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Summer Tour Wows Visitors

By Robin Glowa

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As a devoted gardener, healthy cooking teacher and passionate animal lover, I am excited to be a new member of the Northeast Organic Farmers Association (NOFA). Even more thrilling was the opportunity to tour three organic farms on June 25th, 2006

The first stop of the day: Studio Farm Products. A steady stream of drizzle obscured my view, but a beautiful, soggy black dog bounded over to greet me and led me to the group congregated in the barn.

The main house of Studio Farm was built in 1753. It was later the first house in Voluntown to have electricity. Studio Farm was a movie set in the 1920's

Today, owners Dot and Dick Wingate are producing their own version of "Heaven on earth". Over the last 43 years they have raised and sold organic fruits, berries, vegetables, flowers and honey. For 28 of those 43 years they also raised over 6000 chickens. Both former teachers, Dot and Dick reared a family of four and everyone helped work the farm. Trim, radiating good health and vitality, Dot and Dick readily dispensed advice, tips and stories from their years together.

They invited us to pick some beautiful strawberries for ourselves. There are rows of blue berries and raspberries bushes, as well as American and Asian pear trees, just starting to set teardrop shaped fruit. Dick noted the rain water is beneficial for the soil, adding soluble nitrogen, a nutrient not supplied by well water.

The many varieties of heirloom tomatoes read like a playbill of actor's names: red and yellow Brandywine, Striped German, Estiva, Pruden's Purple, Amana Orange, Rutgers and Big Beef. Dot described her homemade tomato sauce and it sounded sensational. There were rows of broccoli, pepper, carrots, peas, potatoes,

cucumbers and squash. Dot is also an enthusiastic flower gardener. Someone in the crowd wanted to know if there were any problems with deer.

“Oh no, not with the dogs,” Dot said with a gleam in her eyes.

“I’ll tell you the secret weapon if you don’t have dogs...it’s male urine! Lucky for us, we have 7 grandsons!”

Too soon it was time to move on to the next farm. After purchasing a tomato plant, organic jam and fresh eggs, I walked over to thank Dick. He smiled, clasped my hand firmly and thanks me for coming. His parting words to me were like the final moments of a great film: “We may plant the seeds, but the Good Lord has been very good to Dot and I. We go away for a week and when we come back the tomato plants have grown another foot. Only the Lord can make that happen.”

Next stop: Terra Firma Farm in Stonington. Lunch was prepared by Chef Maraiiah Bechtold and we happily tucked into fresh, crusty bread, and a salad of organic greens embellished with dried cranberries, raisins and pine nuts. During lunch, Mary Tyrrell, NOFA tour organizer, spoke to us about upcoming events and gave a brief background on NOFA’s mission.

Terra Firma Farm is a non-profit, educational farm run by 27 year old Brianna Casadei and her husband Ethan. Married last 4th of July, the newlyweds are excited about forging a sustainable, healthy future. Bri and Ethan are devoted to teaching kids the wonders of nature—that peas come from pods, not cans, that milk comes warm and wet from cows, and vegetables come from the earth, not the supermarket. Bri’s love for animals, farming and children has come together in one fantastic facility. Her mission will benefit the world as children learn to respect, to nurture and to care for the earth, the animals and themselves.

Each week over 200 children age 3 and up arrive at the farm to work, learn and have fun. There’s weeding to be done, seed to be sewn, vegetables to be picked, and baby animals to be loved. The children get wet, muddy and have the time of their lives. Many are tasting farm fresh, organic produce for the first time. All the kids are mesmerized by pulling potatoes, according to Bri. The children

have a great hands-on experience with the multitude of animals that live on the farm. Goats, pigs, sheep, chickens, turkeys and cows all need tending to. The docile, hardworking Sicilian donkeys also stand in as miniature mounts for the kids to ride.

Terra Firma Farm helps sustain itself by raising and selling organic lamb, poultry (including ducks, chicken and turkeys for meat and eggs), beef and pork. Bri tells us that the Kosher King turkeys are excellent and the Tamworth pigs are lean and luscious.

The Farm is a CSA where shares of the organic produce grown on the farm are available for purchase: \$400 provides the shareholder with a season's worth of fresh and tasty produce.

I am impressed with the commitment that Bri and Ethan have brought to Terra Firma Farm. Together they will forge a lifetime of their own traditions and stories.

“We love what we’re doing,” Bri says, “when the kids arrive on the school bus and they run up the hill as fast as they can....that’s kind of what makes this all so nice.”

Our final stop of the day was Footsteps Farm in Stonington. Craig Floyd and his wife Sheryl are full time farmers, postal workers and animal lovers.

Craig is passionate about animals being humanely and prepared in a humane way for the dining table. He maintains consideration should be given to what type of life the animal lives. If the animal is stressed out, penned in, not living freely and naturally, the texture, tenderness and taste of the meat will be affected. Craig’s mission is to provide the cleanest, best tasting, most humanely treated animal products for the public to enjoy. Craig raises his animals on open pasture, using no antibiotics or hormones. The animals receive love, respect and natural living conditions. Tamworth Hogs, Highland cattle and Bourbon Red Turkeys are among the historic breed raised on Footsteps Farm. You can also buy poultry, cattle and pigs for your own farm, though Craig will not sell you a single piglet as pigs get lonely !! Craig’s charismatic pigs are pampered with gourmet bread from a local bakery and green produce from a nearby supermarket.

Every facet of the operation here at Footsteps Farm reflects the philosophy of an essential, compassionate co-existence with the animals and the land. Craig has a great respect for innate intelligence of the animals and their ability to work with us. Craig encourages us to try something new, something organic, at our next meal.

Share healthy, local food with your family—you'll be doing something good for them and the environment. And remember to support your local farms, who help keep Connecticut green.

Studio Farm Products: 860-599-2530

Terra Firma Farm www.terrafirmafarm.com 860-535-8171

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