain new skills, learn new information, and really just come together to have a conversation about agriculture in the state. We also offer technical support. We also offer marketing support for farmers markets like signage, as well as digital marketing such as social media promotion. On top of that, for consumers, we offer different resources to help bring consumers into the markets and make the markets more family-friendly. Some of these are in-season recipe cards to help promote especially crops. So yeah, those are some of the things we offer to help support farmers markets.

JT: Where can farmers and consumers find this information?

AO: We definitely have a lot of resources on our website, [ONIEproject.org](#), but we also provide recipe cards and recipe stands and maybe some other resources like scavenger hunts or how to do this family event like a cooking demo to help make the market more of an event rather than just a grocery shopping experience.

JT: Nice. I will say that one that one of my personal favorite resource that you guys have, every year ONIE puts out a calendar, and we always get that calendar because it has all these great recipes and such for it.

AO: And we definitely provide those to different farmers markets as well.

JT: Yesterday, my daughter flipped the calendar because it's a new month now, and she saw orange cashew chicken and she's looking forward to actually making it, so there you go.

Can you tell us about farmers markets throughout the state? Do you know about how many there are, and what about them makes them similar when you go from place to place, and what are some differences that can make each one kind of unique?

JO: So right now there are over 90 farmers markets registered in the state of Oklahoma, and ONIE has worked with markets all across the state from Miami to Frederick in all different corners. Of course, at every market you're going to find people who are very, very passionate about their farms, the produce that they're selling, as well as their community. One of my favorite things about farmers markets is when you go to one, you really get a vibe of what that community's like, what their values are. Farmers markets really do foster a sense of community connectedness.

JT: Of course, this year has kind of been unlike any other in recent memory with the pandemic going on. Can you tell us a little how farmers markets throughout the state have had to adjust during the midst of this pandemic?

JO: So the good news is Oklahoma farmers markets are open to serve their customers. They are all following suggested safety guidelines, so vendors are wearing masks and gloves, practicing frequent hand-washing. The markets are also setting up sanitation and hand-washing stations. We're also seeing an increase in utilization of social media websites by our farmers markets. A few farmers markets have recently expanded to online markets where consumers can order directly from the market vendors and come and pick up their orders curbside at the typical farmers market. So that's another way to ensure safety and limit contact.

We've seen a significant shift in the local food movement during the pandemic as well. Grocery stores were running out of staple food items like bread, eggs and fresh produce that they typically receive from out-of-state distributors, and what was awesome is many of our farmers and farmers markets had these items readily available, so consumers were able to find these items by shopping at their local farmers markets. And when you buy local, the best thing about shopping at markets is you are talking to the person who grew that item, who made it, so you're really helping to shorten the food supply chain to help ensure food safety as well as promote the local economy.

JT: It seems like farmers markets really have been a benefit even more so during this very unusual time.

JO: For sure. They've been able to keep Oklahoma families fed with healthy produce and fresh products.

JT: Well, ONIE has been around for a little while now. Can you kind of describe how farmers markets have grown in recent years, and then in the other direction, what is there to look forward to in the future?

MS: Well James, there's lots of opportunities, and we really have seen some major growth in our farmers markets. We've been working for farmers markets for nearly a decade now directly, and we've seen more farmers markets open. We've also seen the capacity of

the farmers markets grow, seeing new vendors with new ideas, like Jade mentioned, the online shopping, and we see a lot of future opportunity with that. We are really helping people identify new vendors and new opportunities to create the grocery store experience at the farmers market where you can buy the complete, everything you need right at the farmers market. We know that there's many vendors that don't know they're vendors yet. We have a lot of backyard farmers that grow too much, and they can make a profit as well as support their community by selling at the farmers market.

And so we're seeing new technologies being implemented to where we're opening opportunities for a new customer base. The Millennials that would typically not go to the farmers market, but now they can shop online for the farmers market, are now engaging. And so we're seeing a lot of opportunity for growth with the use of technology as well as getting more people to grow and sell as well as make products or farm.

JT: I do know, as you guys very well know, TSET is very interested in helping people to eat better, to eat more nutritious foods, especially fruits and vegetables and other things, and so we're very interested in all aspects of this, including farmers markets. At ShapeYourFutureOK.com, we have an area, [farmers markets](#), with this information and such, and we have really enjoyed working with ONIE, not only our agency, but also TSET Healthy Living Program grantees partnering with ONIE and your resources. So we just want to thank you for that.

MS: Well, we really enjoy working with you guys and we love that we share similar missions and that we try to complement each other the best we can to grow both of our programs and strengthen the quality of food for Oklahomans for sure.

And we wanted to mention, if you're looking for farmers markets, there's obviously lots of different opportunities to find those markets. Both our websites, [Shape Your Future's website](#) and [ONIE Project website](#), have information. We also have – [Loklahoma](#) lists all the outlets that you could find local food.

And if you're interested in being a vendor or, you know, you're starting to grow or you want to help support your farmers market, we also host the Oklahoma Farmers Market Facebook page. It's [Oklahoma Farmers Markets](#). That gives a lot of resources for those who are wanting to help support the farmers market on more the backend side.

JT: Right, good information. Thank you so much, and thank you all for your time. We really appreciate it. You brought some really good information that people can enjoy, and thank you.

MS, JO, AO: Thank you for having us.

[17:11]

CH: Wow, cool. Thank you, James, for that awesome interview.

JT: Yeah, they've been great to work with. I have – over the past few years, TSET and ONIE have worked together and they've been fantastic to work with, and so I'm glad that we were able to discuss that.

I had an opportunity to speak with some people here, vendors, shoppers of all sorts, and it's been a lot of fun.

CH: Cool, let's go talk to them.

JT: Okay.

[17:38]

McKnight: I'm [inaudible] McKnight and I'm from Oklahoma City.

Angelia Watley: I'm Angelia Watley from Oklahoma City as well.

Well, I come out to the farmer's market for freshness. They have fresh produce, it's beautiful, it's clean, it's healthy. I love to eat healthy. I love the green onions. They're sweet, delicious. And eggs. They have crafted pretzels. I have the original, which is ranch and garlic mix. I also support the [Sage and Elm Apothecary](#) for her bubble bath soap. Her soaps and oils, body oils are wonderful. I also support the Signature sweet treats where I have the tomato basil and cream cheese pastry pie. Delicious. And also the natural fruit popsicles, because baby, it's hot out here, but you can't beat coming if you come early in the morning.

MK: The reason why I came is to support Oklahoma City parks and to support the vendors. This is a great place to come on Saturday mornings to walk and enjoy the sunshine and the great weather that we're having right now. They have great fruits and vegetables for you to buy that you don't buy from the store, so you don't have all the pesticide, and it's coming straight from the garden. And what I bought today was a pie that was made from [Signature Bakery](#) over here, and then I bought some plants, some annuals that I'm going to plant when I get home. I bought some pretzels. And all these things are made in Oklahoma, right here. And so the flavor is there, you don't have to worry about too much processing because it's all made right here.

Peyton Keith: Peyton Keith from Midwest City.

Desiree Keith: Desiree Keith from Midwest City.

PK: We came out the first weekend that they were open and we saw they had a lot of fresh stuff out. It wasn't very big, and then we heard that they were getting a little bit bigger and have some more stuff, so we came back out to see what they had.

DK: So I bought a big old bag full of squash today. They had zucchini squash and some really cute, fun varieties that look funny that I've never tried before, so I'm going to try something new. I might just sauté them up and throw them on a side for dinner. I'm

really looking forward to when we get some berries, strawberries and peaches and things like those in season, so that'll probably come later but I keep hoping it'll be here this weekend.

PK: I like interacting with some of the people who know a little more about the food and also the whole idea of supporting the farmers that are here rather than wherever else they come from and just getting the freshest stuff that we can.

DK: Shopping local, you know, being outside, having a good time, getting a little sunshine, and just seeing also what is in season at the moment, 'cause when you go to the grocery store, they could be getting that from anywhere and, you know, oranges aren't in season year round. But when you come to the farmers market, you know you're getting what's in season right then that week.

Rod Ardoin: My name is Rod Ardoin and I'm with [Acadian Family Farm](#). I'm a Cajun from south Louisiana, and so we come from a long history of food. We like to eat good food, if you know anything about Louisiana food. My grandparents raised a big garden. It's just in us down there. A lot of the older people the community raised gardens. And we just like to enjoy life and eat good.

Oh, we have about everything. We have organic carrots, organic radishes, kohlrabi, green and red lettuce, kale, oriental turnips, everything that help the people have a healthy diet.

You know, we're actually three miles from Fort Cobb Lake. It's about 80 miles. So we have to get up really early in the morning and load our trucks.

Everybody knows, you know, to eat a really good healthy diet, you need a lot of vegetables in your diet, you know. And so that's one reason I think that people are looking for vegetables because they know they're healthy. I mean, I don't know if anybody disputes eating vegetables being healthy.

I used to rodeo when I was young and it's a lot like a rodeo in some aspects. You know, you come in, you set up, you have a big event, and afterwards everybody goes home. You know, and maybe we, through the excitement, kind of encourage people to eat right, you know? Because there's lots of things out there that encourage you to eat wrong, you know what I'm saying? So it can have a positive influence in that aspect. I think a lot of people who come to farmers markets don't really eat healthy normally. I think they come because it's a special event or whatever, and maybe we can have some kind of influence on them when they go back and maybe they'll start trying to eat healthier.

[21:58]

JT: Cate, I had so much fun talking with these people and interviewing them and hearing their experiences and why they're here, and it's pretty exciting. You come here and

there are so many other stories of people and their backgrounds and why they're here and it's really exciting.

But you got to hear and talk with a particular chef. Is that right?

CH: I did. Shelby Sieg. She hung out with us at Shape Your Future and taught us how to make a really, really awesome salad with fresh ingredients, and I got to talk to her a little bit about her background and why it's important to know where your food comes from and to have those fresh ingredients.

JT: I would really like to hear it.

CH: Let's play it.

JT: Alright!

[22:48]

[Music: [Yerbaguena by Gnowledge from Free Music Archive](#)]

CH: A soothing contrast of burnt rose colored walls and vibrant green succulents greets patrons who enter Lua Mediterranean and Bottle Shop in the Plaza District in Oklahoma City. Between the bar top and mirrored shelves, the chef prepares a salad.

Shelby Sieg: [background] Today, we're going to make a fresh summer salad featuring a lot of items that come from farmers markets...

My name is Shelby Sieg, and I am the chef and operating partner of Lua Mediterranean and Bottle Shop in the heart of the Plaza District. Just really focusing on fresh, seasonal, local ingredients and cocktails and wines that reflect the Mediterranean vibe as well.

CH: Shelby and her associates have traveled all over the world seeking out unique dishes to bring back to Oklahoma City, but they have also shared the wisdom of those with worldly experience right here at home.

SS: We actually have a lady named Mrs. Moses that is a local teacher. She came in and helped us with the hummus recipe and it's a Lebanese kind of style hummus. That's a recipe that she's really handed out over the years to different students, so it was a kind of a cool way to get some local influence and somebody that a lot of people would know.

[background chatter and laughter]

I think it's really important to know where your food comes from if you can, if you have access to a farmers market. When you have access to those foods, when you can see the people that grow those foods and the hands that were on it and where it comes from, I think it makes you want to focus a little bit more on what you're putting into your body

when you see kind of the whole process from start to finish, because really kind of having that connection for me makes it all full circle.

I think that sometimes, it sounds like it's a very hard thing to eat healthy. It's maybe a little bit more expensive or you have to really, really know how to cook or what you're doing. And that's really a fallacy, because you can just go to your local market, pick whatever vegetables are available and in season, just kind of adding really, really fresh things. Especially in spring and summer when everything is really available and in season, putting together cold salads and putting maybe vegetables on skewers on the grill, things that are really, really easy to do but fill your plate with a lot of fresh fruits and vegetables.

[background] So the cooking time on the quinoa is about 20 to 25 minutes depending on how much...

CH: Food is a living metaphor of what we absorb from our world. It's such a fundamental part of life, and it can be intimately impactful and memorable.

SS: Some of my favorite times growing up were, you know, when we were preparing for any kind of party around my house and having a bunch of my parents' friends over, anything like that. My mom really just went to a lot of trouble putting together these really amazing, elaborate menus. And for me, those times, my sisters and I in the kitchen with my mom and she would be teaching us about menus and recipes that her mom had made from a collection of recipe books that she had gotten from around the country and different friends of hers.

My dad was in the Air Force, so we moved around a lot, and it was always really, really cool to kind of relate to people through those recipes and through food because I think it kind of demystifies different cultures and different populations when you approach it through food. So she, you know, she really would teach us a lot about, you know, "In this country, this is the way this food is eaten and this is the way it's made," and it makes it to where it's not quite so kind of weird and foreign when you're a kid to think about other cultures, and you get a really cool experience of kind of approaching it through something that everyone can relate to.

[background] And that's it. So there you just have a really beautiful, light, fresh summer salad featuring ingredients that you can get at Scissortail Farmers Market.

[26:49]

CH: So we just spoke with Shelby Sieg, and I love that interview because we got to know more about why food is such a personal thing. Everyone has memories, family memories, memories of friends, special occasions, that are really closely tied with food. And so not only is it about your health and your nutrition, but there's a very kind of personal and even spiritual aspect to it as well. What do you think?

JT: I think you're right. You know, food nourishes us obviously, but it's also a source of enjoyment. You know, we are made to enjoy our food, enjoy the taste, enjoy the experience of dining together with friends and such, and so just incorporating all those elements of nutrition and enjoyment and the social aspect, it comes together very, very well.

Speaking of nutrition and social, we're here at Scissortail Park!

CH: [laughs]

JT: – for the farmers market here, and things are really revving up. There are still a lot of people here who are milling around. They are social distancing and they're wearing masks, so that's good. But there's so many vendors here, so much stuff. But you know, Cate, this is only one of many farmers markets throughout the state, and on ShapeYourFutureOK.com, there is a page there that has a lot of information on farmers markets. So I invite you to visit ShapeYourFutureOK.com. Go to I think it's the healthy eating tab. You click on that. There'll be a farmers market dealio. Click on that, and you'll get a wealth of information about a bunch of farmers markets throughout the state. So come here to Scissortail Park or go to any farmers market throughout the state.

CH: Yes. It is so nice here at Scissortail Park. We're having a great time at this farmers market. They are on every Saturday, right? Starting this Saturday. So come on out when you can. You'll get produce from all over the state, from the farm straight to your table, you know where it comes from, you know it's organic, and you're supporting local in a time when we really need to support each other and band together as a community. So this is a great place to be, great thing to support.

So James, this has been such an awesome episode, such a cool experience. Thank you for coming out with me today.

JT: I've had a wonderful time too, Cate. Come on out, and thank you for your interviews. Thank you for your time. Listeners, thank you for your time. I hope you really enjoyed this.

So until next time, this is James Tyree –

CH: – and Cate Howell.

JT: Wishing you peace –

CH: – and Better Health.

[Theme music]

[29:47]