

Joe Lucido (right) and his father, Tony, select produce at Detroit's Eastern Market. Grandfather Lucido started the business with a handcart door to door. Tony and Joe have continued the family delivery service, which now arrives by a well-stocked truck traveling to customers' homes. Joe owns the business, called the Green Grocer of Fine Foods and Fresh Produce.

Wheeling in fruits and vegetables

By Katie Maple McDrise
special writer

Fresh produce comes to your door

TIDY BINS BURSTING with bright-green broccoli, unblemished beans, succulent strawberries and every imaginable fruit and vegetable line the shelves. A cooler houses fresh-laid eggs, tangy cider and special orders. Customers choose from the freshest possible produce in the metropolitan-Detroit area, in a location that can't be beat — their driveway. It's a produce market on wheels. Independent owners take their specially equipped trucks from Eastern Market to nearly every suburb in Detroit, calling on customers who contract their service.

"About 50 percent of the people come out to the truck to select their own fruits and vegetables," says Joe Lucido, owner of the Green Grocer of Fine Foods and Fresh Produce home-delivery service. "The other half leaves an order for me. I pack up whatever they ask for and leave it in their garage or back porch, so it's ready for them when they get home."

Providing top-quality produce and convenient service means long days for Lucido and others in the business. Their day usually begins about 3 a.m., when they awaken to drive to Eastern Market to buy their goods.

"It takes about 3 1/2 to four hours to load up the truck," Lucido says. "I don't just grab anything I see. I han-

dle the best of everything. I specialize in quality. So I'll look through 10-15 cases of a product before I find one I'll buy."

LUCIDO'S LIVELIHOOD is based on this attention to detail — a lesson he learned from his father, Tony. "If

you give people junk, they'll say, 'We don't need you. We can get this ourselves,'" says the senior Lucido, who has been in the business for 45 years. He recently retired, selling the service to his son.

"We always bought the best, and it sold, and people were happy," he

says. "The customers leave it up to us. They trust us."

Shirley Lee of Birmingham has trusted the Lucidos to select her fruits and vegetables for more than 25 years. They "know what their customers like, and how much they want to eat," Lee says. The produce is "impeccably fresh. They won't bring something if it's not up to their standards."

Sam Lopocolo, owner of the

Green Gardener of Fine, Fresh Fruits and Vegetables, relies on 23 years of experience with the produce-delivery business to offer the finest food in the market.

"My customers depend on me to pick a good melon, a good pineapple, whatever," he says. "They count on me for that."

Quality and trust are key to keeping customers, but convenience is an equally important ingredient. Dual-

career couples have boosted business for both Lucido and Lopocolo.

"A LOT of working people don't have time to drive to the store and stand in line. They don't want to go out shopping," Tony Lucido says. "They come home, and everything's there for them."

With the produce waiting when they get home from work, people have more time to cook. And the market is ripe for fresh foods, with more and more families focusing on a healthy diet.

"I'm selling more vegetables than I ever have before — more broccoli, more cauliflower," Lopocolo says. "And I do a big business with greens."

Diet — and cholesterol-conscious customers have "cut out starchy foods," Tony Lucido says. "In the last 8-10 years, they've eliminated corn and potatoes from their orders — the things that need butter."

In addition to the trend toward healthy foods, the senior Lucido says the news media changes customer buying habits. "Whatever they read in the papers, they want to buy," he says. News that broccoli could help prevent cancer meant "broccoli sales went crazy. Another time, there was a story on the benefits of mangoes and papayas. Every place I went, people said give me two or three papayas."

Peddlers who deliver to busy suburbanites

Now more than ever, quality and convenience are key consumer concerns. An old-fashioned concept has come of age for busy people who seek the best: the home-delivery produce business.

Such services have satisfied the fruit and vegetable needs in suburban Detroit neighborhoods for years.

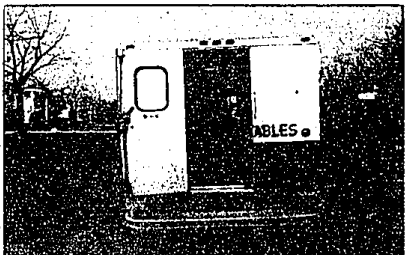
Local peddlers include Joe Lucido, the Green Grocer of Fine Foods and Fresh Produce, and Sam Lopocolo, the Green Gardener of Fine, Fresh Fruits and Vegetables.

Both businesses carry nearly every fruit and vegetable customers could want, delivering special

orders for exotic items at the clients' request.

Lucido travels to neighborhoods in the Grosse Pointes as well as to the Birmingham-Bloomfield area including Franklin, and to Southfield and Palmer Woods. Lopocolo's business takes him to Birmingham, Bloomfield Hills, Southfield, Farmington, Troy, Rochester and Uxley.

Individuals interested in the produce home-delivery service should write to Lucido, the Green Grocer of Fine Foods and Fresh Produce, P.O. Box 1781, Warren 48090, or call Lopocolo at 247-5371. Their routes are not limited to the cities they currently serve.



Joe Lucido sweeps out the truck, during a stop on the route, which includes such suburbs as the Birmingham-Bloomfield area and Southfield.

Take 20 minutes a day to grow your own produce

Who hasn't dreamed of plucking crispy, sugar snap peas fresh from the garden, bringing them into the kitchen, rinsing well under water and tossing them into a hot skillet with just a touch of oil and a hint of fresh garlic?

Depending on the size of your family and the degree to which you practice success in planting, you can grow enough gourmet produce to make store-bought vegetables a thing of the past.

Once you've savored the taste of home-grown produce, you'll never be satisfied with the store-bought again. True, vegetables and home gardens are work during the spring and need occasional upkeep during the summer and fall, but the benefits reaped can reduce your grocery bills and, at the same time, introduce your family, friends and neighbors to some-

taste buds
chef Larry Jones

thing other than tomatoes and zucchini.

First off, the secret to successful gardening is to keep on top of it. Twenty minutes daily in an average-size garden is about de rigueur. Work during the morning or evening when temperatures are lower and so you won't feel the hardness of oil.

Next, use the wide variety of gardening tools and accessories that can make for a more enjoyable garden. I'm not talking pesticides here, sim-

ple remedies like landscape cover which, when laid between rows of vegetables, make weeds almost nonexistent.

A FEW YEARS back when yours truly began gardening, I was a little skeptical of such doodads as Garden Weeds and soaker hoses, but after checking with pros who literally could open their own produce stands with the bulk of what they reap, I have become a believer in buying time-and-back-saving devices.

My garden is a simple patch of ground, about 10-by-20 feet. In one small corner I have my herb garden, surrounded by an old "mitten" tire. This serves two purposes: it keeps the perennials from spreading into valuable garden space and also maintains a neat appearance.

There, I grow fresh mint, basil,

oregano, chives, dill and parsley. This year I added a bay laurel tree. With a little research, I found out that not only will it supply me with enough bay leaves for next year's stews and sauces, it also will help repel pesky summer flies, lice moths and weevils. I figure that the money I spend on bay laurel wreaths alone will repay this year just by planting one tree.

When you have a garden my size, you have to be a little choosy in planning what you need and want. Two tomato plants will reap the Jones gang more than enough tomatoes, as will two small succulint plants. The garden this year is edged on two sides with leeks which required taking the sand from last year's sandbox and mixing it into the soil in the fall. Leeks love a rich, sandy loam and plenty of sun and

will be a tasty addition to my cold Vichyssoise and gaspacho.

THE OTHER TWO sides are full of baby hybrid carrots, which promise to be disease-resistant and won't require the loose soil that larger carrots need. Both the leeks and the carrots will stay in the garden long after the first frost because they are hardy and underground.

This year, I visited a well-known gardening center and picked up some exotic lettuce seeds. If I can grow leaf and romaine with little fuss, this year's harvest of arugula and red leaf should be a real boon.

The corner of the garden that gets some nice afternoon shade from the tall oak tree will benefit best with these types of lettuces. Add to that a

Share a recipe for party food

Readers' special recipes on entertaining are wanted for a cookbook to be published by the Observer & Eccentric. If you've got a recipe for casual or elegant party fare, send it to: Taste Cookbook, the Observer & Eccentric, 46311 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150.

Be sure to include your name, address and phone number.

Recipes may include such categories as appetizers and hors d'oeuvres, soups, salads, main dishes, vegetables, breads and rolls, and desserts.

Please turn to Page 2

Please turn to Page 2