

FOOD FINDER

Meet a rising food star who travels the world to bring specialty food products to increasingly adventurous eaters. BY LORI STACY PHOTOGRAPHY BY RYAN CLARK



For those of you not convinced that the new stars of the food world are the suppliers — farmers, fishmongers, cheese makers, and the like — allow us to introduce you to **Justin Marx**, a fifth-generation meat, seafood, pantry, and produce supplier who started MarxFoods.com to let consumers get a taste of exotic, edible, and delicious ingredients.

Marx — along with his two brothers — grew up in the meat business, and knew from an early age he was destined to be in the food business. All three brothers did eventually join their father at New Jersey-based Marx Foods, but in 2002 Marx moved to Seattle for his then-girlfriend (and now wife). His dad offered him a chance to open a West Coast office, which evolved into MarxFoods.com, a purveyor of specialty foods and truly exotic ingredients.

Much of Marx's research takes place on the road. "No matter where I go, I beeline to the local food markets," he says. "I have traveled to about 30 countries, mostly in the developing world. I always spend a disproportionate amount of my time browsing food markets from horrific to haute. It's my dad's fault; as kids, we couldn't go anywhere without touring the meat counter."

It was, in fact, our search for new and exotic ingredients for the "Fresh Focus" story that led us to Marx Foods, and to Marx himself, who proved to be an encyclopedia of exotic-food information with a passion for tracking down unique items. We asked him to share some of this knowledge.

Favorite farmers market: That's easy. University District Farmers Market in Seattle. While many farmers markets have craft makers and massage therapists and prepared food, this market focuses on ingredients. They have most of Washington state's best producers, and the early bird gets the best worms. I try to go early every Saturday, and I am also one-by-one converting them into our vendors.

Most unusual customer request: Capybara meat during Lent. That's right — the world's largest rodent. Many people believe they count as a fish under Catholic doctrine.

Most underrated produce item: Heirloom potatoes [pictured]. These spuds are beautiful and incredibly delicious. Each variety is distinctive. And they are highly sustainable. They are grown in a closed loop with beef cattle: The cattle eat potatoes and the potato fields are fertilized with cow manure. Plus, they are dry land potatoes, which means they don't require irrigation.





THREE UP-AND-COMING INGREDIENTS

ACCORDING TO JUSTIN MARX

EDIBLE FLOWERS: I think edible flowers could be this decade's microgreens. We're selling a lot of them to brides for their weddings right now, but they are also catching on with ultra-fine-dining chefs. They bring new shapes and incredible colors to sweet or savory plates for a chic, clean, otherworldly look without using modernist gelling agents or expensive lab equipment. Some of them have incredible flavor to go with their good looks too.

BROCCOLI ROMANESCO:

Who doesn't want to eat something that looks like a fractal? We are struggling to meet a five-case-a-day standing order from a very famous restaurant and supply is a day-to-day affair.



HUCKLEBERRIES: Take a blueberry and add to it a universe of complexity. Substitute these berries in almost any recipe and it is a serious upgrade. They are wild-foraged and that is another reason why I expect them to grow in popularity. I recently had an impeccable huckleberry cocktail at The Aviary in Chicago. If Grant Achatz is using them, you can be sure that others will follow. 🍷

