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UGLYRIPE TOMATOES

Beauty is in the taste buds

The Herald showed superb taste and a commitment to safety, health, community, land preservation and family when it went to the plate with an editorial about the importance of the UglyRipe tomato (*Ugly but tasteful*, Jan. 31).

Uglies are a statement about the value of traditional farming at a time when industrialized farming, with its uniform product grown with chemical sprays and fertilizers, is the norm.

The tomato battle broke just after Secretary of Health and Human Services Tommy Thompson, in announcing his resignation on Dec. 4, made an unexpected comment: "For the life of me, I cannot understand why the terrorists have not attacked our food supply, because it is so easy to do." Food like UglyRipes from decentralized local farms cuts the terrorism risk. The Ugly wars started before Thompson stood with Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman last month to announce new dietary guidelines intended to address the epidemic of obesity in the country, especially among children.

With guidelines now recommending nine servings of fruits and vegetables daily, growing flavorful veggies that appeal to youngsters promotes health and is an act of patriotism. Our local Uglies, heirloom tomatoes by another name, also have a face and a geographic identity. For me they are the face of Cliff Middleton and his three daughters, Rachel, Kali and Faith Ann of Three Sisters Farm, a model five-acre sustainable, organic family farm in Homestead that grows heirloom vegetables, fruits and herbs following sustainable and holistic agricultural methods.

They are committed to the small-farm movement focused on local consumption of produce, greens, herbs, fruit, grains, products and services and distribution using direct marketing and sales organizations. I met Middleton on Farm Day in December when I went to collect boxes of heirloom tomatoes and miniatures with names like Cherokee Purple, Black Plum and Isis Candy to take to Maine for Christmas gifts. If taking them across state lines makes me a lawbreaker to the Florida Tomato Committee, so be it. My snowbound friends there, who celebrate summer with heirloom tomato tastings, relished my gifts. Beauty is, after all, in the taste buds of the consumer.

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