

Stocked Markets

Health food options growing in the Capital Region

By Nichole West



Food allergies come in all shapes and sizes. Luckily more food stores are offering alternatives for people with special dietary needs.

For Sheree' Godwin and her family, grocery shopping is an adventure, involving numerous stores, several hours and dozens of miles as the clan crosses from one side of the city to another.

Godwin has a one-year-old son and a three-year-old daughter; both have food allergies. Her son is allergic to milk, soy and peanuts. Her daughter is allergic to milk, eggs, wheat, spinach, beets and tuna. While it depends on the foods, the consequences of having just the smallest taste range from a rash-like breakout to death.

"The biggest challenge is finding stores that carry what we need," said Godwin, lead coordinator of the Food Allergy Support Group of Southern Wisconsin.

Currently, Godwin travels to Low Carb Market & Specialty Foods, Magic Mill, Whole Foods and Woodman's on a weekly basis to keep her children nourished, healthy and safe.

Most of what the Godwins eat is fresh and homemade as buying prepared foods is "too dangerous."

"There are just so many ingredients," Godwin said. "It's just too hard because you can't tell what all the ingredients contain."

With the addition of the Low Carb Market on Madison's far west side and a growing awareness of people with special diets, shopping is getting easier for the Godwins.

"In our house, we have to drink potato milk," said Godwin. "It's very hard to find and not many grocery stores have it, and Low Carb Market started carrying it for us."

Low Carb Market & Specialty Foods, which opened late last summer, not only caters to those on low-carb diets but offers many products for people on special diets.

"We are the largest provider of gluten-free in Madison," store owner Char Cherepinsky said proudly.

People who have celiac disease cannot eat gluten, which is a protein found in

wheat, rye, barley and oats. Cherepinsky uses a dot system to indicate gluten-free, wheat-free and dairy-free foods.

Low Carb Market also offers special services for customers, including samples, cooking demonstrations, guest speakers, special orders and a resource library.

“Specialty foods are more expensive, and I let my customers try before they buy,” said Cherepinsky. “I try to make it as easy as possible for folks to find the products they need,” she said. “They don’t have it easy to begin with.”

With celiac disease, enjoying the fresh goodness of home-baked breads, muffins and cookies is just a dream ... until Silly Yak Bakery & Bread Barn came to town.

Located in Oakbridge Commons on Mineral Point Road, Silly Yak Bakery & Bread Barn offers an extensive line of gluten-free baked goods, in addition to traditionally prepared baked goods.

“We had so many people asking for gluten-free that I just got tired of saying ‘I’m sorry,’” said owner Holly Beach, who formerly ran a gluten-free bakery in Minnesota. Beach and her family came to Madison late in 2004 and opened Silly Yak bakery in January.

All gluten-free products are baked on Sunday to eliminate cross-contamination. A baking schedule is available at www.sillyyakbakery.com. Because all the products are made fresh, they only have a shelf life of one or two days, though they can be frozen.

Customers can place special orders and call in with requests.

Since gluten-free baked goods use less-common ingredients like rice flour, garbanzo bean flour, sorghum and buckwheat, expect to pay one dollar to \$1.50 more for a loaf of bread. The cost of gluten-free cookies and muffins, however, is comparable to their gluten-filled counterparts.

For those without strict special diets but want organic, natural alternatives, there are several options available. When it comes to natural, organic meat, however, the market was lacking until Artamos Specialty Meat & Deli came to town. Artamos is located in Heritage Square and opened last September.

“There was really no place to get

fresh organic meat,” owner Eric Roenning said when asked why he opened the store.

Artamos offers meat is from grass-fed, hormone-free cattle, which, says Roenning, makes for tastier meat that is lower in fat and has more nutrients than non-organic and non-natural meat.

Artamos also sells a line of gluten-free deli meat called Boarshead, which is not organic, but natural, and has fewer preservatives.

Expect to pay between 20 and 25 percent more for natural and organic meat. The reason? “Most of the cost comes from production,” said Roenning. “You’re essentially buying from a local farm.”

Thanks to increased awareness and acceptance, many supermarket retailers are now adding natural, organic and specialty foods to their lineup, making people — and bellies — happy.

Here in Madison, Copps offers a separate natural and organic food section in each of its stores. In fact, Copps was one of the first supermarket retailers to offer natural and organic foods.

Other stores, including Pick N’ Save, Sentry and, of course, Whole Foods, also offer natural foods.

“We have a long, rich history of offering natural foods,” said Jesse Singerman, the retailer’s director of natural and organic food. “More and more products are coming out with natural and organic attributes. It’s really an exciting time.”

While the number of products and size of the natural/organic section varies by store, Singerman said Copps is always working to improve its product offering and selection.

These improvements include wheat- and gluten-free foods. In newer stores, Copps is experimenting with signage and product identifiers to help customers more readily find these specialty foods; these new tools will eventually be adopted in existing stores.

Overall, Singerman commends the Madison-area market for its strong tradition of offering healthy, natural food choices to its consumers.

“Madison is a great natural food market,” said Singerman. “It always has been and that’s great.” ●



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