

Napa Valley Register

‘Eating Local’ looks at thriving small farms — and offers ways to prepare their bounty

By SASHA PAULSEN Register Features Editor | Posted: Tuesday, June 29, 2010 12:00 am

With that most American of holidays on the horizon, it’s worth considering another revolution that’s is taking root in the U.S. and growing state by state from sea to shining sea.

Locavores, dedicated to eating locally produced items for flavor, freshness and health — their own as well as the planet’s — have given rise to a boom not just in farmers markets but to a movement called CSA — community supported agriculture.



Napa Valley Register Photographer

A CSA farm provides produce and other products like eggs, honey or flowers for participants who subscribe to weekly deliveries, providing support for farmers and enabling subscribers to enjoy the benefits of fresh, local bounty.

CSA farms are the subject of a new book by Napa Valley author and journalist — and avid cook and gardener — Janet Fletcher.

“Eating Locally, A Cookbook Inspired by America’s Farmers,” from Sur La Table, has a two-fold mission: It not only takes a look at farmers who are growing and selling their crops with the support of their communities, it provides a year-round supply of recipes for what to do with the diversity of products that can be grown on local farms.

“No phenomenon better demonstrates the nations’ appetite for local food than the astonishing growth of CSA,” Fletcher writes.

To write “Eating Locally” Fletcher visited 10 small farms, from the Dancing Roots Farm in Troutdale, Ore., to the Golden Organic Earthworm in Jamesport, N.Y. She describes what and how they’re doing in profiles, vividly illustrated with photographs by Sara Remington.

“The good news is they’re thriving,” said Fletcher, in the kitchen of her Napa home, which looks out at her own bountiful garden. (Fletcher is also a Napa County Master Gardener, who coordinates the organization’s weekly column for the Register).

“I came away so encouraged about small farms,” she said. “We’re at a tipping point where we realize how important small farms are. What I saw is that the ‘C’ (in CSA) is really important.”

CSA farms began in the 1980s, with the Indian Line Farm in Massachusetts and the Temple-Wilton Community Farm in New Hampshire. “They’re still in business,” Fletcher writes, “and their example has spawned hundreds more ... Local Harvest, an online resource that maintains a directory of CSA farms, had more than 2,500 in its data base in 2009.”

Fletcher calls CSAs “a win-win model for farming.” Fletcher said. “You’re putting the money right in (farmers’) pockets, plus you get a relationship with the people producing your food. We have family doctors, why not family farmers?”

As for the consumer, she said, “Everything changes, when you can look the farmer in the face.”

Instead, for example, of buying tomatoes grown half a world away, shipped thousands of miles to a warehouse and finally trucked to the shelf of a supermarket, you can get the ones picked yesterday — and in a variety that isn’t engineered to have to sustain the long journey.

Even the certified organic stamp — which can be reassuring but generally adds dollars to the price — becomes less problematic when buying through CSA, Fletcher noted.

While many CSAs are certified organic, she said, the certification process is an expensive one that adds to a farmer’s economic burdens and consequently to the price at the market. “What matters is that they’re growing sustainably,” she said, adding that “if you know your farmer, you don’t need the middle man,” telling you the products are healthy. “I think the trust factor returns.”

Fletcher, who studied at the Culinary Institute of America and worked at groundbreaking Chez Panisse restaurant in Berkeley, before becoming a food writer, has written or collaborated on more than 20 cookbooks and garnered three James Beard awards. Among her many articles, she writes a regular column on cheeses for the San Francisco Chronicle.

“But produce is my first love,” she said, “and farmers.”

Rutabagas and kohlrabi

According to a quick Web search, local CSA projects include Comida Carneros and Hudson Ranch. Both sites list an impressive array of seasonable produce. This however, gives rise to a new dilemma: What do you do with produce you may never heard of, let alone cooked? What

can you do with kale? How do you serve a rutabaga? How can you make cauliflower, well, less like cauliflower?

“I’m hoping to help people expand their food vocabulary,” Fletcher said of the 150 recipes she compiled and tested for “Eating Local.” “Kohlrabi was a discovery for me,” Fletcher noted.

“There’s so much to do with fresh produce,” she added. “You don’t have to fuss when you have wonderful fruits and veggies ... I tried to take less familiar products and give simple recipes.”

In the case of kale, you can make Kale Chips, or a Portugese Potato and Kale Soup, or when basil’s season is done, make a pesto with kale for a Fusilli with Winter Pesto.

Rutabaga? Why not a Glazed Rutabaga Wedges? Or Bollito Misto (Italian mixed boil) with beef, potatoes, turnips, cabbage — and rutabagas?

And often uninspired cauliflower gets an imaginative treatment with Grilled Cauliflower Steaks with Tahini Sauce.

In addition to preparation, Fletcher includes notes on storing and preserving bumper crops for leaner months — as well as tips for creating your own garden.

“Eating Local” has its own Napa touches, she noted. Two of the recipes she included come from well-known local foodies. Annie Baker, the valley’s renowned cookie maker and pastry chef, provided a way to use up summer’s inevitable oversupply of zucchini with her Carrot-Zucchini Bread with Candied Ginger; while Sally Gordon, who for many year’s operated the very popular Gordon’s in Yountville, shared her recipe for an Omelet with Leeks, Spring Onions and Goat Cheese.

Grilled Corn with Chipotle Butter and Cilantro

By Janet Fletcher “Eating Local” | Posted: Tuesday, June 29, 2010 12:00 am

Author’s note: Boiling corn can leave some of its natural sweetness behind in the water, while grilling corn intensifies its flavor. Grill the ears in the husk to steam the kernels, then peel back the husks and slather the ears with a spicy, smoky chipotle butter.

Serves 4

4 ears corn

4 Tbsp. unsalted butter, softened

2 tsp. finely minced canned chipotle chile in adobo sauce, or more to taste

Kosher or sea salt

2 Tbsp. chopped, fresh cilantro

Prepare a moderately hot charcoal fire or preheat a gas grill to medium-high (375 to 400 degrees). Carefully peel back the corn husks without removing them, then pull out and discard the threadlike silk. Replace the corn husks and tie the tips closed with kitchen twine. Soak the ears in a sinkful of cold water for 20 minutes.

Put the butter in a small bowl. Add the chile and a large pinch of salt. Taste and add more chile or salt if desired.

Place the corn directly over the coals or gas flame and cover the grill. Cook for about 15 minutes, giving the ears a quarter-turn every 3 to 4 minutes as the husks brown.

Transfer the corn to a platter. Snip the ends of the husks to remove the twine tie. Remove and discard the husks. While the corn is hot, slather it with chipotle butter, then sprinkle with the cilantro. Serve immediately.

Nectarine and Raspberry Galette

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Serves 8

Galette dough

2 cups unbleached, all-purpose flour

3/4 tsp. kosher salt

1/2 cup plus 7 Tbsp. unsalted butter, chilled, cut into small pieces

About 1/4 cup ice water

Filling

1 1/2 pounds nectarines, halved, pitted and sliced lengthwise

1/2 pint raspberries

3 Tbsp. granulated sugar

1 large egg yolk, whisked with 1 tsp. water for egg wash

About 1 Tbsp. sparkling sugar (coarse decorating sugar)

To make the galette dough, put the flour and salt in a food processor and pulse a few times to blend. Add half the butter and pulse just until the fat is evenly distributed and coated with flour. Add the remaining butter and pulse a few times until it is coated with flour. There should still be pieces of flour-coated butter about the size of large peas.

Transfer to a bowl. Drizzle in the ice water while tossing with a fork, adding water just until the mixture begins to come together. Gather the dough with your hands and knead gently if necessary to get it to hold together. Resist the temptation to add more water. Handling the dough as little as possible, shape it into a thick disk like a hamburger patty, then wrap it in plastic wrap and refrigerate until chilled, at least 2 hours or up to 1 day.

Preheat the oven to 425 degrees. If you have a backing stone, put it in the oven on the middle rack to preheat for at least 45 minutes.

Remove the dough from the refrigerator about 10 minutes before you are ready to roll it out to allow it to soften slightly. If it is too cold, it will be brittle and difficult to roll. Unwrap the dough and place it between 2 pieces of parchment paper at least 16 inches square. With a rolling pin

flatten the dough into a 15-inch circle. To prevent sticking, occasionally lift the top of the parchment paper and lightly flour the dough, then replace the parchment and invert the dough so the bottom sheet is on top. Peel back that sheet of parchment and lightly flour the dough, then replace the parchment and continue rolling.

When the circle is large enough, remove the top sheet of parchment and transfer the dough, still on the bottom sheet of parchment, to a rimless baking sheet. Working 2 inches from the edge of the dough, place the nectarine slices in concentric rings. Scatter the raspberries evenly over the nectarines. Sprinkle the fruit with the granulated sugar.

Using a palette knife or other broad knife to help you lift the dough off the parchment, gently fold the uncovered edge of the dough over the fruit to make a wide, rough-edged rim. Make sure there are no cracks in the dough for juices to seep through. Brush the rim with the egg wash, then sprinkle the rim with the sparkling sugar. With scissors, cut off the exposed parchment paper. (It's OK if a little paper is exposed.)

If you have a baking stone in the oven, slide the galette, still on the bottom piece of parchment, directly onto the stone. If you do not have a baking stone, bake the galette on the rimless baking sheet. Bake until the crust is golden and the nectarines are juicy, about 50 minutes. Slide the galette onto a rack to cool slightly. To serve, slide it from the rack onto a cutting board and cut into wedges. Serve warm.