



SPROUTING SPRINGFIELD

Sprout! Regional Food Hub offers worldwide grub BY WILLIAM KENNEDY

This spring, on a warm Friday afternoon, I decide to play hooky. And now I can say that, should you find yourself in or around downtown Springfield, have lunch at **Sprout! Regional Food Hub**.

What's a food hub? Well, by Springfield's definition it's an old, pretty church located near Springfield's Historic Washburne District, converted into an accelerator for all DIY food startups.

Launched by NEDCO (Neighborhood Economic Development Corporation), Sprout! is now privately owned. There's a kitchen you can rent as a safe space to explore the viability of your culinary enterprise.

There's also a food court of sorts, featuring Latin-inspired cuisine from **La Granada** and German-inspired fare from **Pig & Turnip**, and there's new stuff opening all the time.

Across the courtyard there's **Claim 52 Brewing** for adult beverages (kids are allowed too).

And where once was located the church's worship hall, there's now a large space to rent for private events. NEDCO and Sprout! also sponsor Springfield's Friday Farmer's Market located only a few blocks away.

So, if you're planning a hooky day, do it on a Friday to catch some fresh veggies along with your lunch-worthy delights.

I came to Sprout! hungry, so I ordered from both La



La Granada's Peruvian potatoe causa

Granada and Pig & Turnip. Pro tip: The food vendors will deliver your food across the courtyard to Claim 52, or you can order beer there and bring it back to the food area.

From La Granada I chose the *torta pascaulina*, sort of an Argentinian quiche with spinach kale, chard, ricotta, Parmesan and Swiss cheese in a house-made crispy crust. On the plate was a drizzled mayo-based chipotle hot sauce and a few savory olives. Be sure to combine a bite of torta with the sauce and an olive.

I also sampled La Granada's delicious empanadas, described on the menu as "South American fast food," with savory meat, green olives and chopped hard boiled eggs in a crispy crust. La Granada co-owner Evy Hernandez tells me La Granada is unique, serving Latin American food you won't find at just any restaurant.

"It's authentic food," Hernandez says, "from home."

From Pig & Turnip, I try the fondue fries — yes, that's exactly the kind of fried-potato and melted-cheese porn you're imagining — as well as the doner kebab (ground lamb with fresh, dill-infused tzatziki, fresh vegetables, feta and kalamata olives on a warm pita). Pig & Turnip also serves hamburgers on fresh brioche buns.

(Full disclosure: My picky 8-year-old daughter is with me and she orders just a burger and bun, exclaiming several times how tasty it is.)

Pig & Turnip employee Charity Cleveland says most people "stumble upon Sprout!" She calls Pig & Turnip a "traditional German restaurant" and a "holistic place" serving house-made schnitzel and strudel.

Washing it all down against a soundtrack of gentle grown-up indie folk is a Claim 52 Pilsner and a root beer for my kid.

For a sweet treat, we wander around the corner of the church to **100 Mile Bakery**, offering a full espresso bar, savory snacks, breakfast bites and lunch. Started in the Sprout! kitchen, baker Loryn Mason says 100 Mile Bakery redefines local, only using ingredients sourced within a 100-mile radius. ■

Sprout! Regional Food Hub is open 11 am to 9 pm Tuesday through Saturday at 418 A Street, Springfield.

PHOTOS BY TODD COOPER