



Fiddleheads Take Root in New London

By Elizabeth Yerkes

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New London –

On the heels of signing a 10-year lease for the California Fruit building on Broad Street, Fiddleheads Food Cooperative kicked off a season of food-related talks with Craig Floyd of Mystic's Footsteps Farm.

“We need to know how our food is made and where it's made,” said Floyd, who uses natural farming methods to produce grass-fed pork, chicken, beef and dairy products from old-breed animals.

At a talk last week, Floyd educated the audience about large-scale food production realities, such as the “fecal soup” that he said commercial chicken processors employ.

“The average consumer has no clue what they're putting in their mouths,” Floyd said.

Footsteps Farm's practices, although not certified organic, are not only humane but also sustainable, Floyd said. His practice of rotational grazing, which means different species complement each other as they graze, play and rest in the pastures, has been used in centuries past.

Dung beetles that aerate the pastures, chickens that keep down the fly population and other methods are some of Floyd's pest-control mechanisms. Footsteps Farm eschews pesticides, growth hormones and antibiotics, he said.

“If I sprayed the grass on the other side of my fence with weed killer, the cows would find a way to lift the wire and eat it before and after the pesticide was put down,” Floyd said. “It does make a difference what kind of grasses a cow eats in the kind of meat that's produced.”

There are nearly 300 small farms in Connecticut, and dozens of farm markets each week in this part of the state. Floyd may be one of many local farmers who become vendors for the new food cooperative. Fiddleheads' Vendor Committee will decide in the next months with which farmers it does business.

“We want to keep it as local as possible,” said Janelle Leroux of Mystic, a Fiddleheads member.

“The farmers have been waiting for us to settle on a location,” added Michele Millham of Gales Ferry, another member, “and it's just taking off now.”

Peggy Brissette, a member from Stonington, joined the co-op three years ago. She hoped it would approximate the ones she belonged to in Vermont and Florida.

“I loved the concept and experience of those co-ops,” Brissette said. “(Fiddleheads) will be wonderful because I've gotten to know the community of people involved.”

Roughly 100 new members have joined the co-op since the lease was signed in mid-August, according to Leroux, bringing the membership to more than 500. Officials said they hope to open the Broad Street store in late fall. Membership costs \$175, for which members receive co-op stock, discounts, and a year-end patronage refund.

Fiddleheads shoppers won't need to be members but all will have one thing in common: better knowledge about their food sources, which Floyd stressed.

“You must establish a relationship with a local farm because you need to be able to find out what's going into those radishes and how they take care of their animals – your food,” he said.

Future monthly Fiddleheads lecture topics will include Yoga as a Personal Practice, Raw Foods, Natural Medicine, Nutrition and Soap Making. For more information, visit www.fiddleheadsfood.coop.