

# Fulfilling Flavors

## Find fresh, local products used by Birmingham's chef driven restaurants.

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How many times have you heard or read chefs say they start with the freshest ingredients? For many of Birmingham's chef driven restaurants the phrase itself may not be all that fresh, but it is true.

Local products are grown for flavor, not for shipping durability. So you can't compare the flavor of a tomato grown for shipping purposes and picked out of state to a fresh, dead ripe Blount County tomato eaten at its peak. The same is true for heirloom tomatoes and other fruits and vegetables. "Everything is at its absolute peak once it is cut. Then the clock starts ticking," local organic grower Michael Dean, of Michael Dean Farms, explains. "Squash blossoms, for example, are the most fragile and only remain open for stuffing for one day. Our carrots are mega sweet and packed with sugar that begins to oxidize as soon as you pull it out of the ground or cut it. And micro lettuces are fragile with a premium shelf life. Thus fragility and freshness precludes shipping vegetables long distances." Dean is one local farmer who delivers to Birmingham area restaurants. Many other pick up trucks are also found delivering fresh, organic lettuces, carrots, corn, meats, pork and an array of fruits to the restaurants' back doors. Chefs also shop local farmers markets where their favorite vendors have fresh pickings waiting for them. And for lunch or dinner, these fresh ingredients are prepared by chefs in dishes using their own recipes and served to diners, often the same day

they are picked or the following day.

Buying and eating local products improves your health, creates and supports local jobs and reduces the nation's dependence on foreign oil.

### Boutwell Farms

Boutwell Farms is a small, sustainable certified organic family farm located in Abbeville, selling direct to local families and restaurants. They offer grass-fed beef, pasteurized pork and other seasonal products, such as wheat, oats, corn, eggs, fruits, nuts and berries.

"We are the only facility in Alabama that can legally harvest beef cattle and sell commercially to the public," Melissa Boutwell says. Boutwell Beef is flavor-filled, nutrient-dense, tender beef because the cows enjoy sunshine as they are grass fed. The farm also offers nutritious, pastured pink pork. "Pork is not the other white meat," Melissa Boutwell explains. "Pork is a red meat by classification, and the lowest USDA grade pork is white." Retail products available on their website include a half hog pork combo, a quarter cow, beefsteaks, pork steaks and chops and premium ground beef.

Boutwell Farms discourages shipping their products because it is not sustainable. Instead they post on their website pick up dates for one day each week that they will be in Birmingham. They also produce their own fuels for both production and delivery in order to be self-sufficient and not dependent on foreign oil. They focus on a year-round balance

of products that can be produced for fuel and used for food on the farm. Visit [boutwellfarms.com](http://boutwellfarms.com) for more information.

### Fromagerie Belle Chèvre

Located in Elkmont, Fromagerie Belle Chèvre creamery has produced a variety of fine artisanal chèvres since 1989, using time-tested European farmstead techniques. The all-natural, handmade cheeses have won numerous awards from the American Cheese Society and American Dairy Association. The creamery gives waste products to local farmers and uses recyclable boxes.

Alabama native and owner of Belle Chèvre Tasia Malakasis first discovered Belle Chèvre while shopping at Dean and Deluca's flagship store in New York City. "It was fateful, I believe, that out of all of the grand cheeses in that store I would pick up one from a creamery that is just 20 miles from my hometown in Alabama," Malakasis recalls. "And it was love at first bite." Malakasis' passion for food and love affair with Belle Chèvre eventually led her to give up a successful career in high tech marketing software and purchase the creamery.

Malakasis evolved the familiar branding of a baby blue label to a more colorful, fun and friendly style, reflective of her own style. She also evolved the packaging. Among the products is Fromage Blanc, the freshest goat cheese. Montrachet Style Logs with herbs are sold in three