

## Fresh food to go

### Produce market in downtown Inverness offers weekly packages of organics to participants

By Amanda Mims

Monday, December 27, 2010 at 1:01 am (Updated: December 27, 1:02 am)

Floral City resident Linda Kelley used to travel to Whole Foods Market in Tampa to shop for organic fruits and vegetables.



Dave Sigler

Skoors Fresh Produce Market owner LeRoy Rooks assembles a large organic basket for pickup at his Inverness store. The new Inverness co-op has been offering participants a bag of mixed fruits and vegetables at a reduced price. Rooks offers different mixes of fruit and vegetable packages at reduced prices.

Not anymore.

Ever since Skoors Fresh Produce Market in downtown Inverness started its “Organics Too Go” weekly buying program, Kelley has been a devoted customer.

Customers place orders for various sizes of food packages by Sunday night online or in the store on North Pine Avenue and Skoors receives the delivery on Tuesday.

“The food tastes wonderful,” Kelley said. “This has been a real godsend to us. I signed up as soon as I knew about it.”

Skoors owners LeRoy and Stephanie Rooks, who opened the market in 2007 with the intention of selling organics, say it’s a win-win situation. Since the market opened, too few customers have been interested in organics, which cost more than conventionally-grown produce, and the store stopped stocking a lot of organics. This program gives participants a discount on certified organic produce, and Skoors doesn’t have to buy more than they know they’re going to sell.

The program has been going on for four months and the buying club is 71 members strong. Customers come from as far away as Hernando County.

LeRoy said customers aren’t required to order every week, which is a requirement in some other buying programs.

There is a membership fee of \$20 and packages cost between \$22 and \$42, depending on size. The large size includes eight to 10 types of vegetables and four or five fruits. Weight varies depending on the variety and size of fruits and vegetables included. Vegetable- and fruit-only packages are also available.

Skoors generally knows ahead of time what the produce packages will include of that week, although sometimes there are variations in what’s listed and what customers end up getting. In that case, Skoors makes substitutions so the value of the packages stays the same.

“Last week, we couldn’t get the cherries, so what we did was substitute grapes and add more apples and oranges,” he said.

Another benefit to the program is the variety of organic fruits and vegetables customers are getting.

“We always try to add something different that people haven’t tried. For instance, we had oriental eggplant and a lot of our customers were like, ‘Oh, wow.’ We had red kohlrabi. The majority of our customers are used to the green, traditional-type kohlrabi,” he said.

“One of our customers says it’s like Christmas for her every week. She comes in and says, ‘OK, what do I have this week?’”

Kelley, who left Skoors last week with two tall brown paper bags full of produce — one for her and her husband, the other for her daughter’s family — said they enjoy the variety.

“It’s kind of forced our family to try out different vegetables and fruit. I go online and look up recipes. I’m just having a really good time with it.”

LeRoy said they want to grow the buying program to include organic meats and possibly a delivery service.

For more information, visit [www.skoors.com](http://www.skoors.com) and click the “Organics too go” tab on the top of the page or call the store at 341-2777.