Save the Dates: August 10-13, 2006
The 32nd Annual NOFA Summer Conference
by Kathleen Litchfield

It was a gloriously sunny, warm late October day that found members of the NOFA Summer Conference Committee hunkered down over organic, fairly-traded coffee and sumptuous potluck dishes to discuss the 2006 event. In an overwhelmingly popular conference evaluation item, we recognized that the traditional folk dance was sorely missed last year and while plenty of boots were stompin’ to that twangy country western beat last August 13th, it’s clear that NOFA folk desire squares and circles over straight lines and hand gestures! But hey, it’s always good to try something new as we farm folk are well aware!

The 32nd annual NOFA Summer Conference will be held August 10-13, 2006 upon the beautiful, well-landscaped grounds of Hampshire College in Amherst. Enticing farmers, gardeners, land care professionals, organic enthusiasts, homeowners and folks from throughout New England and beyond, the conference offers something for everybody from agricultural training, marketing and animal husbandry to organic turf maintenance, spirituality and politics.

Conference-goers next year can expect more signage to help direct them to workshops, films and entertainment events (we know finding the Red Barn can be tricky after a couple organic brews!) as well as more advance coverage on our website: www.nofa.org.

A special note to campers: when choosing a campsite, please do it right! Keep in mind all the bright lights, middle of the night bathroom flights and other people’s privacy rights! Pitch your tent in a good location, suited to your mind’s expectations – look up, down and all around to find your perfect camping haven!

A special note to dog owners: please, please, please leave them at home! That goes for cats, ferrets and parakeets as well. Pets are not allowed at the NOFA Summer Conference.

Thank you for your cooperation.

We’re beginning a new option this year for financially-challenged, community-minded individuals who want not only to attend the conference but volunteer their hands, hearts and minds towards the greater cause of organizing the event: Work Study! This option is also perfect for single people who want to meet like-minded folk and work as a team to make the conference run more smoothly than ever before. Help will be needed with parking, directions, registration, carpooling to off-site farm tours and more. Based on the successful Work Study model of another local conference, the NOFA Summer Conference will offer discounted registration fees for a select number of individuals wanting to work for part of their weekend fun. Details to come as the program develops!

The Pre-Conference, which will take place the afternoon of Thursday, August 10th and morning of Friday, August 11th, 2006, will focus on Youth in Agriculture (details to be announced soon) and for the ever-popular Saturday evening debate we’re considering self-reliance versus buying into the system. We will be looking forward to this on Saturday, August 12th, 2006. If you have input for the pre-conference, contact Julie at (978) 355-2853 or Julie@nofamass.org, and for the debate talk to Jack at the same phone or jack@mho.net.

Following Satish Kumar and his simple yet infinite wisdom will be tough for the 2006 Summer Conference’s keynote speaker, but we’re sure that individual will be up to the challenge. We will announce that name as soon as we have a confirmation. Watch The Natural Farmer and your NOFA chapter newsletters for updates on the Summer Conference offerings, all of which will be finalized by mid-January. And, remember to visit www.nofa.org for the latest information!

Would you like to present a workshop next year? We are always on the lookout for new and old presenters for the adults, teens, and children. Contact Julie at Julie@nofamass.org or (978) 355-2853 for adult workshops, Sakiko at 617-458-9641 email: chaaco22@hotmail.com for teen workshops, and Erin at (413) 268-9409; erosandler@hotmail.com for the children’s workshops. Please do this by December 31 to be certain of being considered.

We’ll see you next August with bells on – or at least flouncy skirts for graceful spins, do-si-dos and allemandes!

Organic Community Split Over OFPA Amendment Passed by Congress
by Jack Kittredge

The Organic Trade Association, in an effort to reverse the US district court decision in Harvey vs. Johanns, has successfully lobbied Congress to amend the Organic Foods Production Act. The Harvey decision struck down the ability of manufacturers to add synthetic ingredients to foods labeled “Organic” (those in which at least 95% of the ingredients are organic). Many large manufacturers felt that without the ability to add limited synthetics, they would no longer be able to use the “Organic” label and would instead have to use the “Made With Organic Ingredients” one, which is far less attractive to consumers.

The amendment reestablishes the right to use the previously approved synthetics. It also gives the Secretary of Agriculture the right to put agricultural products on the National List for 12 months without consulting the NOSB (previously the only body with legal authority over the National List) if the equivalent organic product is deemed ‘commercially unavailable’. It also changed dairy rules, allowing farmers to feed conventional (including GMO) feed, antibiotics and growth hormones until one year before the milk is sold as organic, and to feed transitional (rather than organic) feed for the final year.

The amendment, passed in late October, has split the organic community. Most large processors and retailers support it, and most small farmers and consumers oppose it. Particularly upsetting to opponents was the manner in which the amendment was quickly drafted and passed in a last minute appropriations rider - without broad consultation within the organic community.

Some people were left out of the process,” diplomatically suggests Iowa Senator Tom Harkin. Congressman Sam Farr (D. Cal.) puts it more directly: “Backroom deals without proper debate undermine the integrity of the entire organic industry.” Many smaller OTA members are reevaluating their membership in the group. This process may be hurried along by a restructuring at the trade association calling for the minimum dues to rise from $100 to $300, and larger rates to go as high as $20,000.

Starting on page 6, this paper prints the statements of several groups regarding this news: a broad coalition of small farmers and consumers, the OTA itself, the New York Times, Jim Riddle, the chair of the National Organic Standards Board, and the Harvey lawyer Paula Dinerstein.
Letters to the Editor
Hello Jack,
I am mailing you a list of meetings set up by our state (Massachusetts) Department of Agricultural Resources. I am concerned about the Right-to-Farm Bylaws as a way of condoming GMO as the best management practice (BMP) for certain crops. If you speak to folks in the state Senate or the Maine State Ag Commission, essentially said that local towns could not condemn GMO practices because they have deemed them as BMP’s. Let me know what you think.

Thanks, Ed Stockman

Enclosed notice:
Upcoming Public Meetings to Discuss Agricultural Commissions

Wouldn’t it be nice to have neighbors and town officials who understand and support agriculture? Would it be helpful to have a town board to deal with agricultural issues? Agriculture needs a voice at the municipal level and the formation of an Agricultural Commission is the best way to add that voice for farming to YOUR town hall. There are 40 towns in Massachusetts that currently have an Agricultural Commission and many more are making plans for Spring 2006 Town Meeting. Make sure YOUR town is part of the Ag Comm. movement!! If you are interested in the formation of an Agricultural Commission or the passage of a Right to Farm by-law in your town, please attend one of these informational meetings in your local area to learn more:

- Monson - November 29 - 7:00 - Monson Public Library <http://www.mass.gov/agr/agcom/upcoming_mtgs.htm#monson>
- Topsfield - December 5 - 7:00 - Topsfield Fairgrounds <http://www.mass.gov/agr/agcom/upcoming_mtgs.htm#topsfield>
- Rutland - December 7 - 7:00 - Rutland Public Library <http://www.mass.gov/agr/agcom/upcoming_mtgs.htm#rutland>
- Groton - December 12 - 6:30 - Groton Grange Hall <http://www.mass.gov/agr/agcom/upcoming_mtgs.htm#groton>
- Williamsburg - December 13 - 7:00 - Williamsburg Town Hall <http://www.mass.gov/agr/agcom/upcoming_mtgs.htm#williamsburg>
- Charlot ton - December 19 - 6:30 - Charlton Town Hall <http://www.mass.gov/agr/agcom/upcoming_mtgs.htm#charlton>

Thanks for the heads-up Ed,
The Farm Bureau was active in defeating California’s Sonoma County referendum against GMOs on just this basis – getting local farmers to complain that banning GMOs would deprive them of a “necessary tool”. As you know, here in Mas- sachusetts we are going through our town meetings to pass resolutions against GMOs. Having them declared a “Best Management Practice” would make it more difficult for voters to oppose them. Hopefully some concerned folks will go to these meetings and make sure that doesn’t happen.

Best, Jack Kittredge

The Natural Farmer

The Natural Farmer is the newspaper of the Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA). The NOFA members receive a subscription as part of their dues, and others may subscribe for $10 (in the US or $18 outside the US). It is published four times a year at 411 Sheldon Rd., Barre, MA 01005. The editors are Jack Kittredge and Julie Rawson, but most of the material is either written by members or summarized by us from information people send us.

Upcoming Issue Topics - We plan a year in advance so that folks who want to write on a topic can have a lot of lead time. The next 3 issues will be:

- Spring 2006 - Agriculture & Globalization
- Summer 2006 - Organic Better?
- Fall 2006 - Organic Potatoes

Moving or missed an issue? The Natural Farmer will not be forwarded by the post office, so if you need to make sure your address is up-to-date you move. You get your subscription to this paper in one of two ways. Direct subscribers who send us $10 are put on our database here. These folks should send address changes to us. Most of the subscribers who send us $10 are put on our database here. We appreciate a submission in any form, but are less likely to keep the paper lively and interesting to members, and graphics, news and interviews, photos on rural politics as we can to interview you. We’d like to keep the paper lively and interesting to members, and look second class raised a lot of consumer eye brows.

I’m old enough to remember the skepticism that accompanied the early days of organic farming. Whether or not the bug bites proved the product was organic, the fact that so much organic food looked second class raised a lot of consumer eye brows. Now we live in a different universe. Organic has become synonymous with gourmet food. The colors, shapes, and textures of heirloom varieties lend themselves to creative presentation, while baby vegetables, tender greens, and fresh berries produced on local farms are reaching the consumer’s table that same day and making possible a taste experience that only the home gardener previously knew.

The Natural Farmer needs YOU!

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Advertise in or Sponsor The Natural Farmer

Advertisements not only bring in TNF revenue, which means less must come from membership dues, they also make a paper interesting and helpful to those looking for specific goods or services. We carry 2 kinds of ads:

- The NOFA Exchange - this is a free bulletin board service for NOFA members and TNF subscribers. Send in up to 100 words (business or personal) and we’ll print it free in the next issue. Include a price (if selling) and an address or phone number so readers can contact you directly. If you’re not a NOFA member, you can still send in an ad - just send $5 along too! Send NOFA Exchange ads directly to The Natural Farmer, 411 Sheldon Rd., Barre, MA 01005 or (preferably) E-mail to Jack@nofh.org

Display Ads - this is for those offering products or services on a regular basis! You can get real attention with display ads. Send camera ready copy to Dan Rosenberg, PO Box 40, Montague, MA 01351 (413) 863-9063 and enclose a check for the appropriate size. The sizes and rates are:

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<td>Half page (7 1/2” tall by 10” wide)</td>
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<td>One-third page (7 1/2” tall by 6 1/2” wide)</td>
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Note: These prices are for camera ready copy. If you want any changes we will be glad to make them - or type-set a display ad for you - for $10 extra. Just send us the text, any graphics, and a sketch of how you want it to look. Include a check for the space charge plus $10.

Frequency discounts: if you buy space in several issues you can qualify for substantial discounts off these rates. Pay for two consecutive issues and get 10% off each, pay for 3 and get 20% off, or pay for 4 and get 25% off. An ad in the NOFA Exchange also counts as a TNF ad for purposes of this discount.

Deadlines: We need your ad copy one month before the publication date of each issue. The deadlines are:
- January 31 for the Spring issue (mails Mar. 1)
- April 30 for the Summer issue (mails Jun. 1)
- July 31 for the Fall issue (mails Sep. 1)
- October 31 for the Winter issue (mails Dec. 1)

Disclaimer: Advertisers are helping support the paper so please support them. We cannot investigate the claims of advertisers, of course, so please exercise due caution when considering any product or service. If you learn of any misrepresentation in one of our ads please inform us and we will take appropriate action. We don’t want ads that mislead.

Sponsorships: Individuals or organizations wishing to sponsor The Natural Farmer may do so by paying a payment of $200 for one year (4 issues). In return, we will thank the sponsor in a special area of page 3 of each issue, and feature the sponsor’s logo or other small insignia.

Contact for Display Ads or Sponsorships: Send display ads or sponsorships with payment to our advertising manager Dan Rosenberg, PO Box 40, Montague, MA 01351. If you have questions, or want to reserve space, contact Dan at (413) 863-9063 or dan@realpickles.com.
Farm Manager - Newton Community Farm, Inc. is seeking a farm manager for a start-up, organic, farming operation at the Newton Community Angino Farm. Job: to farm 1.5 acres, coordinate CSA activities, and participate in long-range planning and fundraising for agricultural, educational and environmental programs. Position: full-time starting February 2006; salary is competitive; and housing is available on site. Farming experience, people skills, and enthusiastic recommendations essential. Deadline for receipt of resume and cover letter is January 10, 2006. Contact: Newton Community Farm Inc., 32 Garland Rd, Newton, MA 02459. (617) 244-0736, newtoncommunityfarm@verizon.net.

YIMBY! (Yes In My Backyard): Local Lifestyle Education & Support. Want to eat (dress, live...) more locally but don’t know how? Don’t have time? Don’t know why anyone would want to? Customized workshops address your particular obstacles to living more locally. Sessions in your home, or location of choice, one-on-one or Tupperware party style, are fun, informative and hands on. Take the leap from pipedream to year-round practice at whatever level you desire. Suitable for busy, suburban folks as well as serious farmer/gardeners (and everyone in between). Contact Becky May, (203)-624-2798 yimbynh@aol.com

Three Apprenticeships available on organic vegetable farm in western CT for 06 season, April 3 - Nov. 17. Help plant, cultivate, harvest, and market produce through a 250 share CSA and farmers markets. Opportunity to learn many of the agricultural and business skills you will need to run an organic farm. Compensation includes a private room in separate apprentice house, farm produce and eggs, $800 monthly stipend plus incentives. To apply, send a letter of intent and resume to Paul Bucciaglia, Fort Hill Farm, 18 Fort Hill Rd., New Milford, CT 06776. Also see www.forthillfarm.com.

Assistant grovers sought: Heirloom Harvest in Westborough, MA, seeks skilled candidates for positions beginning April 10th, 2006. One position lasts 29 weeks, one for 27 weeks. In October, growers work part-time, 3 days a week. The farmsite is open to the public, and employees are expected to work well with volunteers and children. Some management and direction of volunteers is necessary. Pay: Hourly, $9.25. Some variance in workday length (long days and short days) is to be expected. Benefits: CSA share, workmans comp. No housing, but plenty of apartments around. Contact John at 508.963.7792. Check out heirloomharvestcsa.com.

D Acres of New Hampshire, Organic Farm & Educational Homestead is a nonprofit, tax exempt organization committed to promoting a more sustainable future through farm-based workshops, internships, and public access. We’re looking to fill two positions for the 2006 growing season: The Garden Manager will manage the annual gardens. Seed to seed experience necessary. The Kitchen Manager will organize the bakery, coordinate preservation, and manage purchasing. Both jobs require willingness to incorporate interns and ability to facilitate workshops. Full job descriptions, salary & perks, and online application are available at www.dacres.org on the Opportunities page, or call 603-786-2366.

Council Openings at Northeast SARE. The Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program seeks representatives from an agricultural nonprofit and an environmental nonprofit to set policy, review grant proposals, and advance the sustainable agriculture agenda. The positions are not paid, but Northeast SARE covers travel and lodging for twice-yearly meetings. Council members also have the satisfaction of setting policy and helping to decide how SARE grant funds will be spent. To nominate, send a brief description of the candidate to nesare@uvm.edu by February 1, 2006. State why the candidate would be an asset to SARE, describe the nonprofit, and include contact information.

Wayne’s Organic Garden is offering certified organic vegetable transplants for the 2006 season, including tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, parsley, basil, onions, shallots and more. Custom orders welcome. Pre-order only by January 31. Pick-up at farm mid to late May, aliums in April. For list, prices, options, write or call Wayne’s Organic Garden, PO Box 154, Oneon, CT 06773 or call (860) 564-7987.

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Education & Support

YIMBY!

Assistant Vegetable Grower needed for 2006 season. Help manage all aspects of a 200 share CSA in a college setting. Experience preferred but not necessary. Contact: Nancy Hanson, CSA Manager, Hampshire College Farm Center, Amherst, MA 01002 (413) 559-5599 or nhanson@hampshire.edu

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The Natural Farmer

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In the long run men hit only what they aim at. Henry David Thoreau

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Education & Support
The Kent Land Trust is looking for an organic farmer for its 15 acre farm in Kent, CT. On-site housing is available as is a large barn dedicated to food use. The farm has a physical sink under this highly visible site, which contains the Land Trust offices and a nature trail along the Housatonic river. Public interaction with the farm operation is encouraged. They are looking for a full-time farmer with all aspects of farming from planting, cultivation, harvesting, washing and packing to planning, organizing and management of working capital. Opportunities exist for leads on food deliveries and farmers market. We’re in our eighth year of diversified organic vegetable production and looking for hardworking enthusiastic individuals, who want to get their hands on a farm and the knowledge of the flow of the farm season. Working shares available as well. For more information contact Tracie, 603-847-9066.

Manager Opportunity The Open Field Foundation is looking for an infrastructure manager for Bramble Hill Farm. The Open Field Foundation is seeking an individual with experience with farming equipment as well as natural structures and sites, which support a range of resident and visiting educational and agricultural programs. The manager should have experience with green building, electrical, tool maintenance, agriculture, and general maintenance. Good communications skills a plus. To apply, send a letter and resume to The Open Field Foundation, Att. Gordon Thorne, 150 Main Street, Northampton, MA 01060.

Request for proposals: Bramble Hill Farm is a 120-acre farm located 1 mile from the center of Amherst, MA., with 80 acres of fenced pasture, 10 acres of upland woods, and another 40 acres of wetlands. There are also houses, barns, and greenhouses to lease. Open Field Foundation is looking for interested parties to lease all (or part of) the land and infrastructure of Bramble Hill Farm to create sustainable agriculture enterprises. If you are interested, please go to our website (www.bramblehill.org) or for more information, write to: The Open Field Foundation, Att. Gordon Thorne, 150 Main Street, Northampton, MA 01060.

Market Garden Gower: Shelburne Farms is a dynamic 1,400 acre non-profit educational center and working farm. The farm operates a 3 acre organic market garden providing over 75% of the vegetables produced for the farm. Prizes from $1 per ounce for raw fiber. Breeding stock is untreated. Natural colors range from white to black, including fawns and rich browns. Prices for off-the-grid straw bale house on organic farm in Attleboro, MA. Call (508) 564-7987.

Certified Organic Piglets for Sale

Black Sex-Link hens, 12-18 months old @ $5 each; 30 mixed (Aracana, Speckled Sussex, Golden Lag, Wyandotte) @ $8 each. Contact Michael or Karma Glos at (607) 657-2860, karma@kingbirdfarm.com

Apprentice/Intern sought for 2006 season. Long hours, short pay, good food and lots of learning, from soil to seed to sale. Position open from mid-April to mid-October. Salary is $5 per hour and there is a $1000 cash and housing stipend. Contact Wayne at Wayne’s Organic Garden, PO Box 154, Otego, NY 13867 or call (860) 564-7987.

Looking for piglets next spring. We’re in central Mass, but have truck and will travel. We will buy 8 to 10 piglets in April or May and are looking for a reliable source. We prefer certified organic, but will buy uncertified if all we can find. Call Jack or Julie, (978) 355-2853 or farm@mht.net.

SARE seeks exemplary northeast farmers. The Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program is seeking to reward a farmer who is practicing agriculture that is profitable, good for the environment, and beneficial to the wider community with $1000 cash and an expense-paid trip to the SARE conference in Wisconsin in August of 2006. Send a brief profile of the nominee, including contact information, a description of the nominee’s farm and its operations, and any other information that should be considered for the award to SARE@uvm.edu or to Northeast SARE/Madden Award, Hills Building, 1032 North Pleasant Street, Northampton, MA 01060. The deadline is February 1, 2006.

The health hazards of farm animals. A new report from the Center for Food Safety highlights the health hazards of aquaculture fish. The aquaculture industry, which produces about a third of the fish sold worldwide, uses antibiotics, fungicides, dyes, and hormones to compensate for crowded conditions, encroached upon habitats, and impaired the appearance of the final product. Farmed fish also accumulate higher levels of environmental contaminants than wild fish. Imported farmed fish may pose a health threat to the public because they can contain drugs that have been banned in the United States. To read the report, “The Catch with Seafood: Human Health Impacts of Drugs and Chemicals Used by the Aquaculture Industry,” visit the Center for Food Safety’s website or The Catch with Seafood at Aquaculture Report. November 2005

Study: organic diet prevents pesticide exposure in children. Studies show that organic foods provide children "immediate and dramatic" protection from widely used pesticides that are used on a variety of crops, according to a new study by a team of environmental health scientists from the University of Washington, Emory University and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Concentrations of the organophosphate pesticides – malathion and chlorpyrifos – declined substantially in the bodies of elementary school age children during a five-day period when organic foods were substituted for conventional foods. The organophosphates are the most commonly used insecticides in U.S agriculture. The findings suggest that children are exposed to organophosphate chemicals mainly through food not through spraying in homes or other sources. http://www.organicconsumers.org/school/organicstudy00405.cfm

Cornucopia asks USDA to investigate Aurora Dairy. The Cornucopia Institute has filed a formal legal complaint against the USDA asking for a full investigation into allegations of federal organic regulations at the nation’s largest organic dairy company. The Aurora Organic Dairy, located in Vermont, has over 24,000 cows. The dairy appears to have violated organic regulations by routinely bringing in conventional replacement cows. The dairy specializes in processing “private-label” products for large chains such as Wild Oats, Target and Costco. They also supply milk to the nation’s largest organic brand-name label, Horizon, owned by the corporate dairy colossus, Dean Foods. For more information, visit www.cornucopia.org/USDA. source: Cornucopia Institute Press Release, Nov. 10, 2005.

Organic production yields equivalent to conventional. David Pimental, a Cornell professor, has reviewed a 22-year farming trial conducted by Rodale Institute and concludes that yields of corn and soy are the same, whichever system is used. The organic system, however, uses 30% less fossil fuel, and saves soil and water quality. The study is reported in the July issue of Bioscience (vol 55:7) and at www.news.cornell.edu/stories/ July05/organic.farm.vs.other.ssl.html. This article was first published in The Natural Farmer, Oct. 2005 & Oct. 2005 – Organic & Broadcaster, Sep. – Oct., 2005.

Cornucopia Lab report found that composting destroys a synthetic corn gene that codes for production of Bacillus thuringiensis (Bt). After a year in a compost bin a whole GE kernel was completely degraded, while it took only a few days to degrade shredded kernels in the center of the bin. source: In Good Tilth, August 15, 2005.
Bradley takes top NOP job. In October Mark Bradley was named to head the National Organic Program (NOP), the job vacated by Richard Matheus last April. Bradley, 49, has been overseeing accreditation of certifiers for the USDA. He will oversee a staff of seven and a $1.2 million budget.

source: Organic Business News, October, 2005

NOSB executive director sought. The NOP has posted the position of executive director of the National Organic Standards Board. The GIS 12 position will pay between $62,886 and $81,747 and report to the associate policy director of the NOP. The job involves coordinating the NOSB, its meetings, committees, and needs for technical information.

source: Acres, USA, November, 2005

Obesity rates up. In almost every state obesity is on the rise. Numbers compiled in 2004 by the Center for Disease control show that only Oregon has avoided this trend. Overall, 24% of Americans are obese. Mississippi had the largest percentage, Colorado the lowest. In order, the other 10 obese states are Alabama, West Virginia, Louisiana, Tennessee, Texas, Michigan, Kentucky, Indiana, and South Carolina.

source: Acres, USA, October, 2005

National animal identification program to become mandatory in 2008. The USDA has developed a program to register all livestock (even poultry), tracking their lifetime movements in order to provide 48-hour traceback of any diseased or exposed animal. Everyone who owns even one animal will be required to register his or her name, address, phone number, and a 7 digit "premises ID number" keyed to Global Positioning System coordinates. Each animal will have a 15 digit ID number contained on a radio frequency tag or microchip that can be read from a distance, and which will be recorded by the USDA along with its birth date. Movements of any animal on or off farm must be reported within 24 hours. Apparently this draconian level of regulation and tracking is preferable to cleaning up deplorable conditions in confinement livestock operations. To read about these requirements yourself, visit www.usda.gov/nais.

source: Acres, USA, November, 2005 & Growing for Market, November, 2005

MICI appeals USDA decision. In a long anticipated action, Massachusetts Independent Certification, Inc. (MICI) has filed suit in federal district court alleging that the USDA wrongly interfered in MICI's decision not to certify an egg producer, Hubbardston's The Country Hen, because the chickens there did not have access to the out-of-doors. MICI, which was previously the NOFA/Mass organic certification program, had earlier filed and lost an internal USDA appeal. According to board member of MICI Judith Gillan, "We owe it to the organic community and consumers to make sure food that bears the USDA Organic Seal - and our program name - is consistent with their expectations and the intent of the organic program."

source: Organic Broadcaster, November – December, 2005

Whole Foods to label food GE-free. Whole Foods Market has announced it will label its products GE-free. All growers and producers who sell to Whole Foods will have to substantiate their non-GE practices through documentation and independent laboratory tests.

source: The Germinator, Fall, 2005

NOP to certify non-food products. Manufacturer's of soaps, cosmetics, and other 'personal care' products won a major victory when the NOP issued a memo to certifiers stating that non-food products may now display the USDA organic seal so long as ingredients used in them meet the NOP standards for organic agricultural products. The memo represented a reversal of the policy stated in April that non-food products could not carry the USDA seal. That policy resulted in a June lawsuit against the NOP filed by the Organic Consumers Association (OCA) and Dr. Bonner's Magic Soaps. The reversal came on the eve of a deadline requiring the NOP to respond to the suit. OCA head Ronnie Cummins said: "This is a major victory for organic consumers who rely on NOP certification to ensure that their personal care and other non-food consumable products like pet foods contain real organic ingredients free from unnecessary synthetic ingredients."

sources: The Germinator, Fall, 2005 & Organic Business News, September, 2005

The Natural Farmer

Winter, 2005 - 06

5% of US fresh produce is organic. A report by the Produce Marketing Association states that organic produce represents 5% of the fresh produce sold in the US in 2004. Organic food products in general represent 2% to 3% of all food sales here.

source: Growing for Market, September, 2005

Google goes organic. Google, Inc. the search engine company, is seeking two executive chefs at the company headquarters in Mountain View, California, to prepare meals that have "organic ingredients whenever possible." Candidates will prepare a meal for a tasting committee, and the four finalists will compete in a cook off.

source: Organic Business News, September, 2005

DiMatteo to leave OTA. Katherine DiMatteo, executive director of the Organic Trade Association of Greenfield, Massachusetts, is leaving the job next spring after 16 years heading the group (and its predecessor, the Organic Food Production Association of North America.) Phil Margolis, president of OTA, said "She is respected around the world for her consensus-building leadership, her unflagging commitment, and her outstanding ability to manage a diverse, growing association." Insiders report that she is burned out from stress caused by divergent forces within the organization.

source: Organic Business News, September, 2005

Free-range eggs more nutritious. Tests at the Skaggs Nutrition Laboratory in Portland, Oregon, have shown that eggs from free-range hens have four times the carotene, and four times the omega-3 fatty acids as eggs from confined livestock operations. To read about these requirements yourself, visit www.motherearthnews.com/eggs.

source: Stewardship News, September – October, 2005

Globe’s organic area up 10%. The global surface area dedicated to organic growing grew by 10% in 2005. The global surface area dedicated to organic growing grew by 10% in 2005. The global surface area dedicated to organic growing grew by 10% in 2005. The global surface area dedicated to organic growing grew by 10% in 2005. The global surface area dedicated to organic growing grew by 10% in 2005. The global surface area dedicated to organic growing grew by 10% in 2005.

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Google goes organic. Google, Inc. the search engine company, is seeking two executive chefs at the company headquarters in Mountain View, California, to prepare meals that have “organic ingredients whenever possible.” Candidates will prepare a meal for a tasting committee, and the four finalists will compete in a cook off.

source: Organic Business News, September, 2005

DiMatteo to leave OTA. Katherine DiMatteo, executive director of the Organic Trade Association of Greenfield, Massachusetts, is leaving the job next spring after 16 years heading the group (and its predecessor, the Organic Food Production Association of North America.) Phil Margolis, president of OTA, said “She is respected around the world for her consensus-building leadership, her unflagging commitment, and her outstanding ability to manage a diverse, growing association.” Insiders report that she is burned out from stress caused by divergent forces within the organization.

source: Organic Business News, September, 2005

Free-range eggs more nutritious. Tests at the Skaggs Nutrition Laboratory in Portland, Oregon, have shown that eggs from free-range hens have up to twice the vitamin E, up to six times the beta carotene, and four times the omega-3 fatty acids as confined birds. They also averaged half the cholesterol. The research was sponsored by Mother Earth News and can be found at their website: www.motherearthnews.com/eggs.

source: Stewardship News, September – October, 2005

Globe’s organic area up 10%. The global surface area dedicated to organic growing grew by 10% in 2004 reports the International Federation of Organic Movements (IFOAM).

source: The Germinator, Fall, 2005

Bradley takes top NOP job. In October Mark Bradley was named to head the National Organic Program (NOP), the job vacated by Richard Matheus last April. Bradley, 49, has been overseeing accreditation of certifiers for the USDA. He will oversee a staff of seven and a $1.2 million budget.

source: Organic Business News, October, 2005

NOSB executive director sought. The NOP has posted the position of executive director of the National Organic Standards Board. The GIS 12 position will pay between $62,886 and $81,747 and report to the associate policy director of the NOP. The job involves coordinating the NOSB, its meetings, committees, and needs for technical information.

source: Acres, USA, November, 2005

Obesity rates up. In almost every state obesity is on the rise. Numbers compiled in 2004 by the Center for Disease control show that only Oregon has avoided this trend. Overall, 24% of Americans are obese. Mississippi had the largest percentage, Colorado the lowest. In order, the other 10 obese states are Alabama, West Virginia, Louisiana, Tennessee, Texas, Michigan, Kentucky, Indiana, and South Carolina.

source: Acres, USA, October, 2005

National animal identification program to become mandatory in 2008. The USDA has developed a program to register all livestock (even poultry), tracking their lifetime movements in order to provide 48-hour traceback of any diseased or exposed animal. Everyone who owns even one animal will be required to register his or her name, address, phone number, and a 7 digit “premises ID number” keyed to Global Positioning System coordinates. Each animal will have a 15 digit ID number contained on a radio frequency tag or microchip that can be read from a distance, and which will be recorded by the USDA along with its birth date. Movements of any animal on or off farm must be reported within 24 hours. Apparently this draconian level of regulation and tracking is preferable to cleaning up deplorable conditions in confinement livestock operations. To read about these requirements yourself, visit www.usda.gov/nais.

source: Acres, USA, November, 2005 & Growing for Market, November, 2005
The OFPA, the OTA, & the Easy Rider

The Natural Farmer Winter, 2005 - 06

Editors note: In this section the Natural Farmer reprints several documents concerning the recent and controversial Congressional amendment (as a rider to the Ag appropriations bill) of the Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA). We, the undersigned are very disappointed in the process by which it was passed – can fundamentally affect the future of organic food and farming in this country.

The following letter to the Organic Trade Association (OTA) and the organic community was drafted by several organizations and individuals to make a public statement regarding the recent rider to the 2006 Appropriations bill that amends the Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA).

This letter will be distributed throughout the organic community via email and websites. It is open for sign-on by organizations and individuals, including farmers and consumers who like to support the opinions contained in the letter.

If you would like to sign on, please email Liana Hodes at Liana@sustainableagriculture.net by December 10, 2005. This letter and sign-on will also be available on the National Campaign website: www.sustainableagriculture.net/Organic.php

November 18, 2005

To OTA and the Organic Community:

In late October 2005, the Organic Trade Association (OTA) successfully lobbied for a significant change to the Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA). We, the undersigned are very disappointed in the process used to achieve this change and concerned about the outcome of this action.

OTA took this action after a U.S. Court of Appeals ruled in agreement with a lawsuit filed by Arthur Harvey, an organic blueberry grower, that the USDA organic regulations were inconsistent with the OFPA on several counts. Specifically, the court ruled that OFPA did not permit synthetic substances in processed foods, that all non-organic agricultural ingredients used because of commercial availability issues must appear on the National List, and that dairy farms must feed their cows organic feed for a minimum of 12 months prior to sale of organic milk.

The following letter provides analysis of these actions and begins to identify the challenges that lay ahead for all stakeholders in the organic community.

OTA’s decision to seek amendment to the OFPA was taken without consultation with OTA members (including many of us) and without consultation with other vital stakeholders in the organic community. Amendments to the OFPA were accomplished through closed-door deliberations, through efforts funded by a small number of OTA member corporations. Republican members of the House-Senate Agriculture Appropriations Conference Committee inserted the OTA amendment language after the full conference committee had adjourned. The process allowed no input from Democratic members who had objections to the amendment and had drafted compromise language.

What the changes do, and why some object

1. Synthetics in processing: The OTA sponsored amendment will preserve use of all synthetics now used in organic processing. Before the Harvey ruling, the “status quo” NOSEP-supported position was that all ingredients and minor processing aids must be reviewed by NOSB, using established criteria, and be included on the National List in order to be used “in or on” organic food. The OTA amendment leaves the door open, however, as to which new synthetic substances can be considered and added to the National List. The amendment places no restrictions on the types of synthetics (while crop and livestock materials are now restricted to certain limited categories) and does not expressly include the criteria adopted by NOSB for reviewing these materials.

OTA also refused to incorporate the suggested change to their amendment that would have required all “substances” used in processing to appear on the National List. The OTA amendment refers to “ingredients” that are used on the National List, as opposed to the language struck from OFPA that referred to all “substances.” The change is important because the terms “substances” would have ensured that the category of “processing aids” (material used during processing that do not have to appear on the final label) would still have been subject to NOSB review and the National List process. The USDA has issued a policy statement that permits indirect additives and processing aids to be used in processing that do not appear on the National List by declaring that they are not “ingredients.”

The OTA’s amendment reinforces this viewpoint, weakening the original OFPA. OTA claims their intent was to require NOSEP review for all synthetics used in processing, yet they refused to make this important change to guarantee this review.

Although OTA argues that the basis for its amendment allowing synthetics is “10 years of notice and comment rulemaking,” many organizations and members of the public never did agree or sanction the broad allowance of synthetics in food labeled “organic.” By choosing to change the law in this manner, without any public discussion or consensus-building regarding the basis for allowing limited synthetics in organic food, OTA risks alienating and confusing many consumers who do not necessarily expect synthetic ingredients in products labeled “USDA organic.”

2. Commercial availability: Prior to the recent court case, certifiers required processors to justify their need for up to 5% of non-organic ingredients, based on lack of commercial availability of an organic ingredient. The Court struck down this process and ruled that all non-organic ingredients must appear on the National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances. OTA’s amendment gives the Secretary unprecedented authority to write rules to allow emergency use of non-organic agricultural ingredients, if organic forms are not commercially available. This new approach was suggested without any explanation or precedent and the Congressional report language provides no detail. Under the OFPA, NOSEP has always had the clear authority to develop procedures to expedite review of materials needed on the National List, and authority regarding the National List. OTA claims if it has to revise the “status quo” that OTA would not require a role for NOSEP or public participation in this new process.

3. Dairy transition: The OTA’s new amendment allows third year transitional feed produced on farm to be fed as organic to a herd of animals converting with the farm, avoiding a four-year transition (crops and then livestock). This provision is non-controversial, and part of the current regulation. However, it does not return to pre-Harvey “status quo” which allowed the use of up to 20% conventional feed during the first 9 months of the last year of conversion.

Some have questioned why public interest groups have raised the concern that this change will allow cows to be treated with antibiotics and fed genetically engineered feed prior to conversion. Unfortunately, the regulation struck down by the Court allowing the use of non-organic feed is the same section that requires organic management of young dairy stock after conversion. USDA could write the new regulations to eliminate this organic management requirement, and allow all dairy farms to bring in 12-month old heifers that spent their early lives in conventional management. This would allow non-organic animals as replacement stock on a continuing basis; thus allowing the use of non-organic feed and drugs for young animals.

Since May 2003, the NOSEP has been on record with a position requiring organic management from last third of gestation once a herd has converted to organic production. The OTA amendment did not address this significant issue, yet an outcome of the Harvey ruling could be a permanent loophole regarding young stock. We hope that the attention and discussion focused on this issue will lead toward the strengthening, and not weakening of this requirement.

In short, these changes have not strengthened or improved the OFPA in any way; they have only retained the allowance for synthetics that previously existed in the regulation, added a potential loophole for non-organic ingredients, added ambiguity on the issue of processing aids, removed authority from the NOSEP, and failed to strengthen dairy standards.

Setting the Record Straight, Again

Despite an active attempt by public interest, consumer and retail sector groups to hold discussions and find common ground with the trade, after a few initial meetings, OTA, through its legal counsel, refused to discuss any positions other than law changes, and then refused to discuss the content of proposed law changes. After OTA sent its OFPA changes to Congress, OTA refused to discuss any compromise language, including a version drafted by Senator Harkin, ranking Democrat on the Senate Agriculture committee. Finding no alternative, the public interest sector activated its membership, and Congress received over 320,000 calls and letters from consumers, farmers, and businesses opposing OTA’s amendment. Those concerns were ignored by OTA and the members of Congress who carried their amendment. We find it troubling that many traditional Congressional allies for organic issues were disregarded.
An Open Letter from the Organic Trade Association

OTA would like to set the record straight concerning misinformation that is currently circulating about the amendments it is supporting in Congress.

For the past 20 years, the Organic Trade Association has worked diligently to develop standards to safeguard the integrity of the term “organic” for products in the United States. Getting the National Organic Standards was a major accomplishment for all of us in the organic community.

OTA continues to support strict organic standards. And this is why OTA is supporting action by Congress that will uphold the standards as we know them. This is the only change to the rule that OTA’s amendment would make is to make it more difficult for manufacturers to claim that ingredients are not organic. The existing organic standards allow specific materials essential to making various organic processed products. These are non-agricultural materials that are necessary in certain production and processing practices that have been used in producing foods for decades, such as baking powder, a type of pectin and carbon dioxide. OTA is advocating that products currently labeled as “Organic” remain the same products that consumers have been purchasing for the past three years.

Because of a recent court ruling, without the amendments OTA supports, the following examples are a few of the products that will not be able to be labeled as “Organic” and will not be able to carry the USDA Organic seal:

- Most bread, crackers, and breakfast cereals
- Milk, cheese, yogurt and tofu
- Any products containing sugar
- Cosmetics

Even bananas and lettuce will not be able to be sold as “Organic” because common handling practices for these products result in materials that are disallowed by the recent court ruling.

As a result, there will be fewer “Organic” products available to consumers in the marketplace. “Organic” products will be more expensive, and there will be less incentive for manufacturing companies to buy organic ingredients, thus reducing markets for organic farmers.

OTA stands behind the National Organic Standards Board as the citizen advisory board and its process to issue regulations and guidelines. These technical corrections do not change NOSB’s status.

OTA will work with NOSB on regulatory changes that are within the context of the law and the amendments.

The Organic Trade Association can be contacted at P.O. Box 547, Greenfield, MA 01302, (413) 774-7511, fax: (413) 774-6432, info@ota.com, www.ota.com.
Statement of Jim Riddle, chair of the National Organic Standards Board, on October 25, just prior to the amendment's adoption:

To members of the organic community and the House-Senate Conference Committee,

I have farmed organically since 1980 and been an organic inspector since 1986. In 1991, I was elected founding chair of the Independent Organic Inspectors Association (IOIA). I helped develop standardized organic certification and inspection templates and training materials that are used worldwide today. Since 1991, I have served on Minnesota’s organic advisory board, where we originated the organic certification cost share program and helped institute organic transition incentives. In 1997, I took the lead in writing detailed comments responding to USDA’s disastrous first Proposed Rule. I have been a member of the Organic Trade Association for over 10 years. I co-authored OTA’s American Organic Standards in 1999, and compiled OTA’s comments on the second Proposed Rule. I have served on the National Organic Standards Board since 2001, developing the NOSB’s principles of organic production and handling, compatibility criteria, standardized Board procedures, and numerous recommendations to maintain, clarify, and strengthen our organic standards. My roots in the organic community run deep.

The comments I offer here reflect my own opinions, and not those of the NOSB, USDA, OTA, or IOIA.

I am very concerned that proposals submitted to Congress by some OTA members and major food manufacturers to amend the Organic Foods Production Act in response to the Court’s ruling in Harvey v. Johans would weaken existing standards and undermine the authority of the NOSB.

OTA claims that their proposed OFPA changes are mere “clarifications” that restore the status quo. A close analysis reveals that the changes are substantive and do not restore the status quo. Below is an analysis of the status quo, OTA’s proposed changes, and my positions on amendments to OFPA related to these issues. The topics are grouped in three areas: synthetic substances allowed in the processing of organic products; commercial availability of organic agricultural ingredients; and dairy herd conversion.

Synthetic Substances

Status Quo – The regulation allows the use of synthetic substances “used in or on” processed organic foods only after the substances have been recommended by the NOSB and placed on the National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances. 38 synthetic substances are currently allowed in the processing of organic foods. The regulation contains specific criteria for the evaluation of synthetic substances used in processing, but the Court ordered removal of the criteria, since synthetic substances will no longer be allowed to be added to the processing of “organic” food under the Court’s ruling. Non-compliant products can continue to enter the stream of commerce until June 9, 2007.

OTA Proposal – OTA has introduced language that would allow the use of synthetic “ingredients” in the processing of organic foods. OTA’s language calls for deletion of an OFPA section containing the word “substances” and places the synthetic allowance after the word “ingredients.” If OTA’s language is adopted, synthetic substances such as processing aids and food contact substances would be allowed with no restrictions and no review by the NOSB. In addition, OTA has not called for placement of the vacated evaluation criteria in the statute.

My Position – If OFPA is to be amended to allow the continued use of a limited number of synthetic substances, the statute must require review of all substances used in or on processed organic products. Language that only requires the review of “ingredients” must be rejected. The vacated evaluation criteria currently in the regulation must be retained and transferred to OFPA, comparable to the evaluation criteria in OFPA used by the NOSB to assess crop and livestock materials. As with crops and livestock, specific categories of allowed synthetic processing substances need to be established, either in OFPA or through notice and comment rulemaking.

Commercial Availability

Status Quo – Under the present system, if an agricultural ingredient is not available in an organic form, an accredited certifying agent can allow a processing operation to use a non-organic form, if the processor can demonstrate that an organic form is not commercially available. The Court ordered that only those agricultural ingredients that have been reviewed and recommended by the NOSB and appear on the National List may be considered for commercial availability determinations. While accredited certifying agents have been directed by USDA to discontinue commercial availability determinations of ingredients not on the National List, non-compliant products can continue to enter the stream of commerce until June 9, 2007.

OTA Proposal – OTA has proposed allowing USDA to make expedited determinations of commercial availability of organic agricultural products and ingredients due to natural disasters and crop shortages for placement on the National List for up to twelve months, with no review by the NOSB.

My Position – There is no need for this amendment. OTA’s proposal would undermine the authority of the NOSB over the National List and transfer that authority to USDA. Under OFPA (6:51(n)), the NOSB already has the authority to establish procedures for the petitioning of substances to be placed on the National List. The NOSB, working with USDA, should be allowed to establish expedited procedures and evaluation criteria for the timely review of agricultural ingredients not available from organic growers. OTA’s proposal would undermine the authority of the NOSB over the placement of substances on the National List must be retained.

Dairy Herd Conversion

Status Quo – Presently, dairy herds can be converted to organic production either by converting entire farms, or by managing cows organically for one year prior to the production of organic milk, or by converting entire dairy herds by managing them organically for one year and feeding at least 80% certified organic or third year transitional feed for 9 months, followed by 3 months of feeding 100% certified organic feed prior to the production of organic milk. OTA’s proposal would establish, either by feeding and managing cows organically for one year prior to the production of organic milk, or by converting entire dairy farms that use the 80/20 provision are required to feed and manage all replacement animals organically from the last third of gestation.

As a result of the Harvey ruling, dairy farms have until June 4, 2006, to begin conversion of their operations to organic using the 80/20 provision. Non-compliant dairy products can continue to enter the stream of commerce until June 9, 2007.

OTA Proposal – OFPA would be changed to allow the feeding of organic and/or farm-grown, third-year transitional feed for one year prior to production of organic milk. The milk could be sold as organic as soon as the land qualifies for organic certification. After conversion to organic, replacement animals could routinely be fed conventional feed that may contain slaughter byproducts, and they could be treated with prohibited substances, including antibiotics and hormones, up to one year prior to the production of organic milk, during which they would need to be fed and managed organically.

My Position – OFPA should be amended to allow the feeding of farm-grown, third-year transitional feed, so that milk could be sold as organic as soon as the farm and the land qualifies for organic certification. In addition, the statute should require that all farm-raised and purchased replacement animals be fed and managed organically from the last third of gestation once a farm has converted to organic production, regardless of how the farm converted.

In Summary

It is important to keep things in perspective as we consider amending OFPA. Every other organic standard in the world, including IFOAM, the EU, Codex, and JAS, allows the limited use of approved synthetic substances. Synthetic substances are allowed in the USDA’s First, Second, and Final Rules. The NOSB has established a rigorous review process with well-established criteria for the review of petitioned substances. Changes to the statute must reinforce and strengthen – not weaken – the current system.

I have remained open-minded regarding regulatory vs legislative remedies to the issues raised by Harvey v. Johans. I have come to the conclusion that changes to the land qualifications and commercial availability determinations are mere “clarifications” that restore the status quo. I have attempted to engage in discussions with OTA to change their proposal to maintain the authority of the NOSB and to reflect the concerns expressed by the overwhelming number (+320,000 calls, +120,000 letters submitted to Congress) of organic farmers, consumers, and environmental groups. OTA has not been willing to negotiate in good faith to change their proposal.

I am calling on the House-Senate Conference Committee to reinstate the NOSB’s authority to require the “study rider” adopted by the Senate or to include no language on the topic in the Agriculture Appropriations bill now before the Committee.

If OFPA is to be amended, it should be done following an inclusive and transparent process that unites, rather than divides, the organic community.

Respectfully,

Jim Riddle
New York City’s East Village is nothing if not eclectic. Ukrainian, Polish, Korean and Spanish are all heard on the street and in the small shops that line it, although less frequently than in years past. Models, actors and artists, seeking modest rents (at least compared to Greenwich Village) have brought a hip edginess to the neighborhood. One of the community’s most remarkable institutions, which seems to fit well into this mix, is Angelica Kitchen. The restaurant, at 300 E. 12th St., takes high quality fresh ingredients and makes them into elegantly presented dishes, yet charges a very modest price and takes cash only, no credit cards.

Established in 1976, the eatery is named after the herb angelica. In Chinese herb lore angelica is said to expel evil. Also, the healing power of angelica is specifically a female energy and the place consciously represents an alternative to all the male energy in New York City. The menu reads: ‘Fresh, delicious food served in an atmosphere where sustainable agriculture and responsible business practices are the main ingredients.’ It also says that the menu changes daily according to season, that the chef’s practice ‘intuitive cooking’, and that they use first quality, sustainably grown ingredients often served to you less than 48 hours after harvest. They use no preservatives, no dairy, no eggs, and no animal products, and a minimum of 95% of the food has been grown organically.

Originally the restaurant was opened on St. Marks Place, 4 blocks south of 12th street, by followers of macrobiotics. The restaurant had a very specific menu for a very specific crowd. It was basic food, very inexpensive, but clean: rice, beans, greens, and seaweed.

As current owner Leslie McEachern recalls: “The guys who started it would barter if customers didn’t have money. They could bring a piece of art, do dishes for a while. But in 1981 they tired of the restaurant business. They were talking about closing it and a fellow named Frank Simons heard them. He said: ‘Don’t close it. I’ll buy it!’ So that afternoon it and a fellow named Frank Simons heard them. He got some money from his family, quit his job as executive art director of some ad agency, and started baking apple pies!”

But one of the purposes of the restaurant which most excites her is to secure fresh, healthy food and support local organic growers and food artisans.

“The food is delivered here by the farmer just picked, they get it - their eyes get big, they salivate. When that arrives at the table less than 24 hours later, people really respond. They can see it. When you put a plate down made from radicchio that was just picked, they get it - their eyes get big, they salivate.”

She is trying to target those dollars effectively. One of the dishes on the menu, Agrarian Salgado, is a fundraiser. A portion of the price of each one sold goes to the Friends of the Brazilian Landless Workers Movement (MST). Leslie met some of their leaders and became enamored of the work they are trying to do. But mostly she stays close to home with her benefices. The restaurant donates to a local school down the street, helps with the lower East Side girls’ club, donates to NOFA-NY, and supports the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture.

But one of the purposes of the restaurant which most excites her is to secure fresh, healthy food and support local organic growers and food artisans.

“The food is delivered here by the farmer just picked,” she glows. “There is nothing like it, it is so beautiful! The energy and vitality it has is evident. When that arrives at the table less than 24 hours later, people really respond. They can see it. When you put a plate down made from radicchio that was just picked, they get it - their eyes get big, they salivate.

“But not only are we supporting the farmer and that rural lifestyle,” she continues, “keeping life in those communities outside the city, which I value tremendously. But we’re able to give them top dollar...
because we don’t have a middleman. It’s always our goal to eliminate the middleman – we pay the farmer directly. We don’t call and order this and that. We say: ‘What do you have?’ I took a call from Lou at Blue Heron Farm in Lodi, NY on Saturday. He said: ‘I’ve got lots of sugar snap peas. We had a really good season. Can you take extra?’ So I called the chef who does the ordering and we took an extra 50 pounds. If you look on the menu you’ll see sugar snaps everywhere!

“Our tofu is made for us out in Allentown, Pennsylvania by a wonderful guy who buys the beans from western New York state farmers. We take organic flour to a Greek pastry maker in the city and he makes phyllo dough from it for us. We use a lot of kelp and other sea vegetables from guys up in Maine, Maine Coast Sea Vegetables. They’re a very small hands-on owner-operated little business trying to sustainably harvest sea vegetables. (They have the most amazing garlic kelp pickles. People come here because they’re addicted to these garlic kelp pickles.) Our olive oil is from a family in Italy. They have their own orchard and press the oil the old way, not using chemicals or modern extraction techniques. Without accounts like us they couldn’t do it and we couldn’t do without them. Those relationships are what make Angelica Kitchen really work as part of a sustainable community.

The restaurant takes deliveries every day of the week, even Sunday. Almost all the food is organically grown, with as much as possible local. In the spring early asparagus or radishes or strawberries may come from southern Pennsylvania, then as the harvest moves north more and more will come from New York growers. A great deal comes from Finger Lakes Organics, the farmers’ cooperative in western New York.

“Usually the farmers bring it themselves,” Leslie says, “although Finger Lakes Organics rotates delivery through the member farmers. We have one farmer who brings in stuff from several Amish farms in Lancaster County. Then there is Mark Dunau, who used to work in the East Village as a playwright before he and his wife decided to start a farm. I think he gets a kick out of loading up his truck and coming back into the city as a farmer!”

“We have over 350 ingredients in stock at any one time,” she continues. “We have such long-term relationships with the people who supply us that when new suppliers hear about us and come to us with a product, we tell them that we’re already in a committed relationship! Our farmers are already growing based on knowing our needs. So unless the new people are offering something we can’t otherwise get, we often can’t use them. But I will call other restaurants and see if I can hook them up.”

One of the other main goals of Angelica Kitchen is to keep the price of meals down. Many of the entrees are under $10, and nothing is over $20. Not many restaurants in New York City prepare meals that are as labor intensive and with such high quality for such low prices.

“I want people of all economic strata to be able to eat here,” McEachern insists. “Consequently it’s a little bit of a Robin Hood menu. If people come in and have a juice and an appetizer and an entrée and a dessert, they can run up a bill. They sort of subsidize the more basic items – the rice, beans and tofu that we call a Dragon Bowl. But people can order basics a la carte and those are priced at exactly what it costs us to produce them. The higher priced items, the daily specials and desserts and that sort of thing, subsidize the lower priced ones so that people who can only spend $5.00 can come in and get a really good meal.”

The restaurant is open 7 days a week, from 11:30 in the morning to 10:30 at night. The menu stays the same all day, and the specials are the same for lunch or supper. There is a carry-out section for Manhattan people on the go who just want something good to take home and eat.

One of the customers in the restaurant when I visited was Jack, who was eating with his 15-year-old son and his son’s friend. I asked him why he was there.

“I eat here a lot,” he smiled. “I keep coming back because of quality and consistency. You can depend on it. My boy has been eating here since he was 5. If I ask him where he wants to eat in the whole city, it’s Angelica.”

Some of Angelica’s chefs went to the Natural Gourmet Cookery School, in Manhattan. Some went to more sophisticated, higher end cooking schools, but have changed their own lifestyles – wanting to eat healthy and teaching themselves how to cook that way. But a of them didn’t go that route.

Explains Leslie: “One of the gals who works here, Amy Chaplin, our co-executive chef, is from Australia. She was born and raised this way. Her mother even made their own tofu! So she learned by eating this way, cooking this way, thinking this way. She has a very highly developed sense of what the cuisine is like and what can be done with it, how to make things up. You know, at home you go to the refrigerator and see what’s there and put together a meal. That’s basically what we do here. We look at what’s in the walk-in and make up some meals.”

The Pickle plate appetizer includes delicious garlic kelp pickles from the Maine coast.
Leslie shows the cooler where all the prepped veggies are stored until used later in the day. The pail she has open contains chopped collards, red chard and beet greens which will later be steamed.

The daily specials always reflect what is going on during that season. During March and April, when there is nothing fresh coming in from farms, they feature a lot of beets, turnips, rutabagas, and parsnips. But in July the savory vegetable card is mostly local: roasted green and gold zucchini, onions, lemon chickpeas, sugar snaps, marinated beets, garlic scape in mizuna bérainaise, carrots, cauliflower, baby turnips, spinach, and broccoli. The only thing not local is celery.

Angelica even has wild harvested ingredients like wild spinach, wild watercress, or nettles on the menu. The farmers just pick those and bring them with their deliveries. They even use purslane in the zucchini soup!

Some of the foods served at Angelica Kitchen would raise eyebrows elsewhere. A glossary on back of the menu helps customers learn about some of the more uncommon items: agar, amaranth, arame, bar dock, daikon, dulse, gomaiso, hiziki, kamut, kanten, kombu, kuki cha tea, millet, mirin, miso, mu 16 tea, nori, quinoa, sea palm, seitain, shoyu, soba, spelt, tahi ni, teff, tempeh, tofu, uto, umeboshi, wakame. ‘Coffee’ is a grain drink (roasted barley, rye, chichory). The eatery’s only concession to caffeine is black tea, as of this summer.

Six or eight items on the menu all the time have at least a little bit of sea vegetables. Leslie feels that sea vegetables are nutritionally important, especially in an environment like New York City. They cleanse the blood. Breathing these pollutants and absorbing them through the skin makes it important to be eating sea vegetables on a daily basis. In fact, the restaurant’s primary pickle is made of kelp.

McEachern feels strongly about pickles. “Pickles are a wonderful way to use the harvest,” she exclaims, keeping things for later. They are also a great digestive aid. In Japan there is a small plate of pickles at every meal, especially with anything fried. They help break down the fats. So we decided to offer a pickle plate for those who are interested in this. People don’t need to know why pickles make them feel good. They just find that they like them and feel good when they eat them.

“It’s the same for agar,” she continues, “which we use as a gelling agent. That’s a seaweed product. It’s great for the lining of your stomach. So it makes sense for a dessert, if maybe you have overeaten a little. I could use something much cheaper, but I prefer to use agar because I know it helps the digestive system. You the guest don’t have to know all this, only that you feel good.”

But the dishes at Angelica are not prepared only with health in mind.

“We know the food has all these nutritional values and is made with high quality ingredients,” McEachern explains, “but in the end eating is a treat. The eyes should go: ‘Yes! So we like the food to look good.’”

And look good it does! The mixed pickle appetizer is an explosion of glistening reds and greens, dominated by sliced kelp stems with beets, carrots and other pickled vegetables on a bed of lettuce. (Pickled kelp is addictive!) A seasoned walnut- lentil pâté with tofu sour cream topping looks like a strutting turkey, with crackers inserted tail-feather like at rakish angles various places in the mound of pâté, on a bed of sliced carrots, celery, and radishes with a wattle of lettuce.

The blueberry cake has a white tofu-based frosting ringed with fresh blueberries and garnished with a sprig of mint. The whole thing is lightly drizzled with blueberry syrup. A coconut custard (soy-milk based) pie is generously covered with peach sauce thick with real peaches.

Leslie keeps a box full of reviews of Angelica Kitchen. It’s a large box.

“Mostly we get covered only in magazine that focus on natural lifestyle,” she laughs. “The New York Times avoids us like the plague. We don’t have a wine list! Those types of reviewers don’t really know what to do with us. Every now and then we are acknowledged somehow. But the industry and the natural magazines mention us. Restaurant Business, Veggie Life, Delicious Living, Organic Life, Healthy Living, and Slow Food Guide to New York City are among the magazines that have featured stories on Angelica. We routinely win New York’s reader-based ‘Time Out’ award for best vegetarian restaurant.”

These glossy magazines show some of Angelica specialties in full page color photos which put this journal’s poor black and white representations to shame: apple, cranberry and pecan galette (Pickled kelp addict!) A seasoned walnut- lentil pâté with tofu sour cream topping looks like a strutting turkey, with crackers inserted tail-feather like at rakish angles various places in the mound of pâté, on a bed of sliced carrots, celery, and radishes with a wattle of lettuce.

Blueberry cake is among the many desserts sold at Angelica Kitchen. The frosting on this is tofu-based.

Although it keeps prices low and buys local, Angelica Kitchen cannot avoid some of the financial realities that go along with being a business. The East Village is getting quite expensive. When McEachern first moved there, her rent was $1000 a month. Now it’s $12,000. The Con Ed bills are $6,000 a month and insurance keeps going up. And of course salaries are a big part of the budget.

“We employ 70 people here,” she says. “One reason why it is so labor intensive is that we make everything fresh everyday. We have dishes that start at midnight. They cook through the night making breads, muffins and appetizers for the next day. I’m adamant about not using processed foods like soy margarines. Consequently we have to make everything from scratch. It’s hard to find really high quality, all-organic ingredient brands that I can find everyday fresh. So we have to make them.

“Another shift starts at 5:30 in the morning,” she continues, “and they cook through until about noon. We have 2 morning chefs, who basically make the day’s food. Then the kitchen supervisor keeps things moving. In the steam house we have garlic scapes, the casseroles, the things that are held for orders. A huge piece of the game is to cook enough so we don’t run out, but not to waste food either. You have to consider the weather, what is happening in the world, and guess how much you need. The restaurant seats 65 and we serve about 4000 people a week. So we’re in high production mode, but trying to maintain the quality and handmade nature of the food.”

Angelica makes good use of its limited space. The take-out counter doubles as the bakery at midnight, then turns into a prep station at 5:30 in the morning, and a dessert station once the restaurant opens for lunch. Dozens of 5-gallon pails of malt, syrup, flour, maple syrup and many other ingredients line the walls and halls. In the basement are offices, a break room, the housekeeper’s station, staff bathrooms, remote compressors for all the refrigerators upstairs, the delivery hatch from the sidewalk, storage for saved waxed boxes to be returned to farmers, freezers, bags of bulk flour, staff lockers, dried goods, paper storage, and walk-in coolers. One has pita bread, nuts, dried fruits and ingredients for the day’s stew. Another has boxes and trays of produce and a third one has prepped veggies, all washed and chopped. Cider is pressed upstate on order from apples in cold storage. But when the apples can’t be held longer, they are all made into cider which is frozen. Angelica gets it that way and detests it in the walk-in. That way they always have fresh cider, which Leslie also likes to use to sweeten some desserts.

The Natural Farmer
Despite her upbeat manner, McEachern finds running the restaurant to be stressful. “I’m an owner,” she says. “That’s a real loaded word for a lot of people. People project problems with authority or parents on you. It’s up to me to have an integrated view of everything that goes on, but a lot of the people here are very young. They haven’t reached a certain maturity yet and sometimes feel entitled to steal or lie. If you want a business based on relationships, it’s personally difficult when that happens. We’d like to develop an environment that isn’t hierarchical, which isn’t one of those ‘Do as I say or you’re fired’ places. But at the same time, I’ve been doing this so long that I get bitter sometimes. I might not always give people the benefit of the doubt, which they deserve. It’s a game of trying to keep perspective.

“The hardest thing about running a restaurant is managing other human beings,” she continues. “The restaurant business is not a career for a lot of people, unless you’re a chef. It’s a place where waitresses and kitchen help can come and make money while they’re pursuing another career. Hopefully their career gets on track and they go on and do their main thing. Sometimes we get people who work here 3 or 4 years and then they get a record deal or they get work as a choreographer. I tell them: ‘I’m glad you’re leaving for the right reasons. To do what you want to do!’ That’s very gratifying to help people stay on track and pay their rent while they’re getting their lives where they want them to.

“I find the restaurant business to be very stressful. If I didn’t have some deeper passion to keep me going I don’t know that I would have done it so long. You’d be surprised how many offers I’ve had to open another restaurant. But I like to be in one place. To be connected to the earth and to the farmers and to see what the chefs do with the food every day and how it reflects the season. What we stand for would be betrayed if I opened a restaurant somewhere else!”

An Angelica Kitchen Recipe:

Walnut-lentil pâté

2/3 cup dried green lentils, sorted
1 large bay leaf
2 cups walnuts
1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
3 cups diced onions
1 tablespoon minced garlic
1 tablespoon plus 1-teaspoon umeboshi paste (can substitute red wine vinegar mixed with salt or pickled vegetables)
1 ½ tablespoons barley miso
1 tablespoon dried basil

• Preheat oven to 350˚ F.
• Rinse lentils in strainer under cold running water.
• Place lentils in a 2-quart saucepan with bay leaf and enough water to cover by 2 inches.
• Bring to a boil. Lower heat, cover and simmer until the lentils are tender, about 30 to 40 minutes.
• Meanwhile, roast the walnuts on a cookie sheet until they turn a shade darker, about 6 to 8 minutes.
• Puree the nuts in a food processor. Pour the lentils into the food processor and puree until smooth.
• Spoon into a bowl and refrigerate until cool.
• The pâté will keep 3 to 5 days refrigerated in a tightly sealed container.
The Natural Farmer
Winter, 2005 - 06

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Fine Dining at Yale’s Berkeley College

by Jack Kittredge

Yale University, one of the oldest bastions of higher education in the western hemisphere, was founded in 1701. It’s location in downtown New Haven brings that otherwise working class city some measure of elegance with the school’s gothic architecture and cloistered commons, despite contemporary electronic security devices and access cards required for entrance anywhere on campus.

The university once catered to the rich and privileged (many students brought their own servants to wait on them) and still supports the European tradition of residential “colleges” which are essentially dorms with their own dining facilities. Students are assigned to a college at random unless they are “legacy kids” (whose father was in a particular college, in which case they get in automatically.) In one of the ancient colleges, however, new winds appear to be blowing.

Berkeley College was named after Bishop George Berkeley (1685-1753), an Irish philosopher and divine who came to the new world in 1725 to found a college in Bermuda for the training of missionaries. He was unsuccessful in raising adequate funds for this, however, and instead bought a plantation that he later bequeathed to Yale University. Thus the college named after him.

It’s high gothic dining hall, with large fireplace, ornate wooden rafters and oil portraits of the high and mighty of Yale’s past, seats about 250 diners. About 6,300 meals a week are served there. But the lines of students hoping to get in to Berkeley to eat (a few outsiders are let in for each meal according to a set of complex rules) are longer than for any other college at Yale. The reason, surprisingly, is that Berkeley serves fresh local organic food.

“It started with students wanting organic food staples here,” says executive chef Catherine Jones, “such as rice and cereal. There is a student group called ‘Food from the Earth’ and they happily coincided with Alice Waters (owner of Chez Panisse organic restaurant in Berkeley, California) showing up to enroll her daughter Fanny. She tasted some food and decided to get involved to make it taste better. So she connected with the student group and they raised some money and hired a couple of people who knew a lot about farming and sustainability. They approached the University and wanted to go much bigger than just subbing in organic milk and cereal. They wanted a complete change.”

The group created the Sustainable Food Project, set up an urban farm on some school land, and started trying to get local menus introduced into the dining halls. Berkeley’s master, John Rogers, liked the idea and was willing to have them be a test kitchen. Now the program is spreading throughout all the University’s 12 dining halls on a limited basis – 2 or 3 items a day. The students want more.

“Our priority is local, not organic” Jones explains. “We consider local to be New England. If we can get it organic, great. But we’d rather not have California tomatoes, even if they are organic, if they are out of season. We’re sticking to the seasonality of food. If our local tomato growers are out, we don’t serve tomatoes again for the rest of the year.

“There are exceptions,” she continues. “We feel we have to have bananas, but they are organic. Our basic guideline is that if a food screams its season, that’s when we serve it. Everybody knows when tomatoes are ripe. Something else, like broccoli, isn’t as well known to the public. So we can’t have just what is in season all the time. The students would freak out. So something like broccoli can sub in there. But not asparagus”.

The kitchen dare not put fajitas on in the winter and spring, she sighs, because the students know when peppers are ripe. When Swiss chard has run its season, it comes off the menu. Of course that means that in the winter they serve a lot of turnips, rutabagas, potatoes, carrots and other things that can be kept in dry storage. The students complain about the repetition, too, of course.

Students enjoy lunch in the ornate surroundings of Yale’s Berkeley College Dining Hall.

The place seats about 250 diners at a time.

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Salad bar features fresh and local produce such as watercress/orange/jicama (a leguminous root crop with a texture and taste reminiscent of Asian pears) and arugula/mint salads.
Catherine says the goal is to get the main ingredients fresh and local, and key to being able to source enough local food is developing relationships with area food producers: “Brussels sprouts are a typical fall crop, but not many farmers in New England are growing them anymore because they can’t compete with California. So now we’re trying to convince local farmers to grow them for us. We’re constantly trying to develop those relationships.”

Probably the best success story is with George Purtill of Old Maids Farm in Glastonbury, a certified organic operation with 86 acres. About 25% of the farm’s produce now goes to Yale. Five acres of vegetables are devoted to salsa alone.

Of course there are supply problems, as well. Although the school buys local beef and a lot of fresh caught seafood, they also use organic butter and olive oil — which are not local. Things like asparagus are hard to get locally before the kids leave in the spring, and they have to work closely with farmers around season extension systems to get fresh greens off-season.

There was also the problem of getting the chefs onboard for making such radical changes. Mike Schoen was an old timer at Berkeley, having cooked there for 26 years when the Sustainable Food Project came along. “I thought it was completely impractical in an institutional setting,” he recalls. “I thought maybe it is okay for a sixty-seat restaurant when you have 10 cooks. But here? How can you clean and peel all those fresh vegetables? They wanted fresh ground pepper and fresh peeled garlic every day! I said ‘we just can’t do that. We have to work ahead a little bit’.”

Jones, recruited by Yale from Gourmet magazine (and who had previously worked at Waters’ restaurant), was a key to making this a successful transition. She helped bring about the marriage between the mindset of an institution and that of a chef preparing a small dinner party by involving the cooks. She asked them ‘What would you do with cauliflower if you could prepare it your own way?’ Often they would come up with a wonderful simple recipe, something they might prepare at home for their own families. So Catherine would say: “Let’s put your name on it and send it out for the students tonight!” It made all the difference.

Slowly the cooks came to be excited by the possibilities that cooking with fresh food offers. Mike says it took him back to his younger days when more cooking was done that way. “Change is difficult,” he asserts, “but over time you learn shortcuts, how to do things differently. The labor was increased by 100 hours a week for all the processing. We peel 50 pounds of onions every day or two, and the more help you have the less space you have, so it’s tough. But I think it’s great. The turn around finally came when, instead of telling the cooks how to do it, they asked us how to do it and had us train our peers. We had input into the recipes so we got ownership of the program.”

According to Berkeley manager Tom Hellent, the cooks were skittish about training their peers. “We figured the Berkeley crew had earned the right to train the other cooks across campus, but they were really nervous about it. The third cooks were worried whether the first cooks would listen to them. Instead they got a standing ovation. It was a...

Dawn preps potatoes. Cleaning and prepping fresh produce adds about 100 hours a week to the kitchen’s labor load. As well as being used in various dishes, the spuds are turned into homemade potato chips by the college’s chefs.
groundbreaking event that has given us momentum ever since. This past summer we had cooks teach the managers so they would better understand issues of ordering or the labor that goes into it. If you have the senior people believing in and wanting to make it work, everyone else will fall into line. It’s been great for Dining Services as a morale booster. There’s general excitement about food again.

The economics of the Berkeley experiment are still a problem. When the program first started the food cost per meal doubled (over $2 more per person). After a year or so it got down to 50% more ($1 higher), and Catherine says they are working to make it only 75¢ higher. In addition to the higher costs of the food itself, there are extra hours to clean and prep the fresh food – about 100 hours per week. Corn and tomatoes are the hardest when it comes to prep time.

Catherine’s strategy to get the food cost down is simplification. “Initially we just substituted in organic ingredients for conventional,” she recalls, “and we found that drove prices through the roof. But those recipes were very complicated, using a lot of Sysco ingredients. We found that if we could serve really delicious, simplified meals we didn’t need the canned water chestnuts and roasted red peppers. Now we do a lot of roasted, sautéed vegetables. For a salad we came up with chopped watermelon, arugula and ricotta. The kids love it. They say ‘Wow. We get watermelon on the salad!’

“When I came on, I took all those recipes that took forty people and threw them out. A quesadilla originally had ground up tasteless chicken, pre-shredded cheese, onions, peppers, other vegetables and something called “Mexican Spice Blend” to make it taste like something because not one item had a rich taste by itself. We took out most of that stuff and just had cheese, onion and chicken. It tastes great! It tastes like something you’d make at home. With us every item has merit. The things that mask something else are all gone.”

The students I talked with were enthusiastic about the changes in the menu. “It’s a lot better than the other dining halls,” said one. “There we’d have onion rings, a lot of fried foods. It feels like they’re constantly reusing the same ingredients and trying to make them taste different. That doesn’t work.

Soup and sandwich bars are a hit with the kids. The soups this day are vegetable/lentil and carrot/coriander. Many local breads, meats and cheeses, as well as vegetable garnishes, are available.

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Here, whether it’s different spices or just better recipes, I feel like everything has a much more unique, fuller taste.”

Students not living in Berkeley are limited to only a few meals a week there, and I witnessed one or two who had to be turned away because they had overstayed their rights. Other schools are also interested in the experiment, and have been contacting the Berkeley staff. The University of Nebraska was there for a 2-day visit the same week I stopped by. Harvard, Princeton, and Middlebury College are talking to the Sustainable Food Project about doing something similar on their campuses.

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These Yale coeds choose Berkeley because of the fresh, local cuisine. Although not Berkeley students, they try to meet there for lunch on Tuesdays and Thursdays because “the food is more delicious and looks better”.

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It’s All About Food
Running a Gourmet Catering Business
by Mary Cleaver

I come into the food business in part through family heritage. There were professional food service providers on both sides of my family, albeit a generation back. My mother’s family is from the southern food tradition of Baltimore, the Eastern Shore of Maryland and Virginia. During the depression my grandmother planned meals at her daughters’ school in exchange for tuition. My father’s father was a caterer in northern New Jersey and ran an ice cream store in the summers on the New Jersey shore. The other part of my interest in food comes through an appreciation of place, and how and where the food itself is nurtured and grown. Throughout my 25 years of work as a high end caterer in New York City it has been important to me that the beauty and quality of the product I deliver is substantiated by its life giving qualities to both the producer and the recipient. To this end I source organic, local and sustainably grown foods.

As a child I spent summers on the coast of southeastern Massachusetts where the growing season is long. The local dairy, Gulf Hill, delivered its product to our door. They had a milking room on the road side of the pastures, and we could see the cows being milked through a very large window, right across the street from their ice cream store. High quality local produce was plentiful at farm stands – what we bought was just a matter of which direction we were going that day. We had our favorite fisherman on the New Bedford docks, but we picked our own mussels, and often dug our own clams. At the age of ten I had a pivotal epicurean experience when my family traded our own clams. At 4:00 you could have a formal English tea – a veritable white jackets impeccably serving French cuisine where the dining room was tended by stewards in livery. It’s All About Food and we had more than 20 people in the house. With so many to feed we shared jobs - my mother would shop for dinner and I became the cook having studied over the school year with Julia Child and Mastering the Art of French Cooking, Gourmet Magazine and the Tassajara Bread Book. I went on to college in Vermont where I lived in houses with kindred souls who preferred to cook and share daily meals and occasional feasts rather than eat in the cafeteria. We bought Cabot cheddar by the wheel from the co-op, picked apples to cook every which way and harvested green tomatoes to ripen wrapped in newspaper and stored in paper bags to eat all fall.

I studied ceramics and painting, so when I moved to New York City in the late 70’s I started washing dishes to support my art, then preparing salads at a single local tomato or ear of corn. I was able to build the first of my own in 1981 by converting a warehouse space in Tribeca, redolent with its natural resources. That year was the year that raspberries appeared in New York for the first time in February - $7 per pint - but when summer rolled around I was astounded that I couldn’t find a single local tomato or ear of corn. It was not until Greenmarket first started under the 59th Street Bridge in July 1976 and then in Union Square in August that this changed on any kind of scale. We now have 40 green market locations in New York City.

I went on to cook for another store, and soon began catering small dinners. This was done out of my 5 flight walk up tenement apartment in Little Italy with my ironing board as a counter, 2 Mix Masters bought at tag sales, and my friend, Shammon, a dancer and superb waiter who lived down the street, to help me prep. The catering business grew slowly by word of mouth from my initial client, an art collector, and I continued to work in food styling, as a corporate chef in midtown, as a pastry chef and sous chef in a restaurant, and as a cooking teacher. I rented and borrowed kitchens for catering until I was able to build the first of my own in 1981 by converting a warehouse space in Tribeca, redolent with sheep, which had been vacated by a Greek food importer. I chipped caked feta cheese off the floor, relocated a family of pigeons as we cut out the walls to reveal the windows and moved in mostly used kitchen equipment sourced on the Bowery.

A Tasting: Clockwise from Top Left: Organic Corn Sopes with House Cured Wild Alaskan Salmon, Organic Butternut Squash Samosas, Roasted Pear on Crostini with Farmstead Cheese, Wild Bass Ceviche in Tortilla Cups with Avocado Puree, Carmelized Onion and Goat Cheese Tartlets, Sesame Seared Tuna on Cucumber, Southern Barbeque Pork on Sweet Potato Biscuits

Breakfast: Biodynamic Honey and Almond Granola, Blueberry Yogurt and Hudson Valley Late Summer Fruit, Honey Dew Spritzers

photo courtesy The Cleaver Company

Winter, 2005 - 06

The Natural Farmer
Until 1968 Tribeca, re-named around 1977, had been Washington Market, the home of the largest food market in the country where billions of pounds of produce, eggs, butter, poultry and game and all manner of comestibles were traded every year. In 1968 the produce market moved to the Bronx but the wholesale eggs, butter and grocery remained in the neighborhood (finally priced out by the late 90’s). Five years after opening my first kitchen, in 1986, I built my second kitchen, this time on street level with a take out shop, and in 1996 The Cleaver Co built the third and current kitchen in the Chelsea Market, where we also have a take out counter and a small restaurant, the Green Table, featuring local farm product in an intimate but casual setting on the Chelsea Market concourse. The catering and event planning component of the business is the largest and we produce events for an array of clients that range in scale from 20 to 1000 guests and include gala fundraisers, weddings and social gatherings of all sorts as well as corporate and trade events. Our clients are always served a sustainable, organic and local product.

What began with me as an inherent understanding of the superior quality of local food has become over the years a more emphatic and politicized mission to support sustainable agriculture and cuisine. It became clearer to me the longer I worked in the field that the food supply was in serious danger, and that I wanted the money I spent in the market place to contribute to the preservation of family farms and top soil, so I began devoting more time to getting farm product to our kitchen. The Greenmarket at Union Square allowed me first access to local farmers. We would place orders with them and then pick up at the market. The first organic farmer I worked with at Union Square was Guy Jones at Blooming Hill, who no longer works the markets but delivers directly to our kitchen. A chef, Sally Brown, who had worked with me for several years left the kitchen, bought a refrigerated truck and started a business, Long Island Produce, moving farm product directly to chefs in New York City and Connecticut from the North Fork of Long Island which was a valuable resource for 4 seasons until she gave it up.

The marketing and distribution of locally raised healthy pastured animal proteins has been a challenge. We could purchase successfully and from Australia and New Zealand but very little Hudson Valley or New England product was reaching the vast potential in the market place of New York City. In 2001 I became part of a group including producers and Paula Schaefer at Cornell Extension in Washington County to begin “Farm to Chef Express” with a grant from New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets. This is a consortium of livestock producers, farmers and chefs with a marketing liaison person who coordinates product availability, orders and distribution by truck. We have had farmers visit chefs in the city and New York City chefs visit the farms to cultivate understanding and work toward growing supply for demand. The organization is on it’s way to becoming a producer owned cooperative. We also rely on Joe Angello and Angello’s Distributing in Piermont, New York, for excellent organic and biodynamic –meats, dairy, produce and grocery – some local, some not. Much of our dairy comes from Ronnybrook Farms, our neighbor in the Chelsea Market, and cheeses come from a growing number of dairies in the Hudson Valley and New England.

Every day in my business we thoughtfully navigate our purchasing. In 2002 I spent a week

Hudson Valley Organic Apple Tarte Tatin with Ronnybrook Crème Fraiche and Raspberry Sauce
in Washington through an internship offered by Women Chef’s and Restaurateurs with Nora Pouillon, a pioneer in organic fine dining. Restaurant Nora was the first certified organic restaurant in the country and I wanted to find out what the requirements were for organic certification and if it was something to pursue for my business. It was a particularly edifying week to be there as the USDA standards became law after 10 years of negotiation. I came away with the conclusion that certifying would not suit us as I already had 7 organic farmers with whom I was working who were not certified and did not plan to become so for several reasons. The cost was prohibitive, the paperwork was overwhelming, and their practices went beyond the standards. My plan was instead to understand my farmers by the quality of their product and their individual commitment to a healthy food supply, and to visit the farms whenever possible. Another concern with the USDA organic certification was that animal proteins grown organically did not necessarily adhere to Animal Welfare Institute standards, which I think is critical, and is one of the reasons (besides the excellent flavor profile) that we also purchase from Niman Ranch. I also prefer to purchase Wild Alaskan Salmon rather than organic farm raised. For me, each purchase presents a labyrinth to be carefully navigated.

Our clients come to us in a variety of ways and for a variety of reasons. Some come to us because of our commitment to a healthy food supply and to the notion that proper nourishment comes from food that is grown in healthy soil. I have seen a positive trend with wedding clients to seeking us out in order to make their first large financial commitment as a couple reflect their environmental values. It is also true that clients come to us from word of mouth referral and are unaware of these added values until they get here.

Catering by definition is giving the client what they want for any given event. Unlike the restaurant business, where guests choose from your offerings, we meet our clients in the middle, typically designing an event around specific parameters. Catered events are planned months or years ahead, and many are complex performance pieces woven with myriad components, but we are sure to propose menus that give us leeway to maintain our purchasing priorities. We develop trust with the client and encourage flexibility so that we can make final menu choices based on what food is actually available at the time of preparation. With this practice we have established and maintained a reputation for quality of food, service and production value and continue to be rated in the top 5 caterers in New York City by Zagat’s Marketplace Guide.

In the last several years I have begun to address the market more directly with our mission. I was perplexed when I attended a gala fundraiser for a leading environmental conservation group and was served farmed salmon and commodity beef. Surely those dollars ought to be spent supporting their own mission with organically inspired food. I have begun to think further about what we eat and how it affects our health and that of our planet, and I want to know what the food we are eating has consumed before us – in other words what kind of soil was it grown in or what kind of pasture it grazed or what was in the feed that it consumed.

To further our work in the organic and sustainable food movement we partner with like minded organizations such as the Baum Forum, Center Naturally Fermented & Raw

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photo courtesy The Cleaver Company

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I am encouraged by the strong growth trend of the organic market - that your work and our work can have a positive affect on our children’s future. I try to keep my eye on the goal of improving the food supply with every gorgeous meal we serve.

Mary Cleaver is the owner of The Cleaver Company, a high quality catering and event planning business in New York City devoted to the mission of supporting sustainable agriculture and cuisine.

Organic Fall Vegetable Napoleon (the term is stretched a bit here as this one is beets, celeriac, butternut squash, goat cheese and arugula with sunflower sprouts on top -- no pastry at all ) in Heirloom Tomato Coulis begins three-course organic meal provided by the Cleaver Company at a recent British Soil Association dinner (Sting entertained)

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Susty’s Café
by Norma Koski

Our restaurant is located in Northwood, New Hampshire (about 20 miles east of Concord) at 159 1st New Hampshire Turnpike, which is Route 4. The winter hours are: closed Tuesday (just through February), Monday & Wednesday 11:00 - 3:00, Thursday, Friday & Saturday 11:00 - 9:00, Sunday 11:00 - 8:00. We’re totally vegan, about 98% organic (working on 100%). Our set menu is an array of sandwiches, wraps, burgers, nori rolls, and appetizers like nachos, soy fritters, and a hummus plate. We feature two or three soups, and the main entrees are items like black bean enchiladas, tofu lasagna, seitan feast, shepherds pie, and tofu pot pie. We always have cake and pies, which are an assortment of fruit, chocolate cream and pumpkin, as well as muffins & cookies. We have specials of seasonal delights — I’m going to make it to January or February with local potatoes, carrots & tomatoes (that I canned & dried). The cafe has about 20 seats and in the summer we open up a backyard of picnic tables.

Susty’s started in this location seven years ago. Before then, I had been wholesaling food to a variety of retail outlets in southern New Hampshire from my little deli in the back of the Rising Tide Natural Food Store in Kittery, Maine. “Radical Vegan Foods” was what I called myself when I used to cook for family and friends out of my home kitchen back in the day, so that became the wholesale part and we made up the name Susty’s from an amalgam of sustainable sustenance and Knusty’s hamburger joint from the TV show “The Simpsons”.

Now we have developed a dedicated clientele and we strive to serve the best organic vegan food we can offer. Not too many people came to a restaurant like this 7 years ago when we first started. It’s a good thing for good changes! We just redid our dining room in May and after 7 years we now have a menu and waitstaff.

Susty’s Statement of Purpose

We at Susty’s work hard to support local organic farmers, who in turn, work hard to support the environment and a sustainable future. The importance of using all organic ingredients in food is exemplified in the nutritional value, taste and the subsequent stewardship of our home - the earth. Our belief that organic food is in fact cheaper than non-organic lies in contradiction to popular belief, however you get what you pay for and organic foods are better for everyone through each of its stages; from production to consumption. Additionally, we stress a doctrine of locality, from our organic produce to the powering of local bio-diesel vehicles from our 100% organic fryolator oil. By being both organic and local to the best of our ability, “we are working towards a world of institutions built to the human scale within harmonious self-regarding communities that are governed by participatory democracy and fueled by self-sufficient regional economies; deeply conscious of the limits of natural resources and the need for ecological harmony.”

Kirkpatrick Sales forward to Small Is Beautiful.
Chefs Collaborative works with chefs and the greater food community to celebrate local foods and foster a more sustainable food supply. The Collaborative inspires action by sharing information about our food into tools for making knowledgeable purchasing decisions. Through these actions, our members embrace seasonality, preserve diversity and traditional practices, and support local economies.

The organization counts as members more than 1,000 active and passionate food community professionals, 70% of whom are chefs. This creates an impressive nationwide chef network representing independent and corporate establishments. Other members represent a broad range of food-related professions, from culinary school instructors and managers of large foodservice operations to farmers, fishermen, ranchers, and concerned consumers. This diverse constituency is unified by their shared concern about the source and quality of their foods. Our members focus on promoting the highest-quality, best-tasting local ingredients; products that they know are better for the environment and the community.

From establishing local chapters to speaking at national conferences, the future of Chefs Collaborative will be built on the momentum and experience gained during its first ten years. Through the Chefs Collaborative network, members are encouraged to develop buying relationships with local farmers, ranchers, fishermen, and other artisanal food producers, who in turn can learn how to meet the needs of restaurants and build their businesses. Together they will achieve the goal of sustainability—the capacity to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. As an example, the Chefs Collaborative “Seafood Solutions” program has shown that chefs are seeking useful, practical advice about sustainable seafood choices, and that this increased awareness can have a major impact on consumer understanding and purchasing habits. It’s a unique position, one that allows Chefs Collaborative members and the education the organization provides, to positively impact their own buying decisions, as well as the broader public and distributors.

History

Chefs Collaborative was formed in 1993 by a group of chefs who recognized that environmental sustainability and food choices were going to be increasingly important to a healthy world and delicious cuisine. Chefs Collaborative helped lead the growing sustainable cuisine movement and gave concerned chefs an opportunity to connect at conferences and retreats to discuss the issues. As the organization has matured, Chefs Collaborative has put an increasing focus on producing publications and events designed to educate chefs, culinary professionals, as well as bring them together with producers.

Over the past ten years, Chefs Collaborative has transformed from an educational initiative to an independent organization with a full-time staff supporting an exceptionally dedicated volunteer board of chefs and restaurant professionals. Chefs Collaborative has been a steadily growing force, gaining in recognition and influence, establishing itself as the voice of environmentally concerned chefs and food-service professionals across the country. As such, their work has delved into many facets of the food system. One key area of concern is the availability of fresh, flavorful and healthy crops. Combining these factors with a concern for production practices and environmental impacts, they work hard to encourage food purchasers to support local, sustainable agriculture—to know their farmers, and share their story with customers. To help facilitate this, the Collaborative has co-hosted Farmer-Chef workshops and other forums that bring producers and buyers together. Another major focus of the past few years has been raising the awareness of chefs and, through them, consumers, about sustainable seafood through the “Seafood Solutions” program. After receiving a grant from the prestigious Packard Foundation, Chefs Collaborative was entrusted with the task of developing a series of educational industry seminars and consumer dinners nationwide. This series of tasting events addressed issues regarding our oceans today and highlighted the delicious sustainable seafood choices available to chefs and consumers. In fact, the success of Chefs Collaborative and its partners in highlighting these issues led to broad media coverage and a national dialogue that recognizes the need to make healthy, flavorful, and sustainable seafood choices.

Additionally, many of its educational papers and conference appearances have explored the variety of considerations with sustainable meat in its “Meat of the Matter” initiative. Chefs Collaborative will continue its mission to examine sustainability issues with sustainable meat in its “Meat of the Matter” initiative.

Looking ahead to the next ten years, the board of directors has articulated a vision of a vibrant, influential, visible organization. First, Chefs Collaborative will continue its mission to examine and research pertinent facets of the food production system. It will share that knowledge with its members, emphasizing the need for strengthening local food communities. Through national and local partnerships, Chefs Collaborative will improve community relationships and food production, while leading the general debate on broader food issues that affect us all. Second, the board would like to see the organization reach beyond the dedicated chefs and culinary professionals who are already changing the world through their menu choices to include those who have not yet found a way to revolutionize their restaurants. Third, Chefs Collaborative will become a trusted and helpful sustainable agriculture and seafood resource to journalists, chefs, and concerned consumers, as they develop recipes for publication, for their menus, or simply for home cooking.

While Chefs Collaborative will maintain its valuable educational resources and relationships with experts on sustainability issues, its current aim is to reflect a broader voice and solicit member input on a regular basis through surveys, focus groups and targeted outreach. To achieve this, the Collaborative is investing in its internal capacity, including staffing, board development, governance, financial practices and use of technology. Top priorities for new programs include the development of professional education modules and culinary school curricula, as well as the creation of new forums for its members to exchange information, resources and best practices, both in person and via interactive technology.

The Collaborative knows that issues of sustainability no longer sequester themselves to white tablecloth establishments. “Educational tools to make informed purchasing decisions are needed throughout the food industry on all levels of service,” says board member Robin Stempel of HRHS Enterprises and co-owner of The Mist Grill café in Waterbury, VT. “We devote ourselves to finding the right partners to distribute the researched, balanced information the Collaborative provides to all interested parties.”

As a first initiative, the organization recently launched quarterly conference call exchanges, titled Collaborative Hosted Education Calls on Kitchen Sustainability (CHECKS), designed to connect members directly with industry experts and create open dialogue. The first call was on September 13, 2005, and featured guest panelists Becky Goldberg of Environmental Defense, Henry Lovejoy of EcoFish, and Kate Troll of Marine Stewardship Council discussing the topic, organic aquaculture, the subject of a recent Collaborative communiqué.

Current Projects & Ways to Get Involved

In the beginning of the year, Chefs Collaborative began a Chef-Farmer Project in Columbus, Ohio, and Bozeman, Montana, to develop model programs for restaurant-driven buy-local movements. “This is an exciting time for the Collaborative,” said national chair Peter Hoffman, chef and owner of Savoy in New York City. “This project allows us to return to our roots as an organization and refocus our energies on food from the farm to the table.”

Myself and our board chair Peter Hoffman (owner, Savoy in New York City) at a recent Chef-Farmer event in Bozeman, MT.
Funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the Collaborative has been working closely with leaders in Ohio and Montana to build councils of chefs and producers and to promote local purchasing by restaurants. In Ohio, the Central Ohio Chef-Farmers Network and Innovative Farmers of Ohio are key partners; in Montana, the Corporation for the Northern Rockies, Alternative Energy Resources Organization and the Community Coop help drive the project. The goals are ambitious: the Collaborative will use the experience of these two very different regions to compile a list of “best practices” and build a template for supporting similar efforts nationwide.

To date, the Collaborative and its partners in Ohio and Montana have established regional working Network Advisory Councils, which have paved the way for local farmers and chefs to build new relationships and farm-to-table connections through focused region-wide conference calls and local roundtable meetings. Together they have also held a series of farm tours and harvest dinners open to the public and published Chef-Grower (and rancher) Directories, which provide farmers, ranchers and chefs with a one-stop resource for marketing and sourcing local produce, meat, poultry and aquaculture products. The directories include tips for selling to restaurants and buying from local farms, as well as season availability charts.

Chefs Collaborative has become an influential partner in the new Renewing America’s Food Traditions (RAFT) project. RAFT was launched in the spring of 2005 by seven of the most prominent food, agriculture, education and conservation organizations in the United States as the first nationwide eco-gastronomic campaign. Uniting the culinary community’s emphasis on food quality and artisanal traditions with conservationists’ and food producers’ knowledge of and commitment to agricultural biodiversity, RAFT is the first collaborative effort ever assembled to:

- Make a comprehensive catalog of America’s indigenous and authentic foods and their cultural significance;
- Document which foods have fallen into disuse and are at risk of extinction;
- Determine which are capable of being restored and revitalized in ways that benefit their stewards; and
- Begin revitalization projects in partnership with food producers, retailers, consumers and chefs.

Chefs Collaborative’s contribution to the RAFT project is perhaps best highlighted by envisioning the final outcome, a nationwide series of heritage food picnics in 2007. The menus will be developed by Collaborative members and will reflect the culinary heritage of the United States by featuring the cuisines of diverse American cultures and native roots. Picnic ingredients will come from a breed or seed on the RAFT Redlist of America’s Endangered Foods, one of RAFT’s earliest successes that identifies the status, location, and historical and cultural links of over 700 endangered plant and animal foods.

Chefs Collaborative is deeply involved in the following RAFT initiatives:

- Gathering member recipes to be featured in a multi-authored book on America’s most endangered traditional foods;
- Working with its members to develop recipes and promote the use of native foods on their restaurant menus in conjunction with the 2006 Native Foods “Ark Summit” and for use in the 2007 picnics;
- Strengthening the connection between consumers and local growers with the Heirloom Seed Adoption Program by holding heirloom produce events at

Rick Bayless of the Frontera Grill & Topolobampo in Chicago, a founder of The Chefs Collaborative and current board member
Chefs Collaborative restaurants; and
- Ensuring American heritage chicken breeds are selected with thought to taste and usability in restaurants and developing and promoting recipes to best prepare these heritage breeds.

“We are excited to work with such committed partners,” says Gary Nabhan, RAFT founder and co-facilitator. “Each brings different strengths, connections and passions to achieve RAFT’s various objectives. Together, we can get these foods back on our farms and ranches, in our rivers and forests and, most importantly, on our tables.”

For further RAFT information, visit http://www.slowfoodusa.org/raft/getting_involved.html or contact Project Manager Makalé Faber at 718-260-8000/makale@slowfoodusa.org, or Maggie Nesgos at617.236.5200.

In celebration of Earth Day, Chefs Collaborative will join forces for a second time with Organic Valley Family of Farms to host The Earth Dinner™. As an organic farmer-owned cooperative committed to reawakening the connection between farmers and their urban neighbors, Organic Valley created The Earth Dinner™ as “a way for family and friends to come together to appreciate the remarkable role food plays in our lives, in our family’s histories, and on our planet,” says Theresa Marquez, director of consumer affairs at Organic Valley Family of Farms and the catalyst behind the promotion. “How and what we eat determines the health of the Earth.”

Earth Day became a U.S. national holiday April 22, 1970, and this year April 22, 2006, marks its 36th anniversary. The annual holiday represents a time to celebrate the planet and remind people to protect the natural resources that the Earth provides. The goal of this partnership is to create a nationwide network of Earth Dinners featuring Chefs Collaborative member restaurants. Around the country, Chefs Collaborative member restaurants deliver special menus to run for one night or a series of nights and use the Earth Dinner Creativity Cards created by author Douglas Love, to spark lively discussions and story sharing.

Publications
Publications are distributed to the entire membership and to the media nationwide. Quarterly newsletters cover member activities and various subjects that relate to sustainable cuisine. FreshNet, the monthly e-mail newsletter of Chefs Collaborative, contains announcements, event listings, and links to articles on sustainable cuisine to keep members informed.

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(for more information contact Julie Sochacki at jcsochacki@sbcglobal.net)
charge in member restaurants, at events, and mailed out to the public from the Collaborative’s office.

All these programs and initiatives support the Collaborative’s clear Statement of Principles:

1. Food is fundamental to life, nourishing us in body and soul. The preparation of food strengthens our connection to nature. And the sharing of food immeasurably enriches our sense of community.

2. Good food begins with unpolluted air, land, and water, environmentally sustainable farming and fishing, and humane animal husbandry.

3. Food choices that emphasize delicious, locally grown, seasonally fresh, and whole or minimally processed ingredients are good for us, for local farming communities, and for the planet.

4. Cultural and biological diversity are essential for the health of the earth and its inhabitants. Preserving and revitalizing sustainable food, fishing and agricultural traditions strengthen that diversity.

5. By continually educating themselves about sustainable choices, chefs can serve as models to the culinary community and the general public through their purchases of seasonal, sustainable ingredients and their transformation of these ingredients into delicious food.

6. The greater culinary community can be a catalyst for positive change by creating a market for good food and helping preserve local farming and fishing communities.

Parting Vision

As a result of our work, every chef in the U.S.A. will be aware that food purchasing affects the environment and the community.

We look forward to partnering with many more in the greater food community to make this vision a reality. Visit www.chefscollaborative.org or call 617.236.5200 to join our work or find out more information on Chefs Collaborative.

Seattle CC Chapter President and head chef at the Ruins, Kären Jurgensen prepared the first in the nation RAFT Harvest Dinner in September

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Farm to Restaurant Connections:
Can it Happen to You?

by Tony Norris, Urban Oaks Organic Farm

We often refer to our organic farming endeavor as the hobby that got out of control. Back in the mid 1980s my partner Mike and I expanded the large garden that my father had maintained until he died. When we moved back to the ancestral three-family house to look after Ma and the house, we planted all sorts of new plants in the garden. It was mostly foods that we couldn’t find anywhere back in the mid 1980s: fresh cut herbs and a variety of lettuces and salad greens.

When the garden harvest exceeded our needs, Mike, who then worked part-time at a small specialty food store, haggled some of the extra herbs and salad greens and brought them into the store. They sold, but we still had excess. So then I went to “Cheese & Stuff” a locally owned small health food store. They sold there as well. Our plan was to have the garden cover all its own expenses and it looked like that was going to happen. We were thrilled.

A couple of months went by and, unknown to us, the woman in charge of take-out and catering for Cheese & Stuff had been pulling our products off the retail shelves and using them in her food preparation. We didn’t even know who she was until she left Cheese & Stuff to manage one of Hartford, CT’s most prestigious restaurants -- a corporate dining club where quality was tops.

We received a call from her one day and were asked if we would deliver our herbs and salad greens to that restaurant. She explained how she had become familiar with our products and I said sure -- not a problem. But it was a problem. As I said to Mike, “this hobby is getting out of control and we need to decide to either stop it at this point in its development or make a commitment to create a business.”

Being a former hippie and current environmentalist, the question of whether or not we would be organic was not an issue, it was assumed. So we decided to lease some land in a nearby rural community, get certified and give it a shot. On the drive home from the leased land one day, I noticed a car shadowing me. Since these were the days before terrorism, it sparked my curiosity but not much more. It was another restaurant manager who saw the magnetic sign on the side of our old Toyota pickup on the highway; she happened to live in the community next door to where we were leasing land.

Later that day, I got a phone call from her asking if we delivered to restaurants. I told her about the corporate club we delivered to, not even realizing what a prestigious restaurant it was, and she immediately asked if we would deliver to the restaurant she managed. At the same time, Mike and I were looking around the community in which we were now farming, seeing all the farms and farmstands (unfortunately, McMansions now occupy much of that land), and realizing that now, in 1990, not many people were clamoring for organic vegetables and that there were so many farmstands around, our only hope of survival would be delivering directly to small retail stores and restaurants.

We agreed to deliver to her restaurant and from that point forward, we discovered the incestuous world of restaurants and chefs. Chefs didn’t seem to be intimidating to us; we were both good cooks and understood their hunger for fresh, local produce. We began to understand that chefs who were planners worked the best with us and that our biggest hurdle would be breaking many chefs of the habit of calling a regional market distributor that morning and getting all their produce and grocery needs from one source that afternoon. The problem they dealt with, when using that source, was that the produce had to be bought by the case and the quality often wasn’t the top selling point of the produce they carried. We offered an alternative. Some chefs were looking for quality, they were delighted that they could buy in the quantities they needed (rather than in case lots), the organic was a plus, but, prior to groups like the Chefs Collaborative, was not a main selling point.

Dealing with chefs didn’t seem to be any different than dealing with my parents who were both great cooks and demanding of freshness and quality, especially when we canned foods for winter eating. My father had connections with a number of farmers in the area (that was when our hometown of New Britain, CT was surrounded by rural areas where farms abounded). The farmers knew what my father was looking for and when the pickling cukes were at their prime, we’d get the phone call to come pick up the quantities my father had asked for and the kitchen and family turned into a production line of picklers, like squirrels packing away this year’s harvest for consumption during the winter.

When we began dealing with chefs and retail stores, we created a system of producing a weekly product and price list and faxing it to our customers each weekend (we still use this system). I would then call each customer, get their order, produce a picking list (which later became our harvest record), pick their order and deliver it the next day. People raved about the freshness and the shelf life. We became a pick-to-order business, rather than most restaurant produce dealers who grabbed produce from a walk-in cooler and were essentially warehouse businesses. I always told customers that the farm was our warehouse.

The winter farmstand, located in one of the smaller greenhouses; Kathy Duffy, of Sweet Sage Bakery, the farmstand’s main baker, is in the foreground.

Swiss chard in one of the greenhouses.
Our business expanded through the incestuous world of restaurants. One chef would get a new job at another restaurant, give us a call and ask us if we would deliver to his or her new place of employment. The restaurant where the chef had formerly worked continued to order from us and we oriented the new chef there about our system. Or, a chef from another restaurant would be brought in by one of our customers for a special occasion when extra personnel were needed. He or she would see our produce and then give us a call to ask if we would deliver to his or her restaurant.

Back in 1996, the organic farmers in Connecticut formed the Certified Organic Associated Growers (COAG) as a forum for organic farmers to get together and collectively problem-solve. We would have our “meeting season” (from November through March or April) which wouldn’t conflict with our growing season (April to October). It seems each meeting season had its own particular theme, one of which was going through the proposed national organic standards and commenting. We had also hoped that COAG would open up opportunities for cooperative marketing. When we realized the capital investment involved with cooperative marketing, that got put on a back burner.

In the meantime, at one meeting, one farmer let us know he had a bumper crop of fingerling potatoes and asked if any of our customers might be interested in his product. We put the fingerlings on the price list (we didn’t grow potatoes and other crops due to our limited land). They sold. Next year, that farmer had more crops for us to sell and a couple of other farmers did as well. We then began to sell crops for any of the COAG farmers who had surpluses or grew extra just for us to sell. We were able to offer our customers a wider range of products and we helped out our fellow Connecticut farmers as well. It seemed like a perfect arrangement. Although when we tried to convince other farmer friends to approach restaurants on their own, the response was almost universal: they’re too picky and difficult to deal with, yet from my experience, we have farmstand customers who are just as picky and difficult as any chef I’ve every encountered.

In the middle of all of this, we changed farms. Our part-time private business on leased land needed new space since the dairy farmer we leased land from started talking about putting in a golf course.
on part of the land. We knew, even though we had become practically family with our landlords, that we could never be certified organic next to a golf course. At the same time, officials from the City of New Britain introduced us to a businessman who owned a property with six greenhouses and two acres of land that had been a former wholesale florist operation, but had fallen into neglect over the past eight years. Trees and shrubs had filled the property and crashed through the greenhouse roofs.

This businessman wasn’t interested in developing the property himself and was mostly interested in taking a blighted, neglected property and making productive use of the land. The farm that was created was Urban Oaks Organic Farm. We formed a board of directors and the farm was incorporated as a nonprofit (although, being a hybrid, we still pay city property taxes, state sales and corporate taxes and we file as a for-profit with the federal government). The Farm is located in one of New Britain’s oldest and poorest neighborhoods. We made the transition and, to our wholesale customers, there was no break in service; the farm change didn’t matter since they were still dealing with Mike and Tony and Mike and Tony were producing basically the same crops. It was the personal relationship we had established with the produce managers at the small retail stores and the chefs at the restaurants that mattered most.

So what are the lessons to be learned about selling to restaurants from our story? First, produce top quality crops that you’re proud to sell. Second, listen to your customers and understand their approach to their produce needs. Third, be flexible and alter your farming/market schedule to theirs.

And for those of you who are starting out for the first time approaching restaurants (rather than those of us who just stepped in...to the restaurant business), I’d like to offer other advice that we use when we’re approaching a restaurant for the first time. Remember, nowadays, rather than 1990 when we started, chefs are used to the idea of connecting with a local farm — it’s become fashionable and more common.

Try to get referrals from other chefs — usually, they can be almost evangelical about telling chef friends about their connection to a local farm. Visit the restaurant ahead of time and check out their menu — see what products you have that you could sell to them and see the directions they’re going in — brainstorm what crops you could grow in the future that would fit their cuisine. One question I’ll often ask chefs is what do you want that you can’t find or, when you do find it, the quality is less than desirable?

Call ahead and ask when a good (read: slow) time would be for you to bring some samples of your products and be able to have a conversation with the chef. Present your products with pride — well laid out, show good color, etc. Bring a printed list with prices and your farm name, your name and telephone number. Sell things by the pound rather than the bunch. One person’s full bunch is another’s light bunch and bunches can vary depending on the time of year and picker’s inclination. Give the chef an idea of what other crops you will be harvesting later in the season (or what crops you harvested earlier in the season), so he or she will get a feel for what might be available from you. Lastly, find out what days and what times would be best for deliveries — a Monday through Friday place would probably want deliveries Monday morning; a restaurant that’s open Tuesdays through Saturdays would probably want a Wednesday or Thursday delivery.

Set up a system to insure weekly interaction. Call the chef on a pre-arranged time and date, like every Tuesday around 10. Give yourself a day to pick the order. Establish the payment schedule you’re both comfortable with — some restaurants want to pay by check upon delivery while others would prefer to use the pay bills within thirty days of delivery (30 days net) system. Track the payments - if you receive a payment for a delivery that’s out of sequence from the delivery dates, chances are someone lost an invoice. And go to an office supply place and buy an inexpensive invoice pad that makes a copy — you keep one in the book and the chef gets one ripped out of the book for his

Volunteer Brian Booth shows his mom around the farm during her visit from Chicago.
bookkeeper with a clear signature that proves that someone in the kitchen received the delivery. If an invoice gets lost, you have the copy in your invoice book with a copy of the signature on it.

And remember those days in December and January while you’re perusing all those seed catalogs? And remember when you discover new varieties that are available whose color, texture or flavor sound just great? And remember when you rattle on with your friends about the varieties even though you know you’re boring them? Tell your chefs -- they’ll probably be one of the few people who will share your enthusiasm. Chefs often tell us that they count on us to do the research in terms of new varieties that have been developed, recently imported or new heirlooms recently discovered.

Don’t forget to periodically send samples free-of-charge in small quantities to let the chef know what other crops you’re harvesting or will begin to harvest soon. If you grow unusual or heirloom varieties, tell the chef about the crop. If the chef is looking for a product that you don’t grow, but you know a farmer friend who does, offer to get the product for the chef and, at the same time, you’re helping out a fellow farmer. Also, chefs order like most people shop -- they’re not really into eating seasonally, so know when your crops have dwindled to such a point where it’s time to say good-bye for the season and remind the chef that you’ll see him or her again next spring. And remember, approach the chef as if he or she is potentially a good regular farmstand customer whose sales you want to cultivate, because they are, and much more.

Urban Oaks fields facing west towards one of the larger greenhouses.

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Inside one of the main production greenhouses, planted for winter harvest.
Good News Café

is Good News for Local Farmers

by Jack Kittredge

Connecticut is the wealthiest state in the country (by per capita income), and its two wealthiest counties are the wealthiest counties in Connecticut. The southern one, Fairfield, is the site of homes for many top New York executives, and working farms have pretty well been priced out of the market. In the northern county, Litchfield, this process is happening now. Driving the scenic highways one goes from one stately town common to another, with the space between occupied by new, elegant houses. But there are still a few farms hanging on by selling retail, developing value added lines, or catering to more affluent clients. For these, the coming of award-winning chef Carole Peck and her Good News Café to Woodbury was a godsend.

“We’ve been here 13 years now,” she recalls. “I moved up from the city in 1988 and had another restaurant in the Marbledale part of New Milford for four years, then came to Woodbury. I loved New York, but I decided I didn’t need to live there. I needed to be my own chef somewhere. I was working for someone else, and I had that entrepreneurial, independent side.”

When Carole was growing up she had one set of grandparents living in Woonsocket, RI who had a garden, and her other grandfather had a farm in Walden, NY. So she had exposure to the tastes and seasonality of fresh food, and always liked it. In high school she worked at Howard Johnson’s, then went off to cooking school at the Culinary Institute of America. She was in the first class of women at the school, graduating in 1973.

Then, as she says, it was the school of hard knocks – learning to become a successful chef. She has been doing that for 32 years now, and says that over the years her focus has become getting good, fresh food and preparing it in her own style.

“When I came up here,” she relates, “it was with the intention of using much more local sources. That was a little progressive for that time, but there were also more farms then. There are fewer now, but some of the remaining farms have moved into specializing or growing for certain restaurants, so we try to form a relationship with them.”

The Good News Café has about 200 seats and is open 6 days a week for lunch and supper, except Tuesdays. Peck calls her cuisine ‘sophisticated comfort food’. The menu changes seasonally, but always focuses on good tasting meals at reasonable prices. On the September day that I visited, for instance, there were vegetarian, gazpacho, and lobster soups at $4.25, $5, and $7.50 a cup, respectively. Salads included layered beets, avocado, peas, cucumbers, with horseradish, Chantilly cream and organic greens for $11, a delicious heirloom tomato plate with authentic Buffalo mozzarella, arugula & proscuitto, basil, olive oil & vinegar drizzle for $15, and warm smashed potatoes, asparagus, & Gorgonzola on organic greens with tomato vinaigrette for $11.

Entrees featured (among others) black bean burrito, rice, red pepper & cheese, tomato “Pico de Gallo”, avocado & sour cream for $12, free-range rotisserie chicken, buttermilk mashed potatoes and wok veggie with a quarter chicken for $9 or a half chicken for $18, double lamb chops & merquez sausage with layered eggplant, zucchini, feta cheese & tomato tart with cumin vinaigrette for $17, tofu & spiced ginger scallion pesto wrapped in banana leaf, brown rice, broccoli, summer squash, a cashew & cilantro salad with banana coconut dressing for $20, and Italian black kale, tomatoes, arichokes, garlic, red chilli’s on soft polenta, finished with buffalo mozzarella for $21.

Desserts included warm peach crumb tart a la mode with caramel sauce at $8, apple spice layer cake with almond cream cheese icing, vanilla milk glaze and cherry compote for $8, and banana cake with caramel custard sauce, coffee ice cream and peanut banana brittle at $8.

A broad selection of wines by the glass range from $6.25 to $12.75.

“Although the menu changes seasonally,” Carole admits, “there are some things that always stay on – dishes that people won’t let me take off!”

Peck doesn’t cook much anymore. Her Ecuadorian chef has been with her for many years and he, in consultation with her, does much of the menu planning as well as the buying. She keeps her hand in however, reminding him when it is peach season, for instance, and time to call the orchard.

“I’ve been in the business a long time,” Carole says, “so I’m savvy in the restaurant business. I know people will pay for good food. The prices I charge reflect what I have to pay. If people tell me they could go down the street and get it for less, I say ‘Go ahead!’ I employ 35 people and I can’t go out of business buying good stuff and then trying to sell it cheaper. The butter I buy is not Sysco butter!”

The café has a striking décor. The walls are bright colors, there are paintings and black and white photographs hanging everywhere, on a rail above the walls sit dozens of antique radios and TVs, and there is a jaunty cubist mural hanging in the bar which features her, her husband, pastry chef, dog and many local farmers and fishermen. The light fixtures look like they have time traveled from some art deco nightclub.

Peck says that the radios and TVs represent Good News. She was out of business for a while and people wanted her back in, so when she opened it was Good News. She changes the photographs and paintings every two or two and a half months. They are for sale by local artists, and she figures it makes it interesting for her customers while giving the artists exposure.

The aspect of Good News Café which makes it special, however, is Carole’s insistence on local and organic food.
"We do a lot of picking, peeling and plucking here," she laughs. "We use a lot of raw vegetables. But fresh organic local food is a big part of my draw.

"The café gets a lot of greens from Sky Farm," she continues, "in the Millerton/Great Barrington area. Chris is very dependable and the flavor is wonderful. Some weeks I’ll buy 12 or 14 cases. He also uses a greenhouse to extend the season. Then there is Bob Maddox at Sun One Farm in Bethlehem, who is growing more and more vegetables for me."

Peck has found several local sources of eggs and dairy products. She buys organic eggs (at $2.89 to $3.12 a dozen) from Soffer’s Egg Farm in Branford, and Templeton’s in Southbury.

"Our crème broullet wouldn’t be as yellow if we didn’t have fresh eggs!" she asserts. "In the wintertime we have to buy them commercially and they’re disgusting."

She serves her customers raw Jersey milk from Grassy Hill Farm with nary a nod from the health department. For cheese she uses Old Chatham (sheep cheese) and Coach Farms (goat cheese) in New York State and has tried some from Cato Corner Farm near Pomfret.

"The quality of local food is there," Carole asserts. "The farmers are pretty organized so it’s no trouble getting what you want. The biggest thing dealing with small farms is to make sure you get an invoice with their name on it. Sometimes it’s just a scrap of paper. But when I give it to my girl who does the bills she likes to know who to pay!"

"Most of the farms deliver," she continues. "Strawberry Ridge won’t deliver so I go to pick up. I love that anyway. I can also supplement our menu with extra stuff if farmers have a lot of something. Increasingly, our produce dealer up in Hartford, Fowler, is trying to use local farms."

"All my farmers are organic," she concludes, "so I’d say 100% of our produce is organic. The fish and sea food comes out of New York -- we deal with somebody at Hunt’s Point. They used to be at Fulton Fish Market before 9/11, but no more. It’s too hard to rebuild."
Western Connecticut used to be a seasonal restaurant market, according to Peck. But now the demand for year-round homes has grown to the point that farmland is seriously endangered. “When I first moved up here it was a lot more spotty,” she recalls, “but now. They’re tearing up the farms! It’s work people don’t want to do anymore. That’s why you have to find a situation like me. I don’t mind paying for what I get. It doesn’t bother me. I try to keep a few farms going.”

To work with a restaurant account, Carole stresses, farmers should realize it takes time to introduce a new item or flavor. “If we take a small amount at the beginning,” she says, “realize it is a trial and if it works we will buy more the next time. We have to work that new product into our system. We have to work that new product into our system. I just switched ice cream to a local company. But we still have a lot from the old company in the freezer, so we aren’t buying much new yet. That’s just how it works.”

Peck and her husband have a house in southern France and go there a lot now. She says it is amazing to see how the French stress regional cuisine. “They are much more agrarian there,” she insists. They have incredible regional cuisine. They espalier their pears and apples so the trees are flat. The apricots, where we are, are incredible. A town near us has an apricot festival each year. They must grow more than ten different kinds of apricots – some are better for jam, some are better fresh.”

Carole, along with Carolyn Hart Bryant, wrote “The Buffet Book: Inspired Ideas for New Style Entertaining with 175 Recipes”. It was published in 2002 by Ici La Presse, Woodbury, CT 06798. It has done very well, selling about 70,000 copies. The Good News Cafe is open every day except Tuesday at 694 Main St. South, Woodbury, CT 06798.

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Brockton, MA
I received two emails recently that made me “stop and ask myself: How did I get here?” (Yes, they’re also part of the lyrics of one of my favorite David Byrne songs)

One was from a woman in New York who wanted shipping information regarding one of my products: “Incognito”: Vegan Garlic Herb Spread. She thought it was wonderful. She had tried it at the Urban Harvest event, bought some, and wanted more for around the holidays. Jennifer McTiernan, the creator of our New Haven’s City Seed farmer’s market had brought some local products to NYC from different CT vendors to that event.

The other email was from CT NOFA pals Sarah and Josh Rapport from Sacred Organics. Josh grows an amazing assortment of organic garlic and other vegetables and Sarah makes natural soaps and body products. They had married and moved to Oregon last winter and now were craving my SNOOTYFOOD Organic Garlic Herb Butter. We had met at different NOFA events and Garlic Festivals and used to swap products… and now they’re addicted! So we did another swap, but this time through the mail, and Josh’s “Music” (sweet, purplish skinned garlic) was grown in Oregon instead of Connecticut!

Not that the two emails made me think “I’ve finally arrived” but more like “Hey, I think I’m on the right track”. If a woman in NYC (a place where she can choose from the best gourmet foods around) is looking for my product, and a farmer who grows some of the best garlic around can’t duplicate my recipe, then I know that SNOOTYFOOD wasn’t such a goofy idea after all!

I guess cooking has been my favorite “hobby” for quite some time now. I think it came out of necessity more than anything else! You know, eat a great dish in a fancy restaurant, then try to re-create it at home for a lot less money! I inherited that trait from my mother, and her mother, who were always reading about and trying new foods. They both had this inane curiosity about different foods, especially ethnic and regional foods. In the 70’s my mom discovered natural food stores in Madison, Wisconsin where I grew up. To this day my mom, who is 81, will try anything. More than anything she taught me how to taste.

During my modeling years in Europe (ages ago in the late 1970’s) I was lucky enough to be wined and dined in some of the best restaurants around! In many cases the food was not overly fancy, but used the freshest local ingredients and were prepared and seasoned so perfectly. I don’t remember hearing the word “organic” mentioned, but I doubt that the small vegetable gardens in back were loaded with pesticides or fertilizers. One of my favorite things was a simple dish of barely blanched spinach drizzled with olive oil, balsamic vinegar, salt and fresh ground pepper. Yum.

So, through the years I learned how to cook. I love to experiment, am a confessed Food Network junkie, and rarely use one of my umpteen cookbooks that I collect. I like to read them when I’m not cooking, late at night with a hot cup of tea, and get ideas. I can cook a complete Thanksgiving dinner including a green bean casserole made from scratch with organic green beans and a wild mushroom cream sauce. The other night I roasted some golden beets with olive oil, apple cider vinegar (homemade), salt and pepper. When they were done I sprinkled them with diced crystallized ginger and served them on top of the greens that I’d simmered in olive oil, orange juice, and a dash of Worcestershire sauce. Just a side dish for a Monday night dinner. This is just what I do.

One night at dinner almost two years ago my husband Kenn mentioned that we had to go...
somewhere and blah blah blah there’d be, you know, hotdogs and hamburgers, and I must have rolled my eyes (who me?) and he got angry and said “You know, you’re so ____ snooty!” (use your imagination!) He irritated me so much that I later decided the best way to retaliate was to start my own specialty food business and call it appropriately “Snootyfood”.

My job had been selling life insurance quite successfully in Hartford, so I figured if I can sell insurance, I can probably get people to buy something that tastes good! I wasn’t very happy at my job, so it gave me a creative outlet and something to daydream about!

I decided to start with one item. I’d always gotten rave reviews whenever I made garlic bread which I spread with a concoction of butter, parmesan cheese, lots of herbs, and lots of fresh chopped garlic. I fine-tuned that recipe: decided which herbs and spices to use and omit, how much garlic, how much cheese, added a few surprising spices. Then, I decided that since my family was leaning more toward organics, as is the consumer, I would make the product the ultimate and best tasting and use 100% organic ingredients. My key selling point would be the many uses for this product: mashed into potatoes, tossed into pasta, melted on any steamed vegetable, broiled on seafood or fish etc.

So, my business adventure began, and I learned a lot. Oh, and Kenn’s response when I told him my idea? He enthusiastically chimed in “Yeah, OK, whatever” so I had his full support! (I swear he rolled his eyes)

Kenn and I were married 16 years ago and live in a small cozy house in the woods in Oxford CT. We had been involved with summer and winter CSA’s for a few years and always followed the no pesticide, no fertilizers rule at our home, especially since our son Max was born 14 years ago, and was always playing outside, and we have pets and a well. We had known many folks from CT NOFA through the CSA’s including our neighbors Bill and Suzanne Duesing, and Bill encouraged me to join - which I did.

Through a NOFA friend’s suggestion I contacted the CT Dept. Of Agriculture to find out how to get started. I received all sorts of literature about labeling, food safety, marketing, taxes etc. The first thing, which usually deters many people, is that a commercial kitchen is required when any food is to be packaged and sold to the consumer. (There are a few exceptions usually involving farms that do their own jams and jellies etc.) Our friend who runs a small pizza restaurant in town has let me use...
Garlic Herb Butter was the original, and remains the primary, Snootyfood product.

New Morning Natural and Organic in Woodbury CT is my closest natural food store and they were the first store to carry my products. It took quite a few phone calls, left messages, and then they forgot to try the samples I left for them, but that's typical of the grocery business! Everyone's around and busy doing their jobs and sometimes it's hard to get your foot in the door, but I keep trying. So far Snootyfood is in three retail grocery stores in CT with many more planned.

I've just finished approving my new label design which will go to print soon. Everything will finally have it's own UPC (bar code) and nutrition label. I'm now at that point in my business where I may need to hire people to help me produce, store and distribute everything, and possibly someday soon will need my own facility. I haven't yet had to rely on any funding, but I have a feeling that will be around the corner. It's exciting… and a bit scary.

I'm not selling life insurance anymore. In April I started buying up tubs of garlic herb butter! And I realized that Kenn is a great salesman! By Sunday we had sold everything.

I then signed up to be a vendor at two farmer's markets, one in nearby Shelton, and CitySeed in New Haven. Since both took place on Saturdays, Kenn and I would split up and each "work" a market. My mom is my "worker bee" and is usually with me, buttering samples, and chatting with the customers. Kenn usually works the market alone; but he's such a social butterfly, he'll know everyone before the day is done! He's been the biggest help to me - from helping with the labels to making the garlic butter and lifting that 80 quart Hobart mixer to me - from helping with the labels to making the garlic butter and lifting that 80 quart Hobart mixer.
The Organic Gourmet
by Leslie Cerier

My catering company, The Organic Gourmet, was started in 1990. Becoming an organic gourmet caterer and cooking teacher, however, was an organic process that took me many places.

I earned my master’s degree in physical education from Teacher College, Columbia University in 1976. During that time I continued to play sports, while studying creative movement, relaxation techniques, body awareness, experimental theater and vocal improvisation. I began teaching sports, focusing more on body alignment and the joy of movement rather than the score.

When living in Eastern Kentucky in the 70s teaching physical education at the university, a colleague brought me to my first health food store. There I saw shelves of beans and grains I had never seen before. At that time, there were no natural food cookbooks. I quizzed the owners of the store. “What is this? How do I cook it?” Each visit to the store was an adventure. I bought something new and made up my own recipes.

Although both my grandmothers loved to cook, my mom did not. I asked one of my grandmothers’s to teach me how to make her delicious strudel dough, and she explained that you put some flour in a bowl. Add some water, and a bit of salt, and the dough should look like this. “But grandma,” I asked; “how much flour and water do you use.” She could not say, but advised that if it did not turn out right, I could always throw it out and start over.

While most folks kept journals, I kept a pad in the kitchen and wrote down my early recipes. I wasn’t thinking of writing a cookbook back then. I simply wrote down the combinations of ingredients without the amounts. Cooking is still is a means of self-expression.

In 1985, when my father died suddenly of a brain tumor, I began studying and cooking macrobiotic foods. I learned by doing. I took one or two macrobiotic cooking lessons (in which my teacher taught cooking by intuition) and began cooking on yoga and macrobiotic vacations on Cape Cod. I partnered with a friend, then cooked a meal or two on my own and learned quickly. Being adventurous and creative, I have always been willing to improvise with local seasonal organic produce.

At this time I was a photographer, spontaneously capturing the moment on film. I took my camera everywhere. I photographed creative dance, my family and nature. Then in 1987, after building my home with non-toxic building materials, going in the darkroom with toxic chemicals no longer made sense. I had always gone out of my way to buy organically grown food so I turned my creative attention to cooking.

In the summer of 1988, through connections, I cooked at the Kushi Institute’s summer camp in the Berkshires My friend advised me to cook in the children’s kitchen, which also fed the folks who were healing from cancer. We were cooking for 100 people, while the rest of the cooks in the main kitchen were cooking for 400 and being more of an assembly line of vegetable choppers. I learned how to cook healing macrobiotic foods from start to finish. When camp was over, all the leftover donated beans and grains in the kitchen were divided amongst the cooks. I skipped the brown rice and bulgar and brought home exotic ancient grains like teff and quinoa. I had a bite of teff at the food fair at the Kushi summer camp and fell in love with it. For those that are new to teff, teff is one of those ancient grains like spelt and quinoa with a super nutrition profile. An eight-ounce serving of teff yields 32% of the USRDA for calcium and 80% for iron. I nickname teff “the women’s grain.”

Leslie's tofu vegetable kebobs

photo by Leslie Cerier
Olives with Nasturtiums and Calendula Flowers

photo by Leslie Cerier

While not a complete protein like quinoa, a 2-ounce serving of teff has 7 grams of protein, equal to an extra large egg. Teff is low in fat (1 gram per 2-ounce serving), and high in fiber (8 grams per 2-ounce serving). And that’s not all. Teff is a good source of niacin, thiamin, riboflavin, zinc, magnesium, copper, manganese, boron, phosphorus and potassium. If I sound excited, I am; teff is my favorite grain.

I contacted the Teff Company and asked if I could develop vegan recipes for them in exchange for teff. They were the first company I developed recipes for: 5 with teff grain and 5 with teff flour. That added another career branch to my life as a cook, food writer, and cooking instructor.

When I came back from camp, my cooking teacher was leaving town and encouraged me to take over. So I did! I put an ad in the local holistic newspaper advertising myself as a personal chef and caterer. I got a few clients, and a gig cooking for a yoga and meditation retreat. Soon I became known in Western Massachusetts as a personal chef, caterer, cookbook author, cooking teacher, and even kitchen designer.

I get my inspiration for menus from the local organic harvest. Every year, I spend as much time as I can on a sixteen-acre organic farm, the CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) that feeds my hungry family as well as 500 other households (from surrounding Western Massachusetts hill towns and the Boston area). Here, among the long rows of vegetables, beans, herbs, flowers and fruits, I can be found snacking. Basket in hand, I stroll and munch on juicy strawberries in June, sugar snap peas in July, cherry tomatoes in August, and sweet raspberries and green beans until autumn’s first frost. With each weekly visit, I note the combinations of vegetables, fruits, and edible flowers that grow at the same time. These are the obvious choices to cook together. Even at home in the kitchen, this happy feeling of endless bounty and wholesomeness emanates.

This past summer, The Organic Gourmet traveled and catered in the Berkshires, Connecticut and the Amherst/Northampton area. My favorite catering job this summer was for a couple from England, whose parents belonged to my CSA in Amherst. The bride, Katherine and I set up phone dates to create a menu, and emailed quite a bit to finalize the details. Because the wedding took place at my CSA, I could submit my order for produce and there it was waiting in the cooler for me. Turns out, the farm was one of the best sites I have ever catered in. The perfect set-up for rinsing vegetables and rental dishes; tablecloths thrown over the farm shop tables dressed them up elegantly and the flowers came from another local organic farm, which was run by a former apprentice of my CSA. And I had the luxury of the large walk-in cooler for all the produce, prepared salads, local beer and organic white wines. Last, but not least, I did not have to pick up the produce and transport it anywhere. I was right at home on the farm, having been a member for 18 years.

Currently, we cater elegant indoor and outdoor weddings in New York and throughout New England. I also work as a personal chef, cooking for professionals who are too busy to cook and college students, whose parents want their kids to eat the highest quality organic meals possible. Other clients have illnesses such as cancer and need nourishing meals to help them heal. My background in macrobiotic cooking has prepared me for that. And I have been the cook for a professional group inspired by Dean Ornish’s heart healthy diet, which included a doctor, psychologist, nutritionist, body worker, and stress management consultant. Blending macrobiotics, heart healthy cooking and my creative inspiration from the local harvest, I can follow any recipe, and enjoy inventing new recipes.

Cooking clients who want me to be creative find me. Usually, we will have a meeting or speak on the telephone. I learn what they can and cannot eat, what they like and do not like, and together we will create the first week’s menu. Usually, after the first delivery, some clients will still want to speak weekly to plan the menus. Others prefer me to run wild with the local harvest and cook whatever I like. Bring the same quantity of food each time for the same price, which often has me multi-tasking: inventing recipes, writing them down for the next cookbook, while pots simmer on the stove.

Often, as a personal chef, I work alone, but at times when I am cooking for more than one family at a time, I hire help. Last year I had two apprentices. One was a senior from Hampshire College, and the other was a young woman who had experience running a kitchen for a retreat center, who wanted to learn how to creatively combine healthy ingredients into gourmet meals.

I love a challenge and enjoy cooking for folks with food allergies. For the fun of it, I have developed decadent and healthy pastries without wheat, dairy and sugar. For my weekly clients, it is easy to cook with the local harvest. They trust me to come up with weekly menus and want me to cook with fresh local organic ingredients, mixing and matching them in any way I like.

I create wedding menus with the seasonal harvests in mind. Even with the best planning, crops have their own timing. Occasionally, vegetables are not ready or have already passed. In those cases, I call several local organic farmers, go to the farmers’ market, the local coop, or whole foods market to source out a vegetable that my CSA does not have or does not have in enough quantity for me to buy extra. If my client is willing, I will adjust the menu and substitute other seasonal ingredients. Other challenges include gambling and losing when I order dry ingredients from my buying club. When they do not come in, I have to buy them at a higher price at a local whole foods store. With the higher gas prices, I have to weigh whether it makes sense to buy products at local whole food supermarkets or travel further to support a local coop.

I also buy my breads from the local artisan sourdough organic bakery. Local eggs, goat cheese, and cow cheese are also staples in my kitchen and catering business. Whether it is for weddings or for my personal use, I buy and support the local organic farmers, bakers and cheese makers. Their products are the tastiest and freshest I can find. However, I do like imported sheep and goat artisian cheeses, too.

Though I am a vegetarian, not everyone on my staff is. Under my guidance, they will cook meat and fish. Often, I will create a fabulous marinade from my own flavored oils and vinegars. (You can find recipes for making your own flavored oils and vinegars in my new cookbook, Going Wild in the Kitchen, which is reviewed in this issue of The Natural Farmer.)
Natural Farmer!) This summer I made a marinade with my own Shiitake Cider Vinegar, Spicy Cilantro, Garlic Basil Oil and tamari. We used that for chicken, vegetable and tofu kebobs. Scrumptious! And of course the chicken and tofu were marinated in separate containers. And whenever I cater a wedding or event that calls for meat and fish, I will seek out the very best local, organic and sustainable raised meats and fish I can find.

I make my own flavored oils and vinegars as a way to preserve garlic scapes, herbs, spices, and fruits. I make super strawberry vanilla balsamic vinegar, and blackberry vanilla balsamic vinegar. I marinate my own dried cherry tomatoes in organic red wine, fresh basil, calendula flowers, garlic, and other Italian herbs. Grilling sweet bell peppers and marinating them in olive lemon garlic dressing preserves them naturally into the winter. They are fabulous in scrambled eggs, roasted red pepper hummus, tossed in chili, and rolled into sushi. These flavored oils, vinegars, marinated dried tomatoes and grilled peppers have become trademarks and mainstays in my catering business and home kitchen.

I have never done the same menu twice in all the years that I have been catering. (Sure, there are Leslie classic dishes like vegetarian spring rolls with wasabi, cilantro almond olive dip, goat cheese mushroom strudel, Lasagna with Chevre, Arugala and Cremini Mushrooms, poached salmon, chicken kebobs and much more -- many from my cookbook, Going Wild in the Kitchen.)

From my cooking classes and weekly clients I began to write recipes down in a notebook until I had enough for a book. That first crop of recipes along with my improvisational approach to cooking led to my first cookbook, The Quick and Easy Organic Gourmet. I made a cooking video for my local cable TV company, Easy Organic Cooking. Besides seeing me demonstrate chopping techniques and explain the art of the stir-fry as I stood in front of a sizzling wok, viewers were treated to a voice over about the dangers of pesticides while I walked through an organic garden complete with a butterfly beside me.

I showed how to pick the vegetables and herbs in season which were used in the stir-fry. I never got a show on the Television Food network, but they did like my cookbook, The Quick and Easy Organic Gourmet and invited me on In Food Today, one of their food news shows.

My skills have led me to develop recipes for organic food companies such as Green and Black’s organic chocolate, who were looking for vegan desserts. I created fabulous hot fudge with their dark organic chocolate, a dark chocolate cake, and vegan chocolate mousse. By the way, I have made this dark chocolate cake with the vegan chocolate mousse, and served it at weddings and received rave reviews. The dark chocolate cake also tastes great with the addition of eggs for those desiring a higher protein dessert.

Coombs Vermont Gourmet hired me to create glaze recipes for seafood with their organic maple syrup.

The Organic Gourmet is growing. I already have inquiries about catering jobs for next summer and fall. I was considering doing some local advertising, but folks seem to be finding me by my website.

I have come full circle. In addition to organic gourmet catering, writing cookbooks, doing kitchen design consultatniums, cooking lessons, and developing recipes, I have returned to photography. My digital camera enables me to take photographs and upload them onto to my computer. My archival printer enables me to print on 100% cotton paper. And I can even recycle the ink cartridges. My impressionistic nature series of photographs captures the natural light on moving water and has been praised and used for inspiration and healing. My photographs have been exhibited and sold in galleries and through my website: LeslieCerier.com.
NOFA’s 5th Annual Course in Organic Land Care:
January 10-12 and 17-18 in Massachusetts
February 8-10 and 14-15 in Connecticut

by Kathleen Litchfield & Bill Duesing

Landscapers, landscape architects, designers, municipal groundskeepers, nursery personnel, garden and environmental center staff and others will learn how to manage their land organically during NOFA’s 5th annual Course in Organic Land Care, held in Massachusetts in January, 2006 and in Connecticut in February, 2006.

These professionals will join over 300 others who have taken the highly acclaimed five-day course. Many students choose to become NOFA-Accredited Organic Land Care Professionals. The course is designed to provide an understanding of organic land care from design to maintenance and is taught by respected scientists and experienced organic land care practitioners.

The Massachusetts course will be held January 10, 11, 12, 17 and 18, (snow dates Jan. 19 and 20) inside the newly constructed Doyle Conservation Center in Leominster, a “green” building featuring waterless composting toilets, solar and geothermal energy, bamboo and cork floors and an on-site recycling center.

The Connecticut course will be held February 8, 9, 10, 14 and 15 (snow date Feb. 16) inside the spacious and modern Jones Auditorium of the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station in New Haven. Both courses feature complimentary organic lunches by fine local caterers.

The NOFA Organic Land Care Program extends the vision and principles of organic agriculture to the care of the landscapes where most people carry out their daily lives. Organic land care uses appropriate methods and materials to promote plant health and uses no synthetic pesticides or soil amendments. A healthy soil contains billions of organisms, from earthworms to microscopic bacteria. Such a balanced ecosystem is necessary for a healthy landscape. Healthy soils yield plants that are disease-resistant, negating the need for chemical pesticides. Organic land care prohibits the use of soluble, synthetic fertilizers and toxic pesticides. Experience has shown that organic land care methods work well and can be less expensive in the long run. The trend toward organic landscaping services is being driven by consumer concerns, environmental awareness and regulatory pressures.

The five-day course includes presentations covering: Principles and Procedures; Site Analysis, Design, and Maintenance; Rain Gardens/Storm Water Infiltration; Soil Health; the Soil Foodweb; Fertilizer and Soil Amendments; Composting; Lawns; Lawn Alternatives; Planting and Plant Care; Wetlands; Pest Management; Wildlife Management; Disease Control; Weeds; Mulches; Invasive Plants; and Client Relations. Four hands-on case studies are also included.

At the end of the course, students will be able to incorporate methods and materials that respect natural ecology and the long-term health of the environment into the care of their own landscapes or ones that they manage. Those who pass the optional exam offered at the conclusion of the course can become NOFA Accredited Organic Land Care Professionals. They are able to use the NOFA Organic Land Care logo, be listed on the www.organiclandcare.net website, be published annually in the NOFA Guide to Organic Land Care and have the opportunity to represent NOFA at organic land care events.

Over 300 land care professionals from eight states have taken NOFA’s course. These professionals include landscapers from large and small firms, landscape architects, garden center employees, municipal groundskeepers and property managers. Small business owners, entrepreneurs, homeowners, land trust and conservation organization staff and many others have also found the course extremely valuable.

Sarah Little, Ph.D. is coordinator of the Massachusetts Pesticide Awareness Collaborative and author of the Pesticide Reduction Resource Guide for Citizens and Municipalities of Massachusetts. She writes:

“The NOFA Standards for Organic Land Care provides the foundation for a trusting relationship between the landscaper and the client who are working together to create a healthy and sustainable property. We have found these Standards, along with the NOFA course which teaches them, to be an absolutely essential base for our state-wide efforts to move the public towards healthier and more ecologically sound suburban practices.”

For more information or to receive registration brochures about the Massachusetts course, contact Kathy Litchfield, NOFA/Mass Organic Land Care Course Coordinator, at (978) 724-0108, klitch29@yahoo.com or visit www.organiclandcare.net and register online.

For more information or to receive registration brochures about the Connecticut course, contact Bill Duesing, CT NOFA Executive Coordinator, at (203) 888-5146 or bduesing@cs.com or visit www.organiclandcare.net and register online.
Impact of the Harvey V. Johanns Decision – and the OTA Rider -- on Organic Requirements and Labeling

by Paula Dinerstein, Arthur Harvey’s lawyer

There have been many misunderstandings as well as intentional misrepresentations about what the current USDA regulations provide, what the Harvey decision actually did, and what the OTA rider did. The following is an attempt to get the facts straight. The final judgment in the Harvey case is attached to what actually did and did not do. Stakeholders and consumers are already discussing an effort to repeal the rider in Congress next year, as well as other responsive actions. Therefore, these issues are far from closed. Also, as discussed below, the rider does not invalidate all aspects of the court decision, and thus there must still be rulemaking and implementation of some aspects of the decision even if the rider remains law.

The Harvey decision: No non-organic agricultural products for use in the 5% non-organic component of organically-labeled foods.

Impact of Harvey decision: Invalidated the regulations' holding of no synthetic ingredients and processing aids in handling and processing of products which contain a minimum of 95% organic content and which are eligible to bear the USDA seal.

II. Allowance of synthetic substances in the 5% non-organic component of organically-labeled foods.

Allowance of synthetic substances in the 5% non-organic component of organically-labeled foods by the Harvey decision or packaging materials forbidden by the provisions of OFPA referred to above. The OTA rider apparently seeks not only to permit synthetic processing aids and food contact substances, but also to eliminate the need for their review and listing. The National List provisions of the law apply to “ingredients,” an all-inclusive term, rather than being limited to ingredients. The rider removes all reference to synthetics in handling from the National List provision of the law, and addresses synthetics in a provision that refers only to “ingredients.” It also possible to interpret the OTA rider to prohibit any synthetics except ingredients, since it affects only “ingredients,” but it is doubtful that this was the intent.

III. Individual listing of non-organic agricultural products for use in the 5% non-organic component of organically-labeled foods.

Impact of the OTA rider: No criteria for inclusion of synthetics: Because the court found that no synthetics could be allowed in post-harvest handling of organic foods, it struck down the existing regulatory criteria for judging whether particular synthetics should be listed on the National List for such use. The OTA rider did not add the criteria back into the law. Whether the change in the law affects the regulatory criteria that were struck down by the court is unclear. If not, synthetics could be added to the National List without any criteria at all, or new, weakened criteria could be adopted.

III. Individual listing of non-organic agricultural products for use in the 5% non-organic component of organically-labeled foods.

Impact of the Harvey decision: Invalidated the regulations' holding of no synthetic ingredients in handling.

Impact of OTA Rider: Amends OFPA to remove prohibitions on synthetic ingredients in post-harvest handling, provided they are listed on the National List. Reverses the Harvey decision’s holding of no synthetic ingredients in handling.

Misconception: Some have claimed that the rider permits the addition of synthetic ingredients and processing aids in handling and processing of products which contain a minimum of 95% organic content and which are eligible to bear the USDA seal.

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Impact of the OTA rider: USDA has already publicly noticed the fact that, after the phase-in period, i.e.
Help Wanted

New England Region Pool Coordinator
Organic Valley / CROPP Cooperative
Certified Organic Dairy, Eggs, Produce, and Soy
One Organic Way
La Farge, Wisconsin  54639
(608) 625-2602   (608) 625-2600 fax

Duties and Responsibilities:

- Regional Meat and Egg Pool Producer Procurement Responsibilities:
  -Coordinate with regional DEC representatives
  -Hold procurement meetings in areas of existing dairy producer/members in all of the states in New England Region.
  -Supply information for Regional Prospect Database
  -Assist in preparation and presentation of Dairy Pool DEC meetings.
  -Make personal visit to all member-owners on a practical level of frequency.
  -Make personal visit to all member-owners on a personal attendance basis and support the efforts of CROPP staff in the event of the hosting of additional meetings and farm-related events.
  -Supervision and support for regional producer milk quality, tracking producer progress via the Work Improvement Plan (WIP), and direct involvement in producer suspension status.
  -Assist with producer membership production via directive from National Milk Procurement Manager.

-Organic Farming Association

-Coordinate with regional DEC representatives and traditional dairy pool producer procurement
-Coordinate personal visits to prospective farms for additional membership evaluation.

-Supplier information for Regional Prospect Database of all potential producers in respective outlying regions.
-Hold procurement meetings in areas of existing milk production for prospective interest and participate in producer field days, workshops, conferences, etc.

Qualifications and Skills:
-Organic certification standards and requirements.
-Practical Dairy & Livestock experience.

-Needs to define the appropriate role to play in regard to the conduct of rulemaking to implement this part of the Harvey decision.
-Needs to validate the implementation of the rider to remove any “transitional feed” provision.
-Needs to expedite the rulemaking to implement this part of the Harvey decision and the NGO rulemaking petition included regulatory provisions similar to the old regulation.
-Needs to seek to remove any “transitional feed” provision.
-Needs to implement the Harvey decision.
-Needs to oversee the organic dairy production needs of the states of New England (VT, MA, NH, ME), plus other regional procurement team member in Northern New York.

-Practical Dairy & Livestock experience.
-Organic Farming Association

-Needs to oversee the process of transitioning of the dairy pool procurements.
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In a Nutshell
Tips for Local Living
by Becky May

'Tis the season for shopping. Shopping for presents, buying food for now that CSA's and gardens have gone dormant for the winter. Here are some tips that advance the cause of living more locally and/or organically. * either through direct purchases or the spirit in which we shop.  
- Ask what's local/native/regional* (and of course, organic, if possible) of your produce, fish, etc. manager where you normally shop. Don't be discouraged if you get a blank look. In fact, ask every time you shop. If you're feeling really adventurous… ask what local ingredients are used at the deli counter or baked goods. It may blow their minds but usually no harm done. Ask hopefully, acknowledge enthusiastically, and keep it short and sweet so they don't send security after you or start hiding in the storeroom every time you come in.  
- If the only local/organic product your normal grocery store offers is something you hate…buy it anyway. If you're feeling nice give it (or trade it) to someone who does like it! If you're feeling naughty use it or coal in someone's chimney (reduces fossil fuel consumption)! Tell the store guy you'd buy ten of them if they were offered (fill in the blank with something you would like to be offered) and then follow through if she gets them in next week.  
- Pick a recipe you make often and figure out how many ingredients could be grown locally/ organically. Then figure out which are available to you. Then obtain a list of those local/organic items each time you cook it or go whole hog one time you cook it even if it means making multiple shopping trips for that special PC rendition.  
- Pick one thing from your dietary staples that's not locally feasible and commit to its local equivalent (for example… maple syrup substitutes one for one with cane sugar in most recipes. We get by on about a gallon a year) or to a substitute that could be local even if it is currently not available (for example; soy butter vs. peanut butter)  
- Pick one thing from your dietary staples that is or could be grown organically and commit to buying it only when available or in season (stay tuned for tips on preserving food for busy folks).  
- Practice reverse psychology. Give someone local/organic and/or something non-local as a gift. An orange in the Christmas stocking reminds us it should be seen as special like it used to be. Maple syrup or beeswax candles bring local light and sweetness to this dark time of year.  
- Form an informal co-op. Local products are often not available in one convenient location. Find out who else is interested and split up the trips. You'll also increase others' awareness and the amount of shopping done locally!  
- Contact your state's Department of Agriculture and request any directories they have on locally grown or made products. You might be amazed at the variety of things that fall under their purview. Going beyond food.  
- Ask that the US/organically made when shopping for clothing. My 77 year old mother has the folks at Nordstrom's trained to pre-screen items on the rack the minute she was asking for a particular style or designer. It may not be the height of PC but it’s a step!  
- Check out any labels. Perhaps one brand of whatever you’re buying (batteries, hardware, toys) is headquarted in your locale even if the product is imported. Then check this out brand online at www.responsibleshopping.org to make sure supports your local business is also an ethical choice in other respects. Submit your ideas for local living as well as questions or quandaries you may have about achieving your goals for a more local lifestyle to me at BSeashoreMay@aol.com. I may use them here.  

*Terms vary from place to place, you may have to learn to speak locally too! What does local have to do with organic? Just as organic farming reduces or eliminates harmful chemicals from the products themselves and the environments in which they are produced, local products reduce the consumption and pollution by non-organic products in preserving and transporting goods to their consumer destinations. It also promotes relationship between producer and consumer that increases our sense of connection, and accountability to sustainable practices.  

A Tribute to
by Jane Harvel Dean

When death comes to someone you admire there is often a quick, low-down feeling that comes with the unwelcome surprise. I felt that way when I learned of the passing of Carla Emery DeLong on October 11, 2005. I came across her book, The Encyclopedia of Country Living, back in the seventies. My husband and I used it constantly as we learned how to make soap to tanning leather. We were responsible for keeping it alive. She wrote, “My Encyclopedia of Country Living was a continual, expanded, refined and loved into incarnations, expanded, refined and loved into its shelves in bookstores and I know it’s easy enough to keep to the traditions that sustained us before the advent of cheap oil. This 885 page book is published by Sasquatch Books, 119 South Main Street, Suite 400, Seattle, WA 98104. Although currently out of print, I sometimes spot it on the home steak/farm store shelves in bookstores and I know it’s easy enough to order used copies online. The book has had nine incarnations, expanded, refined and loved into being. Carla gave the book to me so she would not have to worry if people would read it and discover that we are responsible for keeping it alive. She wrote, “My prayer is that this book will be a good thing in your life.” I am sad while I write these words. It’s hard when a light goes out, but you know it’s shining somewhere else.  

For more about this remarkable woman, please visit carlaemery.com.  

Winter, 2005 - 06
The Natural Farmer
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Working in 8 states. We promote our accredited professionals through our website, annual OLC Guide, and community outreach, and we offer update courses and networking opportunities. Description of work:  
- Managing the accreditation program: registering and maintaining contact with the accredited professionals, notifying them about opportunities for continuing education credits, working to ensure annual renewal of their accreditation.  
- Maintaining an accurate and up-to-date database of accredited professionals and the services they provide. We will use this database to create the 2006 - 07 edition of the NOFA Guide to Organic Land Care.  
- Facilitating networking, exchange, and support among the accredited professionals  
- Publicizing the accredited professionals to the wider public in need of their services  
- Recruiting accredited professionals to participate more fully in all aspects of the Organic Land Care Program (including teaching in the Organic Land Care courses)  
- Coordinating the annual update course  
- Participating fully in the monthly meetings and the work of the Organic Land Care Committee, which oversees the Organic Land Care Program.  

The scope of the job within the Organic Land Care Program as a whole has the potential to grow significantly, contingent on additional funding. As currently funded, this is an independent contractor position for an estimated 500 hours of work at $15 per hour, dependent on qualifications and experience. The work would start in January 2006, with most of the hours between January and May, 2006. You can work anywhere in Connecticut or Massachusetts. The contract will be under the direct supervision of Bill Duensing, Executive Coordinator of CT NOFA, with program direction by the Organic Land Care Committee. To apply, send a resume to Bill Duensing, bduesing@cs.com, or CT NOFA, Box 164 Stevenson, CT 06491.  

A Tribute to
by Carla Emery

Carla’s Encyclopedia of Country Living should be important to all of us who care about the land and keeping to the traditions that sustained us before the advent of cheap oil. This 885 page book is published by Sasquatch Books, 119 South Main Street, Suite 400, Seattle, WA 98104. Although currently out of print, I sometimes spot it on the home steak/farm store shelves in bookstores and I know it’s easy enough to order used copies online. The book has had nine incarnations, expanded, refined and loved into being. Carla gave the book to me so she would not have to worry if people would read it and discover that we are responsible for keeping it alive. She wrote, “My prayer is that this book will be a good thing in your life.” I am sad while I write these words. It’s hard when a light goes out, but you know it’s shining somewhere else.

For more about this remarkable woman, please visit carlaemery.com.

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Email: redworms@fragnorth.comcast.net

S o l u t i o n s • C o n s o r t i u m s • W o r k s h o p s
www.redworms-greenearth.com
Going Wild in the Kitchen

The Fresh & Sassy Tastes of Vegetarian Cooking
by Leslie Cerier
2005, Square One Publishers, 115 Herricks Rd., Garden City Park, NY 11040
(516) 535-2010, (877) 900-BOOK
228 pages
$16.95 U.S.
$25.50 Canada
review by Karen DiFranza
While judging a book by its cover may be inadvisable, a quick perusal of the books displayed on a household’s shelves can give some insight into their owners’ values and interests. This applies particularly well, I think, to cookbooks.
One look at our kitchen shelves reveals that we have not purchased a cookbook in ten years; nor have we given gift cookbooks made it to the keeper shelves. The reason for this is that we are no longer cookbook cooks. We’ve been there and have moved happily out of complacency and into “going wild in the kitchen.”

Never having heard of teff, an Ethiopian grain that has a sweet, nutty flavor, and which Leslie describes as “a nutritional powerhouse”, I had to give it a try. Her “Porridge with Coconut and Dates” using a combination of rolled oats and teff sounded appealing, so I tripled the recipe to get family feedback. The porridge was a success, partly, I think, because I served it during the October monsoons when we were all in need of warm and comforting food. The teff added to that comfort, and I served the sweet porridge with plain yogurt, which gave it a nice balance.

Our sixteen year old daughter made the Spicy North Dates” using a combination of rolled oats and teff, describes as “a nutritional powerhouse”, I had Never having heard of teff, an Ethiopian grain that has a sweet, nutty flavor, and which Leslie describes as “a nutritional powerhouse”, I had to give it a try. Her “Porridge with Coconut and Dates” using a combination of rolled oats and teff sounded appealing, so I tripled the recipe to get family feedback. The porridge was a success, partly, I think, because I served it during the October monsoons when we were all in need of warm and comforting food. The teff added to that comfort, and I served the sweet porridge with plain yogurt, which gave it a nice balance.

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but her most important contribution has been the relationships she’s cultivated with the restaurant’s suppliers.

Interspersed among the recipes and stories are profiles of the individual farmers, tofu makers, and other suppliers upon whom Angelica Kitchen depends. There is even a chapter by Farmer Keith Stewart, describing a typical day in his life growing food for the restaurants and farmers’ markets of New York. Reading these anecdotes and odes to organic farming reminded me that, for the majority of Angelica Kitchen’s customers, life in the big city does not often expose them to fresh air, rich soil, and growing things.

This cookbook was first published in 2000. The 2003 second edition includes a substantial new chapter on organic and sustainable agriculture. McEachern has done good research, and this chapter includes information from organizations such as NOFA-NY and the International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements (IFOAM). She has watched the organic movement grow from its counterculture roots to a big business, and makes a spirited argument against the USDA’s deceptive new “organic” standards.

Upon reaching the recipes section, the reader will notice none of the recipes, which McEachern developed with Chef Peter Berley, use any dairy, eggs, meat, or other animal products. But the author is quick to point out (in a section titled “On Eating Animal Products”) that she has no ethical objection to consuming animal protein. However, she warns, we should take care that any animals we rely on for food are humanely raised following sustainable and organic practices. And of course you’ll need a different cookbook to learn how to prepare them.

Angelica Kitchen’s signature dish is called the Dragon Bowl. The Dragon Bowl is an excellent example of the restaurant’s roots in the 1970s’ health food and macrobiotic movements. Brown rice, noodles, tofu, and vegetables are mixed with whatever vegetables are in season (steamed, of course) and topped off with your choice of dressing or gravy. McEachern proudly points out that the Dragon Bowl is priced near retail to keep in keeping with her economic belief that everybody should have access to healthy, organic food regardless of income.

One of the first things I read in a cookbook like this is the miso soup recipe. I am picky about soup, and miso soup is such a simple recipe that there are no aroma, and health benefits of miso, a fermented soybean product full of live cultures. Fortunately, Angelica Kitchen’s miso soup recipe is one that I have used throughout the years that they have the recipe down to a science. No overwhelming flavors here, just carrot, onion, and two kinds of sea vegetable. The soup cooks in 25 minutes, including making the broth, and the miso is added at the last minute and never allowed to raise a boil. Perfect!

This book has many other fundamental recipes that would be useful for any kitchen. Not only are there three different recipes for plain brown rice, there are interesting grains such as millet, spelt, and kamut. There are instructions for making seitan, a flavored wheat flour gluten that many vegetarians eat as a high-protein meat substitute. There are fool-proof instructions for making dried beans, and a mention of some of the heirloom varieties available.

But just because the author has a strong grasp of the fundamentals does not mean all of the recipes will be bland or boring. As this cookbook unfolds, it becomes clear that Angelica Kitchen has expanded beyond its Japanese health food origins to embrace influences from all over the world. Curries, Moroccan stew, Greek phyllo pastry, and enchiladas with mole sauce all spew up the menu. One of the most interesting recipes is called Three Sisters. It is a modern version of succotash, a traditional Native American dish based on corn, beans, and squash, and serves as an excellent illustration of Angelica Kitchen’s commitment to local, sustainable agriculture.

Of course, no vegan cookbook would be complete without a dessert chapter. You won’t find any butter or white sugar in these recipes. Olive oil is the fat of choice, and maple syrup is the main sweetener. Gelatin is replaced by agar (a type of seaweed), arrowroot, or kuzu. Tofu replaces cream cheese in the tantalizing cheesecake recipe. If this does not sound appetizing to you, or look at the gorgeous color photograpghs will get you mouth watering.

In addition to the excellent color and black and white photography (by John Bigelow Taylor), this is a well designed book. The recipe sections have color-coded margins at the edges of the page, so you can easily open to the green pages to find salads or the brown pages for bread and muffin recipes. The spine allows the book to open flat so that you can use it in the kitchen. Ten Speed Press has done an excellent job, and if you enjoy this book, they publish many other fine cookbooks such as the Moosewood series.

In conclusion, I strongly recommend this book for anyone who wants to learn more about incorporating fresh, organic, healthy plant foods into their diet. If you enjoy vegetarian foods, or cook for vegetarians and want to impress them, The Angelica Kitchen Home Kitchen is a must read.
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From all the folks at Stonyfield Farm

A table set for an event catered by the Cleaver Company, an organic caterer.
This issue contains news, features and articles about organic growing in the Northeast, plus a Special Supplement on

Organic Fine Dining