Business opportunities grow for teenage Perry County farmer

By Matthew Rand | Updated: Tue 7:05 PM, May 24, 2016

PERRY COUNTY, Ky. (WYMT) - For Perry County teenager Brandon Stidham, farming is a family tradition.

"My grandfather done it, and he taught my dad, and my dad taught me, and I plan to teach my kids one day," Stidham said.

When Stidham, 16, isn't busy being a student at Hazard High School, he's out tending to his family's goats, chickens and turkeys.

He's also growing a garden, something he says he's done every year since he was six years old.

His favorite farm-fresh produce? Tomatoes.

"They have taste," Stidham said. "The tomato you get in the store, you can't hardly taste it, but you get one out here, just full of flavor."

Earlier this year, folks at Jabo's Coal River Grille in Hazard reached out to Stidham and offered to buy his produce to use in their restaurant.

"It's great to see a guy, 16 year old out working, farming, starting a good, you know, little thing there," said Jabo Clemons, the restaurant's owner. "I like that. That's cool."

The deal came about through the Perry County Farmers Market, something Brandon's family has been a part of for years.

Organizers say there are all sorts of opportunities for teens like Brandon to make money raising fresh, healthy vegetables right here in the mountains.

"You know, we're looking at our economy as a whole here in Eastern Kentucky changing, and so why not focus on agriculture?" said Morgan Kirk, a board member with the North Fork Local Food Group, which oversees the farmers market. "We have the space. We have the people. Let's do it."

Stidham says for him, farming is about preserving a way of life.

"If somebody don't do it, one day it's going to be gone, and I just want to keep that tradition alive," he said.

Opening day for the Perry County Farmers Market is this Saturday, May 28 from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. at the Perry County Park.

Thursdays on the Triangle begins this Thursday, May 26 from 6 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

The event will showcase local artists, farmers market vendors, and music at Triangle Park in Hazard.

Anyone interested in joining the Perry County Farmers Market or has questions contact perrycountyfarmersmarket@gmail.com.