

Bethel farmers' plans bear fruit



Bethel farmer Tim Meyers.
(Chris Ho/KYUK-TV)

By Rhonda McBride
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BETHEL, Alaska -- When it comes to agriculture in Alaska, most people think Mat-Su, not Bethel. But think again.

Tim Meyers and his wife Lisa started farming in a greenhouse to feed their family. But when fuel went over \$6 per gallon and started driving up costs, they realized they had a market.



Vegetables await packing in one of the Meyers' \$30 produce boxes. (Chris Ho/KYUK-TV)

Most produce eaten in Bethel arrives by airplane, making it at least 50 percent more expensive than produce in Anchorage. But the Meyers are hoping to bring some relief.

The Meyers sell produce by the box, charging \$30 for an assortment of vegetables delivered to the buyer's door -- a chance to save money and eat well.

"I really think what I'm doing has huge potential for rural Alaska," said Tim Meyers. "If you put your ear to the wind, you're going to hear everybody talking about sustainable living and wanting to do this."

Thanks to the coldness of the climate there's no need for pesticides, which is good for both the consumer and the land.

The Meyers also say small-scale farming shouldn't have much impact on the environment, because it doesn't take up much space.

"My attitude is, we're just going to do it anyway," added Lisa Meyers.

In addition to the rain, the crops soak up that famous midnight sun. Fertilizer is supplied by a mixture of chicken droppings and salmon waste.

Here at Meyers Farm, they've learned to work with a short, intense growing season. Each year the family finds more things to do with their land, known as Arctic Tundra.

"These have just been amazing this summer," said Lisa Meyers, examining some calendula, which the family's daughters use to make skin care products. "We've harvested them three times now. They just keep producing like crazy. And it could be the sunlight."

Out here, even cauliflower is exciting.

"I started eating one the other morning. Just making boxes and I ate half a head by eight o'clock in the morning," Tim Meyers said. "The cold helps make the plant produce sugar to sweeten it. This stuff is 40 degrees every night."

The Meyers moved heaven and earth this summer to lease some acreage from the state for a crop of potatoes this summer. Tim Meyers says he'll store root vegetables underground so he'll be able to market them in the winter.

"To have this quantity and quality of food is extremely comforting," he said.