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Easton Farmers' Market opening with 25 vendors, plans for trolley service

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By **EDWARD SIEGER**

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EASTON | John Place can't exactly afford an extensive advertising budget for the farm he and his wife, Amanda, purchased in August 2007.

Keepsake Farm and Dairy in Moore Township relies on word-of-mouth advertising and venues such as the Easton Farmers' Market, which opens this weekend.

"I don't think any young producers trying to get into the business have great advertising budgets," Place said. "Farmers markets really are the best course to find the buying public."

Keepsake Farm will be one of several new vendors featured when the Easton Farmers' Market opens its 257th season 9 a.m. Saturday.

Place, 28, farms nearly 100 acres on Route 248. Dairy products – raw milk, yogurt, cheese – represent the bulk of the farm's business, although Place continues to expand his offerings to include beef, pork, eggs, ice cream and chicken.

Place said he's begun to secure more restaurant business, which he sees as a general trend toward buying local. Before the ongoing recession, he reports steadily growing business and a desire to "get to know your farmer."

"I think more people are paying more attention to where they put their dollars," Place said.

Megan McBride, market manager and Easton's assistant Main Street manager, said Keepsake Farm is among a handful of younger farm operators new to the market. In all, Easton Farmers' Market is set to open the season with 25 vendors, up from 16 last year, she said.

Trolley rides starting

Also new to the market will be a trolley to ferry passengers from Forks Township and College Hill to Centre Square. The \$1 roundtrip trolley rides start June 6 and run through the end of the season, Oct. 31, McBride said.

The trolley will run from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. and make about four stops in Forks Township, including the municipal building and over-55 communities, McBride said. The trolley – paid for with a \$2,500 Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture grant – will make one stop on College Hill likely somewhere near Wawa, 225 Cattell St., she said.

City council last week agreed to apply for a \$60,000 U.S. Department of Agriculture grant that would allow the farmers market to purchase equipment necessary to accept food stamps. The grant would not require a local match.

If the city receives the grant, McBride said, the market would implement the food stamp program next year along with educational outreach and trolley service to West Ward and South Side.

Three produce vendors will continue to accept senior vouchers issued by the Northampton County Area Agency on Aging. Agency Director John Mehler said distribution will begin about June 1 and run through Sept. 30 or until the agency runs out of vouchers.

Qualified seniors will receive four vouchers of \$5 each. Seniors must be at least 60 years old and meet income requirements.

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