

Best Farm-Fresh Towns

BY TAMARA MULDOON

Why visit farming communities? There are many reasons. You can take leisurely drives along quiet country roads, enjoying wide-open views of fields, vineyards, orchards and woodlands. Meet friendly folk with a knack for hospitality. Breathe fresh air and listen to bird song. But the best reason is to savor the locally produced food and beverage. Each season in these farming regions offers something different. In spring, flower fields and orchards bloom to spectacular effect. Summer brings fresh produce and line-up of fun festivals. Autumn means harvest time, reaping the abundance of successful crops. Winter offers its own stark beauty and quietude. These exemplary northwest farm regions offer an abundance of epicurean delights together with fun agriculture-related festivals and activities. So, when should you go? Anytime!



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Medford, OR

Medford, in southwestern Oregon, makes the perfect hub for exploring the fertile Rogue and Applegate Valleys. The Rogue Valley Food Trail map is your guide to farm stores, U-pick orchards, lavender fields, artisan food producers, wineries and farmers' markets. Find the map, visitor guide and more at travelmedford.com.

At Central Point's "Artisan Corridor," park once and visit three adjacent complementary businesses. Sample Rogue Creamery's award-winning cheeses. Give in to temptation at Lillie Belle Farms Handmade Chocolates. And before you go, grab a coffee and pastry treat at Coquette Bakery.

Adult beverage lovers take note. This area boasts four different wine-tasting routes: Jacksonville, Southern Rogue Valley, Upper Rogue and Applegate Valley. The region is well-suited to warm-climate varietals: robust reds, such as cabernet, malbec, merlot, syrah, sangiovese and tempranillo, and also delicate, fruit-forward whites, including chardonnay, pinot gris, sauvignon blanc, viognier and others.

Sample well-priced blends at Valley View Winery, founded by area pioneer Peter Britt, namesake of the famed Britt Music Festival. Take in inspiring views from Troon Vineyard, a biodynamic and certified-organic winery. Taste estate-grown goodness at Dunbar Farms and RoxyAnn Winery, both fourth-generation, family-owned businesses minutes from downtown Medford. Some wineries feature live music at their tasting rooms, a pleasant way to spend an evening. Not into wine?



Follow the Rogue Valley Ale Trail, or seek out the area distilleries, organic hard cider or Steamworks Meadery.

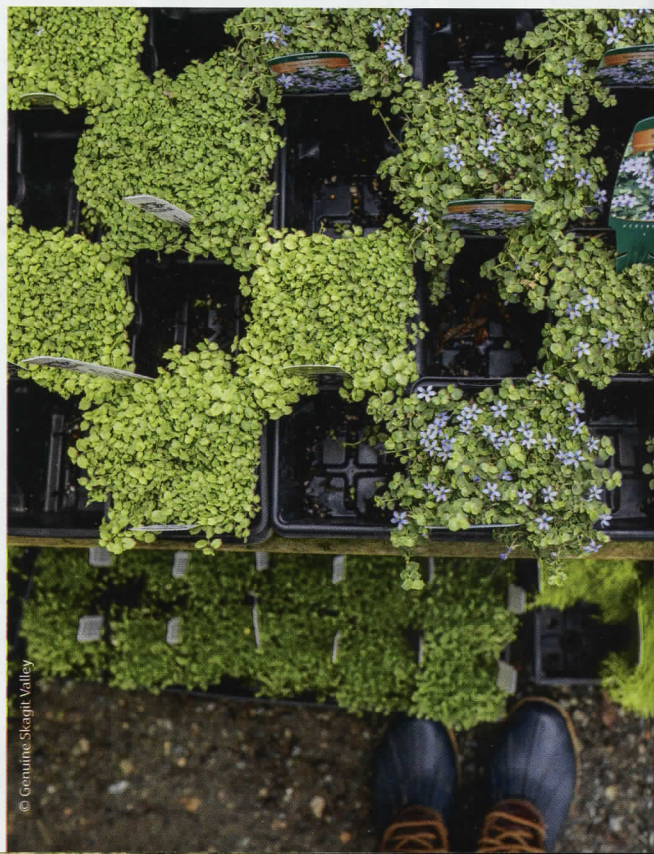
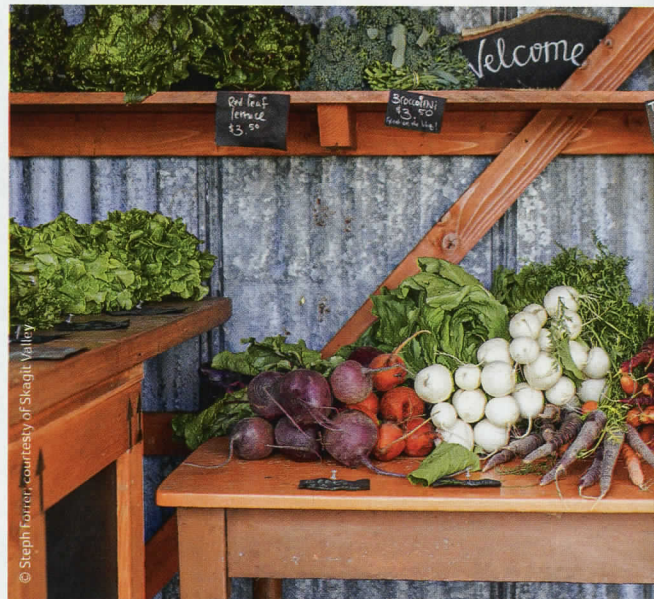
Harry & David's flagship store stocks an amazing selection of gourmet foods, wine and gifts—a brick-and-mortar version of their mail-order catalog. For local cheeses and accompaniments, stop by The Cheese Cave in Phoenix. Choose some picnic items at the Medford Food Co-op or grab lunch at its Café.

Catch one of the Rogue Valley Growers & Crafter's Markets held weekly in Medford, Grants Pass and Ashland. You'll find a wide selection of fresh, local produce, artisan foods, baked goods, plants, and handcrafted items there.

Mt. Vernon, WA

Mt. Vernon, located 60 miles north of Seattle, anchors the broad coastal plain known as Skagit Valley. The dominant industry here is agriculture, including more than 90 different crops. Within Skagit Valley are about fifty farms and businesses offering fresh produce, flowers, plants, herbs, organic meat and eggs, seafood, berries, honey, baked goods, tree fruits, cider, dairy products and more.

Special events throughout the year celebrate this bounty. The year kicks off with the La Conner Daffodil Festival and Skagit Valley Tulip Festival, where visitors flock to see fields ablaze in colorful blooms. There are several wine and





beer festivals. June features Berry Dairy Days. In October, participate in the Skagit Valley Festival of Farms, a driving tour to more than a dozen family farms to enjoy fresh food, see livestock, take farm tours and enjoy a hay ride.

However, there are plenty of reasons to visit at other times. Browse an area Farmers Market. Shop the Skagit Valley Food Co-op for local food and gifts. Take a self-guided tour, such as the Bow-Edison Food Trail, Skagit Farm to Pint Ale Trail, Historic Barn Tour or the Talking Fields Tour where signed sites offer recorded information on agricultural and historical topics. Go to visitskagitvalley.com for details on festivals, tours and visitor services.



Caldwell, ID

Just a half-hour drive west of Boise, Caldwell lies in Southwest Idaho's fertile Snake River Valley. Construction of a railroad depot and irrigation canal system in the 1900s helped Caldwell and Canyon County develop a thriving agriculture-based economy that continues today.

A good way to explore is to follow the AgVenture Trail, a self-guided driving tour to farms and ranches, farmer's markets, flower farm, produce stands, orchards, a honey producer and more. When dining



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in area restaurants, look for the "Farm to Fork" and "Farm to Cork" logos on the menu. These designate dishes utilizing locally grown products and local wines.

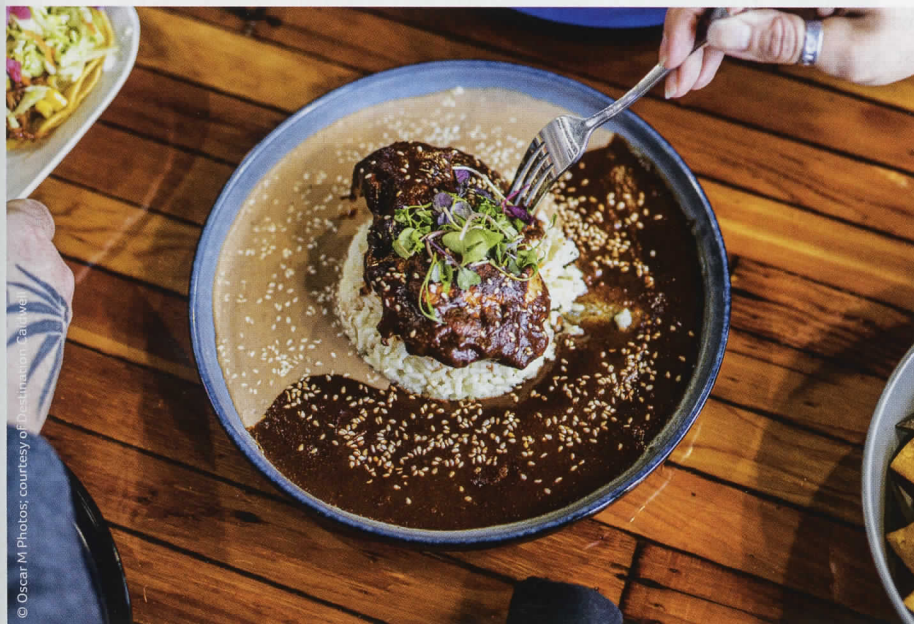
The Sunnyslope Wine Trail includes more than a dozen wineries, vineyards and cider producers within the Snake River AVA. Better yet, book a Snake River Wine Tour and let a professional tour guide do the driving. A series of annual wine events include a Wine and Chocolate Weekend, Spring Equinox Celebration, Idaho Wine Month, Sunnyslope Wine Trail Festival and Thanksgiving Weekend Open House.

The owners of Koenig Vineyards also operate Koenig Distillery, where you can sample brandies made with local fruits like apricot, plum, pear and cherry. Or try their flavored vodkas or Seven Devils brand whiskeys.

Don't miss Indian Creek Plaza in downtown Caldwell, location for events such as the weekly Farm to Fork Farmers' Market, Tuesdays on the Creek Concert Series, Idaho's Wild West Brew Fest, Taste of Caldwell Wine Festival, Hops & Crops Festival, Great Downtown Harvest Festival and others. Get more information at destinationcaldwell.com.



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Fraser Valley, B.C.

Drive east from Vancouver, British Columbia, for about 50 miles and you reach the Fraser Valley. It is one of the province's most agriculturally productive regions and second largest wine producing region. At its center lies Abbotsford, one of B.C.'s most populous cities. But it feels more small-town than urban center. Abbotsford is within a provincial Agriculture Land Reserve, which makes it an ideal base for exploring the farm-based delights of the region.

The self-guided Fraser Valley Circle Farm Tour is actually four separate routes, each centered on a different community and including up to 20 locations. Highlights of the Abbotsford tour include a honey farm and meadery, apple orchard and cidery, dairy farms, lavender fields, berry farms, a distillery, several wineries and a trout hatchery. The Langley route offers markets specializing in local and gourmet foods, meat and poultry producers, dairies, distillery, cidery, wineries, plant nursery plus alpaca and cattle ranches. On the Chilliwack Circle Tour, check out family farms and farm stores, a blueberry farm, honey producer, dairy farm, cidery, breweries, bakery and coffee shop, garden center and soap maker. Along the Harrison



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route you'll find fresh produce, berries, baked goods, cheese, fresh corn, lavender fields, locally caught salmon and a coffee roaster. While there, visit Harrison Hot Springs for a relaxing soak.

However, there is a lot more here than farm trails. Those who prefer beer can download the B.C. Ale Trail App to find the growing collection of more than a dozen craft brewers in the Fraser Valley. Visit the B.C. Farm Museum in Fort Langley to see the province's largest collection of agricultural and pioneer artifacts. Perhaps schedule your visit to coincide with the annual Abbotsford Berryfest or Agrifair events. To help you plan, visit tourismabbotsford.ca and thefraservalley.ca. 🍷