

Whole Foods, Safeway top healthy retailer list

By Ashley Bentley
Staff Writer

Whole Foods, Safeway and Harris Teeter are the healthiest of the largest 35 supermarket chains in the nation, according to a Nov. 6 *Health* magazine article.

Large selections of fresh conventional and organic produce and locally grown items were cited as factors in the rankings.

"A healthy produce department makes both organic and local vegetables and fruits easy to find and has a nice selection," said Christine Palumbo, a registered dietitian based in Naperville, Ill. Palumbo was one of the judges who helped rank the stores.

Whole Foods was praised for its "extraordinary selection of fresh conventional and organic fruit and vegetables ... (and) fresh-cut veggies," according to the article.

While the availability of organic and locally grown produce heavily influenced the results, Palumbo said they're not the only factors considered in the rankings.

"In these challenging economic times, people appear to be cutting back on pricey organics in favor of traditionally grown produce," Palumbo said. "I am more interested in a large display of traditionally grown produce that's visually appealing and that holds some unusual items that will entice the shoppers to put them into their cart. It's more important that people eat produce than worry about if it's organic and not eat it at all."

Pleasanton, Calif.-based Safeway, the largest chain on the list, with more than 1,700 stores, came in second for its "huge transformation," including organic store brands and locally grown produce. The chain is expanding the produce sections in many of its redesigned stores, according to the article. Safeway is in the process of converting all its stores to its new Lifestyle format.

On the opposite side of the size scale, Harris Teeter, the Matthews, N.C.-based chain with only 176

Top retailers

According to *Health* magazine:

- ▶ Whole Foods, Austin, Texas
- ▶ Safeway, Pleasanton, Calif.
- ▶ Harris Teeter, Matthews, N.C.
- ▶ Trader Joe's, Monrovia, Calif.
- ▶ Hannaford Bros., Scarborough, Maine
- ▶ Albertson's, Boise, Idaho
- ▶ Food Lion, Salisbury, N.C.
- ▶ Publix, Lakeland, Fla.
- ▶ Pathmark, Carteret, N.J.
- ▶ SuperTarget, Minneapolis

stores, claimed the third spot on the chart with its 600-plus varieties of fruits and vegetables, including organic and locally grown.

"We're always looking for new fruits and vegetables to incorporate," said Jennifer Thompson, director of communication for Harris Teeter.

The chain was also commended for its shopping tools, including a Green Thumb Expert at every store to advise consumers on how to choose and prepare produce.

"Highlighting local and seasonal produce is also great," said survey judge Kate Geagan, a registered dietitian and author of "Go Green, Eat Lean: Trim Your Waistline with the Ultimate Low-Carbon Footprint Diet." "Consumers are increasingly looking for this information, and so if it's easily available. That's a plus. Organic is wonderful, to, but it's only a piece of the overall picture."

Geagan said the amount and variety of produce offerings, as well as point-of-purchase information and health campaigns, organic and local or season offerings are all part of her criteria in making a healthy supermarket.

Staff writer Kristen Banocy contributed to this article.