

# Market Analysis

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Published on *Saturday, February 27, 2010 9:55 PM AKST*

**WOLF LAKE** — If you've ever wondered how long those granny smiths have been sitting on the supermarket shelf, ignorance might be bliss.

“If apples are not in season, typically it takes four to six weeks to get to their distributorship. They may sit in their warehouse for a week, a week on the barge, add two more days until they get to the front shelf,” Brian Baranek said. “You're looking at almost eight and a half weeks from picking until the shelf.”

The only way produce can possibly last this long before spoiling is through the use of chemical preservatives, Baranek said. But even organic fruits and vegetables are subject to the week-long shipping time it takes to get to Alaska.



Firm believers of the benefits of eating organic and using natural products, but who are tired of the wait and limited selection of the local supermarkets, Baranek and his wife Ludie opened Wolf Lake Wellness.

Wolf Lake Wellness started as a group of five families going in together on wholesale orders of organic produce and natural foods. Two years later, the group has evolved into a full-blown food buying group with more than 50 customers.

Unlike other food cooperatives that deliver boxes of food depending on what's in season, Wolf Lake Wellness allows customers to pick exactly what they want from what's available. With a \$10 registration fee, users scan the offerings at [www.wolfakewellness.com](http://www.wolfakewellness.com) and pick what they want included in their next order.

Because the products bypass the traditional supply chain, Baranek said all their food is air-freighted up from the distributor. This means it gets from the warehouse in Oregon to the customer's home in less than 24 hours. Orders come in twice a month to the Baranek's warehouse. The couple then separates the orders out for customers to come and pick up.

With only a slight mark-up to cover the cost of running the website and separating the orders, Wolf Lake Wellness sells its products for essentially wholesale prices, Baranek said. But only after each item is individually inspected.

**“If you go into a store to buy a piece of equipment, you expect the piece to be 100 percent working,” Baranek said. “We feel if you are paying full price for an item, it should be 100 percent good.”**

**If a piece of fruit has even one bruise, it will be taken out of the order and put on sale for a discount. If a case of apples has one apple with any hint of mold, the whole case will be pulled.**

**“We do not put anything in anybody’s order we wouldn’t pick off the shelf ourselves,” Baranek said.**

**In addition to organic produce, Wolf Lake Wellness offers anything found in a traditional natural food store. There is grain, beans, wheat-free and gluten-free baking products and even natural diapers.**

**“There are a lot of chemicals in regular diapers to help make them more absorbent. We sell diapers without these chemicals,” Baranek said.**

**Baranek said they offer locally grown products whenever they can. Their warehouse also acts as a drop point for free-range eggs and organic milk from local farms. They currently don’t have a supplier for organic meat, but Baranek said he expects to begin offering beef and chicken sometime next year.**

**As the food buying club continues to grow with each order, Baranek said they have almost reached the limit of their warehouse. Run as a cooperative for the members, Baranek — who daylights as a pilot in the National Guard — said they are making some money off the orders. However, he said the ultimate goal is to use this money open a storefront to get the operation out of the airplane hanger at their house.**

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