THE NEW *Greenmarket* COOKBOOK

Gabrielle Langholtz

RECIPES AND TIPS FROM TODAY'S FINEST CHEFS

&

THE STORIES BEHIND THE FARMS THAT INSPIRE THEM

LIFELONG BOOKS

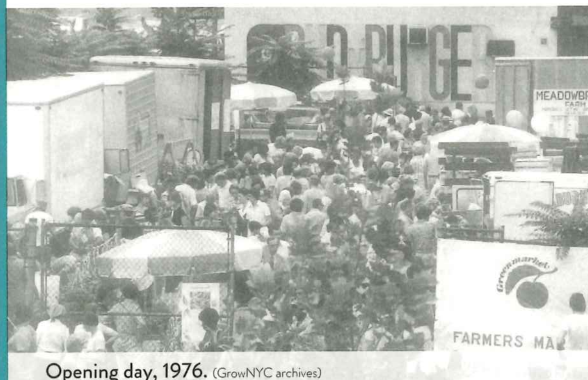
Introduction

A NEW IDEA TAKES ROOT ON A CITY SIDEWALK

It began as an architect's experiment.

Nearly forty years ago, a visionary city planner named Barry Benepe set into motion something that would transform urban diets, rural economies, and the relationship between eaters and farmers in New York and, eventually, across the country. The idea was born when his work took him up to the Hudson Valley. There he saw hundreds of family farms in crisis—while just an hour's drive to the south, New Yorkers survived on insipid iceberg, mealy apples, and hard pink tomatoes: ingredients with about as much flavor as the Styrofoam they were packed in.

The Hudson Valley boasts some of the richest farmland in the country, but vegetable farms, dairy operations, and fruit orchards that a generation before had fed the Big Apple were losing their shirts, unable to compete with the giant industrialized farms that were shipping in cheap foods from distant lands. With no way to sell directly to New Yorkers, small family farmers upstate sold wholesale, watching middlemen take more and more of a cut, until wholesale prices fell so low that farmers, rather than lose money on each bushel, sometimes left their harvest to rot in the fields. In the twenty-five years between 1950 and 1974, two-thirds of New York State farms went out of business—and the state lost a staggering seven million acres of agriculture. Almost overnight, centuries-old farms were literally disappearing, making way for the march of suburban sprawl. Meanwhile, city dwellers downstate had all but forgotten the perfumed juice of a truly ripe peach or the inimitable crunch of sweet summer corn.



Opening day, 1976. (GrowNYC archives)

Benepe, on the other hand, couldn't forget. After a childhood divided between his parents' Gramercy Park apartment and grandfather's Maryland "truck farm," he knew the joy of eating tomatoes fresh off the vine, the challenge of selling them profitably, and the impossibility of finding anything in New York that tasted half as good. An experienced urban planner dissatisfied with the poor produce available in his otherwise amenity-rich metropolis, Benepe saw a single solution to the twofold problem of failing farms and undernourished urbanites. Urged on by the *New York Times*' John Hess, who famously thundered, "We don't need a study about farmers markets; we need farmers markets!" and with the help of a young planner named Robert Lewis, Benepe launched a project that would immeasurably improve the quality of life, upstate and down, for decades to come.

The response that first morning made the *Ed Sullivan Show* audience on the night of the Beatles' first appearance look lackluster by comparison. (GrowNYC archives)

After a year recruiting farmers (who thought Benepe and Lewis were crazy) and partnering with the Council on the Environment (later renamed GrowNYC), the duo eventually persuaded a dozen desperate farmers to load their harvest into pickups and bring it to a police parking lot in the shadow of the Queensboro Bridge. Urban farmers markets were altogether unheard of back in July of 1976, but the response that first morning made the *Ed Sullivan Show* audience on the night of the Beatles' first appearance look lackluster by comparison. As Dick Hodgson, one of the participating farmers, told writer John McPhee of that first day,

> *The people were fifteen feet deep. There were just masses of faces. They went after the corn so fast I just dumped it on the ground. The people fell on it, stripped it, threw the husks around. They were fighting, grabbing, snatching at anything they could get their hands on. I had never seen people that way, never seen anything like it. We sold a full truck in five hours. It was as if there was a famine going on.*

Nearly forty years later, GrowNYC's Greenmarket program now operates more than fifty markets across the city, and the farmers market phenomenon has taken the country by storm. According to the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), the number of US farmers markets rocketed from 1,700 in 1994 to 8,100 in 2013, as eaters nationwide have rediscovered the extraordinary flavors of food grown nearby on small family farms.

MARKETS TRANSFORM CITY LIFE

"If the Union Square Greenmarket were to leave my life, I would leave the city in a New York minute."
—DANNY MEYER, UNION SQUARE HOSPITALITY GROUP

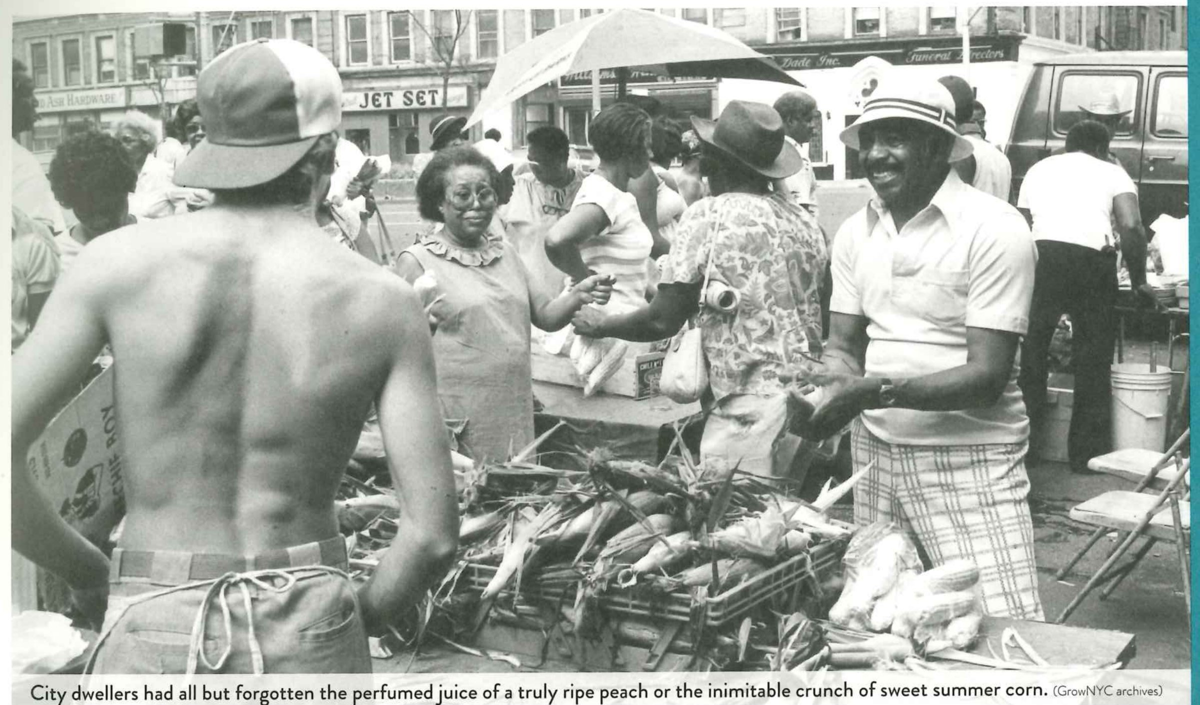
The Greenmarket's opening day under the Queensboro Bridge was the start of a revolution. Benepe opened three more markets that summer: one in Harlem, one in downtown Brooklyn, and, on the edge of what was then known as Needle Park, the now-world famous location at Union Square.

Over the next thirty-five years, markets blossomed across the city. Today, Greenmarkets in operation from Jackson Heights to Bronx Borough Hall function as eaters' lifelines and village squares. Over the peas and peonies, otherwise-unapproachable city dwellers talk to strangers, set aside their differences, swap recipes, debate politics, and occasionally fall in love—in fact, a sociology study found that people are ten times as likely to talk to strangers at farmers markets as at supermarkets.

Farmers markets are at heart a social experience. Uninsured fisherman Rick Lofstadt once showed up to the Greenmarket with his arm in a sling only to have a customer (a surgeon) volunteer to operate on it for free. (The woman behind him happened to be an anesthesiologist and signed on to help as well). Maple syrup maker Andy Van Glad befriended a homeless crack addict and brought him upstate to get clean on

Over the corn and cabbage, New Yorkers set aside their differences. (GrowNYC archives)

(GrowNYC archives)



City dwellers had all but forgotten the perfumed juice of a truly ripe peach or the inimitable crunch of sweet summer corn. (GrowNYC archives)

The harvest is so diverse, you might say lettuce is just the tip of the iceberg. (Amanda Gentile)

the farm. After crises such as 9/11 and Superstorm Sandy, the markets offered New Yorkers comfort and camaraderie—and in the case of Sandy, processed food stamp sales when many powerless retailers could not. And at least three farmers have met their spouses at the market.

Stop a stranger at a farmers market and ask why she shops there, and she might say it's because the food on offer is better for the environment (small family farms are typically far more biodiverse, growing hundreds of crops rather than a single monocrop, and using more ecological growing methods—and transporting cantaloupe and cucumbers from a neighboring county, instead of another country, has a fraction of the carbon footprint). Or she might cite the health benefits of local food (which is picked at peak ripeness and often sold the day after harvest). But she's just as likely to name something more abstract: that it just feels right to buy your food from the person who grew it, that the market is a place where she meets her community, that there's something reassuring about traceability, something deeply meaningful about eating this way, and that participating in a human-scale food system adds richness to life.

These real-life, feel-good experiences are a welcome antidote to the seemingly endless stream of disturbing reports about our food industry. Even when there's not an outbreak of E. coli (in organic spinach, no less!) or avian flu or mad cow disease, the everyday evils of industrial agriculture have brought on a plague of "diabesity," created a dead zone the size of Massachusetts in the Gulf of Mexico, and set this generation on track to be the first in American history with a shorter life expectancy than their parents. Against this backdrop of grim news, farmers markets abound with community connections and culinary collaborations.

FARMERS RISE TO THE OPPORTUNITY

"If it weren't for Greenmarket, I'd be selling used cars." —**FARMER ANDY VAN GLAD**

An utter transformation of American agriculture took place after World War II. The embrace of industrial agriculture devastated small family farming—and the American diet. Prized heirloom varieties of vegetables and heritage breeds of livestock went the way of the dodo bird. As USDA policy urged farmers to "get big or get out," by planting hedgerow to hedgerow, food became cheap—but at great social, environmental, and public health cost.

The founding of the Greenmarket offered small family farms a ray of hope. Instead of selling monoculture commodities (such as onions, apples, or dairy) for pennies on the dollar, local farms were now able to sell direct through the Greenmarket and make a real living growing high-quality food.

Farmer Ron Binaghi Jr. was only sixteen on the first day he came to the Greenmarket in 1976, and he vividly remembers money being thrown at him by city folk starved for fresh produce. One of a dozen "first family" Greenmarket farmers still selling today, Binaghi's multigenerational farm family is part of a breed of growers who realized that in order to keep themselves in business, they'd have to biodiversify their crops for the growing demands of hungry urbanites and the chefs who serve them. Ron recalls, "When a customer asked us, 'Do you grow chamomile?' we didn't know what it was, but we said, 'We'll find out, and we'll grow it.'" Binaghi's New Jersey farm went from growing just four crops to more than eighty, thanks to his vow that if customers want it, he'll find a way to get it onto their plates. Fortunately history repeats itself: Although the average American farmer is now over age fifty-five, Binaghi's son, Ron III, inherited his father's attitude, saw a viable future in raising food for city shoppers, and is now carrying on the tradition at the twice-weekly Greenmarket at Lincoln Center.

Barry Benepe knew the joy of eating tomatoes fresh off the vine, the challenge of selling them profitably, and the impossibility of finding anything in New York that tasted half as good.

Farmers markets have given growers a way out of the industrial treadmill, which leads to fields of monocultures, fetid factory farms, manure lagoons and a poisoned environment. Freed from the tyranny of the corporate food system, small family farmers (who drink the well water and plan to pass their land to their children) favor ecological production methods—organic (whether certified or not), as well as biodynamic (which builds upon the teachings of Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner), Integrated Pest Management (which treats for pests only when vital and at the precise moment of maximum opportunity, thus vastly reducing chemical use), and mineralization (which decomposes or oxidizes chemical compounds into plant-accessible forms in the soil). These independent farmers also embrace pasture-based or grass-fed

Selling direct allows a transition from commodity agriculture to a human-scale system. (Amanda Gentile)

livestock production, which forgoes the diet of corn and antibiotics, instead returning herbivores such as sheep and cows to the fields of grass, and putting pigs in the woods where they can root to their porcine hearts' delight.

At the same time that market participants are employing specific ecological practices to create their unique products, some fishers, foragers, and farmers are creating new markets for little-known edibles, such as Northshire Farm's forest-found morels and porcini, Blue Moon Fish's tunny and sea robin (which other fishers would throw back, dead), and Roaming Acres' delectable ostrich and emu meat. These innovations ask shoppers to open their minds and mouths to species they may never have tasted—or seen.

Production methods aren't the only things improving, and independent farmers aren't simply maintaining their corner of an otherwise-crumbling foodshed. Through Greenmarket, some farmers are working to reinvent a component of the food system. Wild Hive Farm and Cayuga Pure Organics are reviving the local grain economy. An increasing number of midsize growers are selling additional ingredients through Greenmarket Co., GrowNYC's mission-driven wholesale operation, which provides a competitive retail price to bigger farmers who are happy to sell their chard or cilantro by the box, not the bunch.

Farmers markets enabled many families to transition from failing commodity agriculture into a reimagined human-scale system. This has brought about a combination of old and new, of legacy and innovation, of horse-drawn plows and electric livestock fencing, a renaissance of growing grain and a heyday of artisan alcohol.

CULTIVATING ECOLOGICALLY AWARE EATERS

A keystone program of GrowNYC—a nonprofit organization dedicated to creating a healthier and more sustainable New York City—Greenmarket creates centers for citizens to participate in environmental restoration.

You might say local lettuce is just the tip of the iceberg. The Greenmarkets are more than just a place to pick up tonight's dinner ingredients. Answering a call from customers who wanted to dispose of their food waste in an environmentally sound way, in 2011, GrowNYC launched a compost initiative that diverted more than 1 million pounds of kitchen scraps from the waste stream in its first year. Customers can buy their carrots at Greenmarket, then bring the peels and tops back to be composted. These are then transformed into a fertile soil amendment for use in local urban farming and gardening projects. With the help of the City of New York, the number of Greenmarket collection sites has expanded and has led to the sanitation department initiating composting programs in schools and neighborhoods across the city.

Similarly, customers can bring their old clothing and textiles to market to be recycled. Since GrowNYC began its textile recycling program in 2007, more than 2 million pounds of old clothing, shoes, linens, handbags, and other textiles have been collected—putting landfills on a diet.

But the good work isn't only happening at Greenmarket. GrowNYC also operates environmental education, recycling, and community garden programs across New York. The organization is growing green spaces in our neighborhoods, growing public awareness about conservation and recycling, and—most importantly—growing young people who are better educated about environmental issues and leaders in their communities.

The project would immeasurably improve the quality of life, upstate and down, for decades to come.

GrowNYC programs for kids range from the Randall's Island Urban Farm (a 3,000-square-foot learning garden that invites school groups to grow, harvest and eat garden-fresh produce) to Learn It Grow It Eat It (a South Bronx high school initiative that pays teenagers to tend organic fruit, vegetables, and herbs in three local community gardens, run a weekly farm stand, and teach children and adults about the environment and healthy eating). And to provide large-scale support to school gardens citywide, GrowNYC is a founding partner of Grow to Learn NYC, a comprehensive program to organize all school garden efforts.

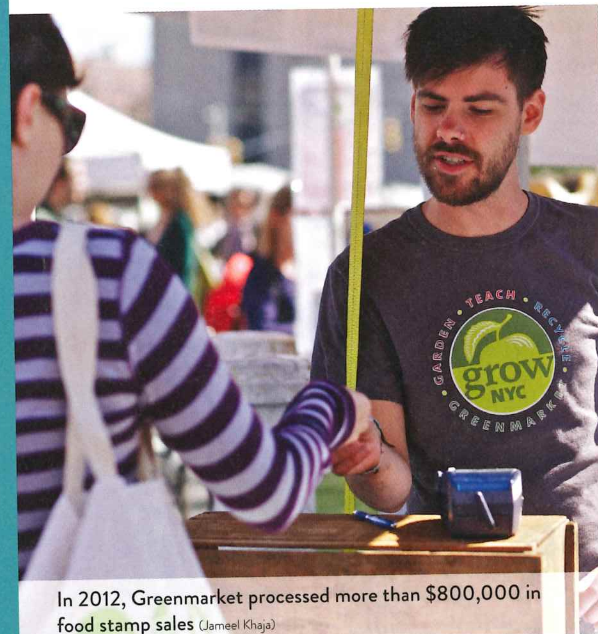
FOOD ACCESS AND JUSTICE

The local food movement is sometimes cast as an elite way to eat, typified by the wealthy urbanite who buys edible flowers to scatter across the grass-fed steak at her dinner party. And while people with means are among the Greenmarket's many customers, they shop alongside New Yorkers of all walks of life.

In fact, many farmers report that their highest sales aren't at Union Square, but in lower-income neighborhoods where recent immigrants eat in every night, often cooking for extended families. The Greenmarket has long worked to provide a continuing supply of fresh local food to all New Yorkers, and in the early 2000s has been a critical civic ally in increasing food access in underresourced neighborhoods.

Greenmarket's Food Stamps in Farmers Markets initiative serves as a national model. When the USDA transitioned from paper coupons to debit card–style EBT (electronic benefits transfer) cards, the shift didn't just reduce stigma and fraud—it also inadvertently left farmers markets, which typically lack landlines and electricity, on the wrong side of the digital divide. Ironically, citizens with the greatest food insecurity could buy candy bars and soda at the corner bodega but were unable to redeem their benefits on spinach or squash at the neighborhood farmers markets—until Greenmarket cofounder Bob Lewis, who had a long career at the New York State Department of Agriculture, piloted wireless EBT terminals.

As word spread, the crowds swelled, and the benefits to upstate and urban communities alike have been exponential. In 2012, the markets processed over $800,000 in EBT sales. The Union Square market alone saw $241,000 in EBT sales. Two-dollar market coupons called Health Bucks, originally created by the Department of Health to help at-risk communities eat more produce, now stretch Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) sales at Greenmarket. For *every* $5 purchase, SNAP shoppers receive one $2 Health Buck, resulting in a 40 percent boost in buying power. In an era of angry debate about whether sugar-sweetened beverages should be eligible for SNAP purchase—they currently account for a staggering $4 billion a year in Food Stamp sales—Health Bucks offer a stimulus, rather than restriction. And while Greenmarket's program is the nation's largest city-operated SNAP, $16.6 million of SNAP benefits were used at farmers markets nationwide in 2012, up from $7.5 million in 2010, thanks to the growing availability of EBT terminals at markets.



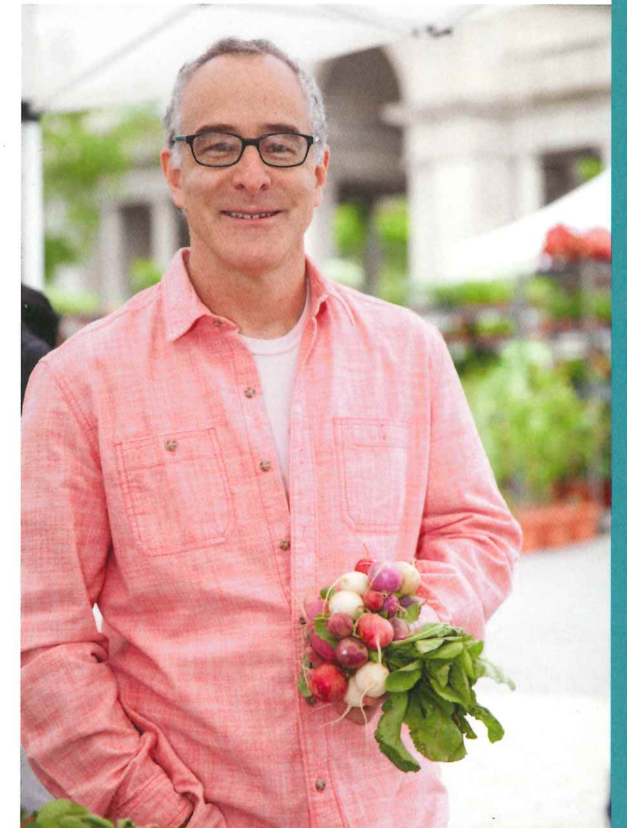
In 2012, Greenmarket processed more than $800,000 in food stamp sales (Jameel Khaja)

CHEFS MAKE CRUCIAL CONNECTIONS

"If this is your first visit to the market, you're in for the most delicious experience of your life."
—CHEF PETER HOFFMAN, BACK FORTY AND BACK FORTY WEST

Each market day in summer and fall, more than five hundred thousand New Yorkers shop at the Greenmarket—a number that includes scores of the country's best cooks. In the early hours, the bright red chard, orange squash, and purple kale are contrasted with the crisp white of jackets, as chefs finger speckled cranberry beans, sniff fresh anise hyssop, and select Cherokee Purple tomatoes to buy by the case—God help the taxi they'll hail. Lured by the call of superior flavor, many have developed close business relationships—and even close friendships—with the men and women whose food forms their kitchens' foundations. Thanks to the Greenmarket, scores of the city's top toques and celebrity chefs have become ardent advocates of sustainable agriculture, collaborating with farmers to transform the way New York eats.

They're here because the farmers have learned to entice them with ingredients that easily elevate any menu, and those pros in turn commission farmers to grow old varieties and raise little-known breeds so flavorful they're worth their weight in gold—and chefs are willing to pay accordingly.


Chefs like Peter Hoffman have taught their patrons to look askance at apricots before August. (Amanda Gentile)

Today's farm-to-table craze began back in the 1980s with a few early handshakes between palms calloused by hoe handles and fingers scarred by scrapes with stoves. It was all born of eager, innovative farmers, such as Rick Bishop of Mountain Sweet Berry Farm, who saw an opportunity to think outside the commodity box. Despite the American agricultural experts' insistence that profits lay in high yields of varieties that could withstand long-distance transport, Bishop favored flavor. He built up his soils with minerals and sought out unique varieties—like his signature Tristar strawberry, which is a domestic strawberry crossed with a wild alpine strain and whose tiny fruits taste like strawberries straight from God's own garden. Cooks soon swarmed his stand and Bishop confirmed his hunch—that they were starved for interesting ingredients, and that taste was the path to profit.

Pastured livestock production returns herbivores to fields of grass.

Chefs found Bishop was game to grow special requests. David Bouley, for example, longed for French Lyonnais potatoes like those from his hometown and gave Bishop $10,000 to develop seed stock and enrich his soil to grow purple Peruvian and ruby crescent potatoes. And lo, the fingerling craze swept American ovens. Chef Cesare Casella brought the farmer nineteen heirloom varieties of shell beans from Tuscany—and Bishop grew every last one.

This symbiotic relationship has blossomed like a sunflower. Many chefs have even made the pilgrimage to Bishop's Catskill kingdom to read seed catalogs, dig potatoes, savor strawberries, and forage for ramps and fiddleheads with their Greenmarket guru. Mere mortals shop his tiny stand, too, landing the likes of celtuse, which tastes something like a cross between celery and lettuce, and, come winter, tiny crunchy tubers called crosnes that look like miniature Michelin men and just might land you a Michelin star.

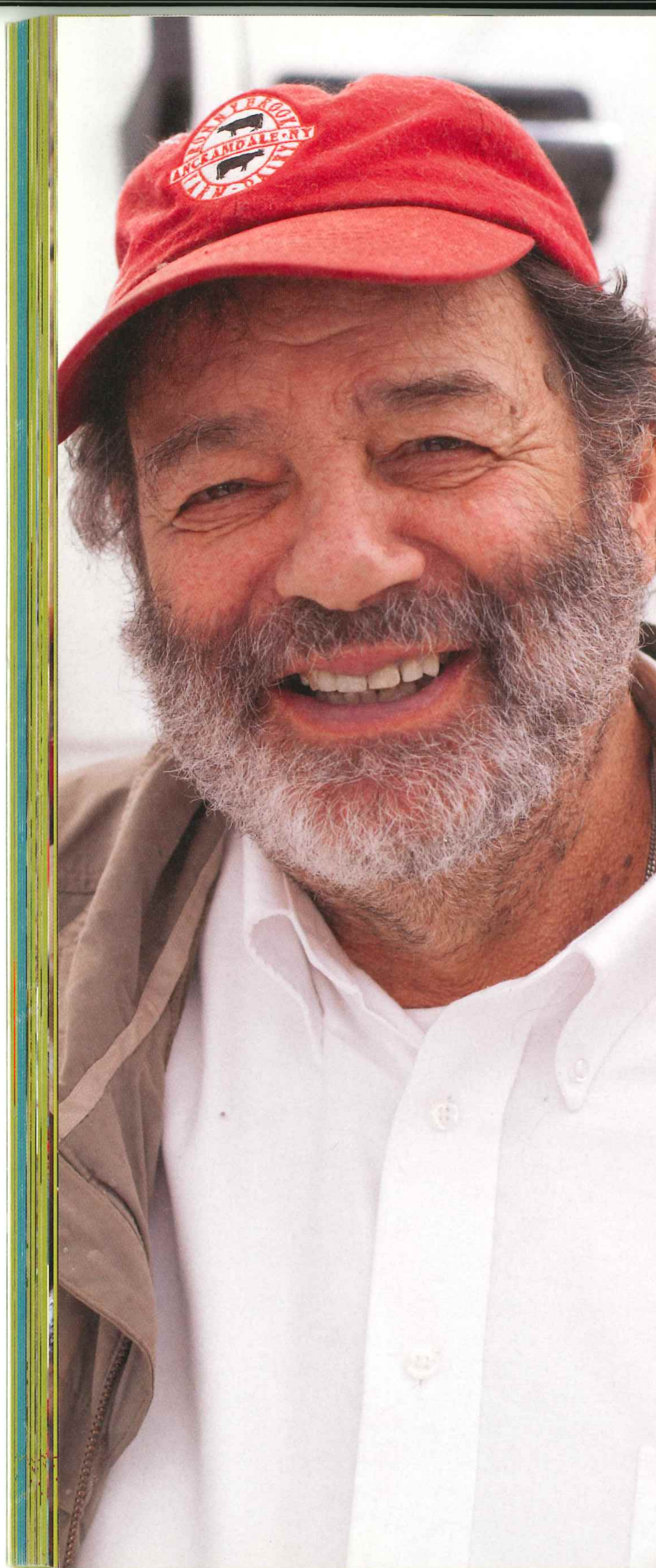
It's not only Bishop. Call today's culinary moment the "cult of the ingredient." What began with Bouley and Bishop back in the 1980s has, over time, ushered out the dusty culinary era of commodities lost in white French sauce. As chefs sank their teeth into real produce, they threw off those béchamel blankets and put the spotlight on the ingredients. The trend has coalesced into menus that read like seed catalogs.

Drawing on taste-memories of unforgettable fruits from a backyard cherry tree, or dreaming up flavor profiles based on an herb they only just met, cooks cast local ingredients in preparations from European classics to reimagined homey American fare to cutting edge molecular gastronomy. Across the board, these chefs have turned their training on its head, and mastered the art of writing last-minute menus after a morning at the market—sometimes just moments before unlocking the door for dinner. And on those pages it has become standard practice to list farm names below each dish. Enlightened chefs have trained their diners to eat asparagus only in May, to look askance at apricots before August, and even to expect that burgers shall remain tomatoless for eight months each year.

Nearly forty years later, the Greenmarket operates more than fifty markets, and the phenomenon has taken the country by storm.

This book embodies the experience of life at market. You'll find recipes ripe for each season, direct from the chefs and food artisans who know their farmers. Profiles of the growers themselves take you to upstate New York, where a city-raised former nurse discovered that the secret to true nourishment is in soil; to the Connecticut countryside, where one family tends generations of cows that bring farmstead cheese to city dwellers; and to Long Island, where a husband/wife team who first met at market make their life by fishing and selling their catch directly to customers. But you needn't be a New Yorker to cook from this book. From Boston to Austin, Seattle to Savannah, farmers markets have put down roots across the country. On city sidewalks and grassy fields, these seemingly simple marketplaces benefit ecology, economy, and community. They also offer the real peaches and corn Barry Benepe dreamed of decades ago.

See you there.



◂ *After the crash of 1987, recalls Ronny, "we knew we had to do something different to stay afloat." Soon a proudly unhomogenized institution was born, literally the cream of the crop.* (Amanda Gentile)

Farmer RONNY OSOFSKY

RONNYBROOK FARM DAIRY

In 1941, the year Ronny Osofsky was born, his parents founded a dairy farm and named it after him: Ronnybrook. Starting out, they did things the old fashioned way, even using horses to tend to the corn and hay that the cows would eat all winter. But agriculture was changing. When Ronny was a boy, his dad bought the farm's first tractor and let his little boy "steer."

"I thought I was driving," laughs Ronny, now seventy-two.

The family milked about a hundred cows and for decades, like just about every dairy farm in America—and the eighteen in their town alone—they sold their milk wholesale to processors who homogenized it with the outputs of hundreds of other herds before selling it to supermarkets. Each middleman took a cut, leaving little for the farmers.

In the 1980s, in addition to twice-daily milking, the Osofskys sold bulls to dairies in Europe, China, and Russia. One year, a creature named Ronnybrook Prelude was deemed the best bull in the world by dairy sire summaries. They'd sold him for about seven grand. The stud eventually went for $20 million.

But while some made hay on the global market, small farmers generally did not. Commodity prices were constantly swinging, and after the Stock Market crash of 1987, dairy farmers everywhere saw the bottom fall out. Suddenly the Osofskys couldn't even cover their operating costs.

"After the crash," recalls Ronny, "we knew we had to do something different to stay afloat." Assessing their limited options, the family realized they had one thing many American farmers didn't: close proximity to New York City. So although Ronny had only been to Manhattan once or twice in his life, an idea soon rose to the top.

It was at once revolutionary and nothing new: great milk from one herd of grass-fed cows, bottled right on the farm in glass bottles, and sold directly to city customers who care about what's in their glass. In other words, the total opposite of the commodity market that had nearly milked small farmers dry.

The Osofskys didn't know of a single farmer bottling their own milk, but they sought out shuttered operations that had done so a generation or two before, buying a piece of old equipment in Massachusetts, another in New Hampshire. Ronny mortgaged the farm, borrowed money, got two grants, spent about a hundred thousand on infrastructure, and by the summer of 1991 was ready to launch. Ronnybrook's milk and cream debuted at the Greenmarket on July 4. Customers came out in droves, and a New York institution was founded.

Selling directly to customers meant the Osofskys now earned about three times what they'd been paid when selling their milk to a processor. But the farm also had "a lot more expenses," Ronny laughs. "That I found out!"

Bottom line, though, it was a huge success: The Osofskys were able to save the farm. Of the eighteen dairies in Pine Plains a few decades ago, only two are still in business today. (Ronnybrook's retail experiment didn't just save itself—the brand benefited a few others, because the Osofskys supplement their herd's supply with milk from three neighboring family farms, and now also custom bottle milk for two others.)

Today the Osofskys tend about 120 grass-fed milking cows, all the offspring of their long line of prize-winning Holsteins, plus three Jerseys to increase the butterfat—not for nothing is their milk called "Creamline." Pasteurized by law but proudly unhomogenized, each bottle bears a nice big cap of fat, literally the cream of the crop. The Culinary Institute of America can't get enough of the crème fraîche, and many city chefs cook with Ronnybrook butter, which clocks in around 87 percent butterfat (conventional butter has just 81 percent).

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Ronnybrook won the blue ribbon in 2012 for best butter at the World Dairy Expo in Madison, Wisconsin. But Ronny says the Greenmarkets—they now sell at more than a dozen locations—remain the place where they get the most gratification.

"Greenmarket has been very instrumental in our growing," Ronny said. "But beyond the economics, there's a real satisfaction. People come to us every day and say that they've been shopping at our stand for twenty years and really appreciate what we're doing. That's very important to me."

Today Ronny's four children take care of the cows and markets, and his grandkids show calves at the fair. Ronny still steers when they harvest the hay, and he still drinks milk by the glass every day.

Farmer SERGIO NOLASCO

NOLASCO'S FARM

Once a week an unlikely oasis appears on a stretch of concrete just outside a scrubby park in the Bronx: tables overflowing with produce as fresh as you can find anywhere in America. While the Bronx suffers from some of the highest rates of obesity and diet-related disease in the country, every Tuesday, July through November, shoppers line up at the corner of 192nd Street and Grand Concourse a good hour before the market's official 8 a.m. opening time. Many are waiting for one farmer in particular—Sergio Nolasco.

Like many of these customers, Sergio grew up on a farm in Mexico. But today he farms in New Jersey, growing standards such as tomatoes, lettuce, potatoes, and onions, plus ingredients only recently eaten by Americans—cilantro and tomatillos—as well as herbs that are virtually unavailable in America: *papalo*, a succulent green that's often tucked into tortillas; *pepiche*, whose velvety leaves perfume cemita sandwiches; *alache*, whose long green leaves are popular in Puebla; *quelites*, a cousin of amaranth; and *epazote*, which seasons pots of beans simmering over open fires and uptown hot plates. By September, he'll harvest a dozen different chiles, from dark green poblanos for stuffing to orange habañeros that should come with a warning label in English.

Sergio immigrated to New York at age fourteen in search of economic opportunity but was soon working a dead-end sweatshop job in a garment factory. He was desperate for the chance to build a better life.

He found it in the form of Greenmarket's New Farmer Development Project (NFDP), which helps immigrants with previous agricultural experience put down farming roots here.

When a friend of Sergio's read about the project in an article in *El Diario* in 2004, Sergio jumped at the chance to empower himself through agriculture and become a small business owner. In 2005 he enrolled in the program's class for new farmers—and had a lot to learn. Sure, he'd grown up on his grandfather's farm, but childhood memories of plowing sugarcane fields with oxen have limited stateside application.

> So-called experts say low-income neighborhoods have little demand for fresh produce, but Sergio knows otherwise.

So before he was ready to farm on his own, Sergio spent four years learning the ropes under an NFDP partner farm in the Hudson Valley, where he mastered diverse vegetable crops in the few months before spring's last frost and fall's first. Through NFDP, he received an eight thousand dollar micro-credit loan that he used to purchase a small tractor, some row cover, and seeds.

Finally he and his family were ready to farm on their own. Now they rent 40 gorgeous acres in New Jersey, farming more than fifty diverse varieties from Romaine lettuce to Caribbean callaloo.

Today other immigrants are sharing in the fruits of these labors. Sergio sells at Poe Park in the Bronx and other Greenmarkets in underserved Latino communities: Manhattan's Washington Heights and nearby Inwood, plus Sunnyside and Jackson Heights, in Queens. For him, selling in these communities isn't good karma, it's good business. So-called experts say low-income neighborhoods have little demand for fresh produce, but Sergio knows otherwise. His customers cook every night, often for big families. And when they find good produce at a fair price—especially the traditional foods they grew up eating—they line up to buy by the pound.

So while everyone else at Poe Park on this blistering morning is looking for a spot of shade, Sergio doesn't mind the heat. By 2 p.m., the only thing left on his table will be the last drooping handful of cilantro, and he'll have an apron full of cash. Exhausted, he'll pack up the tent and price signs and drive back to New Jersey to get in a few more hours of farming before dusk. For dinner, he'll feed his children the foods his grandparents fed his parents almost three thousand miles away, and tomorrow he'll be up with the sun to harvest.

It may not be everyone's idea of the American Dream, but it is Sergio's. And he's living it.

◂ *Latino shoppers line up for Sergio's* pepiche *and* papalo, *which are all but unavailable in America.* (Amanda Gentile)

Farmers KEN AND EILEEN FARNAN

BUZZARD CREST VINEYARDS

Never mind Labor Day or leaf peeping. In late August the unassailable end of summer is announced by a ringing phone: It's Ken and Eileen Farnan of Buzzard Crest Vineyards, calling to say the grapes are ripe and they're ready to come back to market.

A few other Greenmarket farmers grow grapes, lining up quarts alongside their apples and pears, but the Farnan family's annual offerings—more than a dozen varieties, all certified organic—put them in a class all by themselves. Their return each September is the bittersweet signal that soon frost will strike, dusk will fall early, and we'll all be simmering soups and roasting roots. But first, we feast on the fruit of the vine.

The Farnans' fame stems mainly from the varieties they grow, which make you realize the Thompson Seedless in most supermarkets taste like the page these words are printed on. Ken and Eileen, on the other hand, tend vines with names like Marquis, Canadice, Diamond, and Isabella, carrying within their skins off-the-charts flavor.

That's because when corporate chemists were cooking up artificial flavors a few decades ago, they imitated the flavor of real grapes. Meanwhile, other men in lab coats were breeding the flavor right out of the crop, trading it in a Faustian bargain for high yield and long shelf life. As a result, when twenty-first-century eaters taste their first Concord, the flavor is familiar—but only from Magic Markers and Hubba Bubba chewing gum. At Buzzard Crest's stand, the record is set straight. Especially when it comes to their intense grape juice, which contains exactly one ingredient and has no rival in the supermarket aisle or anywhere else.

But beyond their long-prized genes, Buzzard Crest grapes' flavors have another secret ingredient: terroir. The deep, glacial Finger Lakes delay frost and create conditions ideal for grapes. The Farnans' vines grow on a sun-soaked, west-facing slope that overlooks Keuka Lake. Those chemists could not have engineered better conditions.

Their return each September is the bittersweet signal that soon frost will strike, dusk will fall early, and we'll all be simmering soups and roasting roots.

The Farnans had sold their harvests wholesale until a corporate takeover caused the bottom to fall out of the market in 1986. They were considering selling the farm when Ken's mom mailed them a newspaper clipping about the Greenmarket. Almost thirty years later, each Friday night in fall, Ken and Eileen leave the farm loaded with grapes just after midnight, pulling up at Union Square by 5:30 a.m. They'll sell for twelve hours straight before starting the five-hour drive home.

It's a long day but more than worth it, thanks to the kind of customer devotion evidenced by another phone call that came in to the Greenmarket office one summer. It was a woman who had moved from New York to New Mexico and was planning to fly home. Before buying her airline tickets, she wanted to know when Buzzard Crest was expected back at the market.

Farmer ELIZABETH GILLMAN

CATO CORNER FARM

"It became apparent that making cheese would be a very good idea."

So recalls Elizabeth Gillman of a realization she arrived at twenty years ago. She had been raising goats on her Connecticut farm since 1979, but each time she sold the young animals for meat, her herd of nannies suddenly had an abundance of milk. And you know what they say about when life gives you lemons.

Elizabeth had loved cheese since childhood and after some experiments taught herself to make her surplus goat milk into sophisticated chèvre. Before long she added Jersey cows, which are prized for their milk's high butterfat content.

After a cheese chemistry intensive and a hands-on class with a Belgian cheesemaker, she set to handling curd and washing rinds; by 1997 her first aged, raw-milk cows cheeses were ready for their debut at the Greenmarket. It's hard to believe that back then, only three participants sold cheese, including an Amish farm that sold vacuum-packed blocks alongside their shoo-fly pie. The phrase "American cheese" still conjured images of fluorescent orange, plastic-wrapped slices, and most people thought serious cheese was something you imported from Europe.

At home in what Gillman calls "conservative Connecticut," appetites were limited to brie, but at city Greenmarkets—on the Upper West Side, near the United Nations, down in Tribeca, and over in Park Slope—she found a warm reception, as samplers quickly became shoppers.

◂ *Initially, Elizabeth was like the little red hen—milking cows, making cheese, and selling it herself. Now seventy, she still tends the herd and milks them at four o'clock each morning.* (Amanda Gentile)

Initially, Elizabeth was like the little red hen—milking a dozen cows, making their milk into cheese, and selling it all in the city herself. But help arrived in the form of her son, Mark, who quit his job as an English teacher to move back to the family farm. Soon selections ran the gamut from the mild, nutty Brigid's Abbey to the stinky, gooey washed-rind Hooligan, all proudly "farmstead," meaning they contain only milk from the farm's own herd. That grass-fed milk's high beta-carotene content turns the curd a signature golden hue.

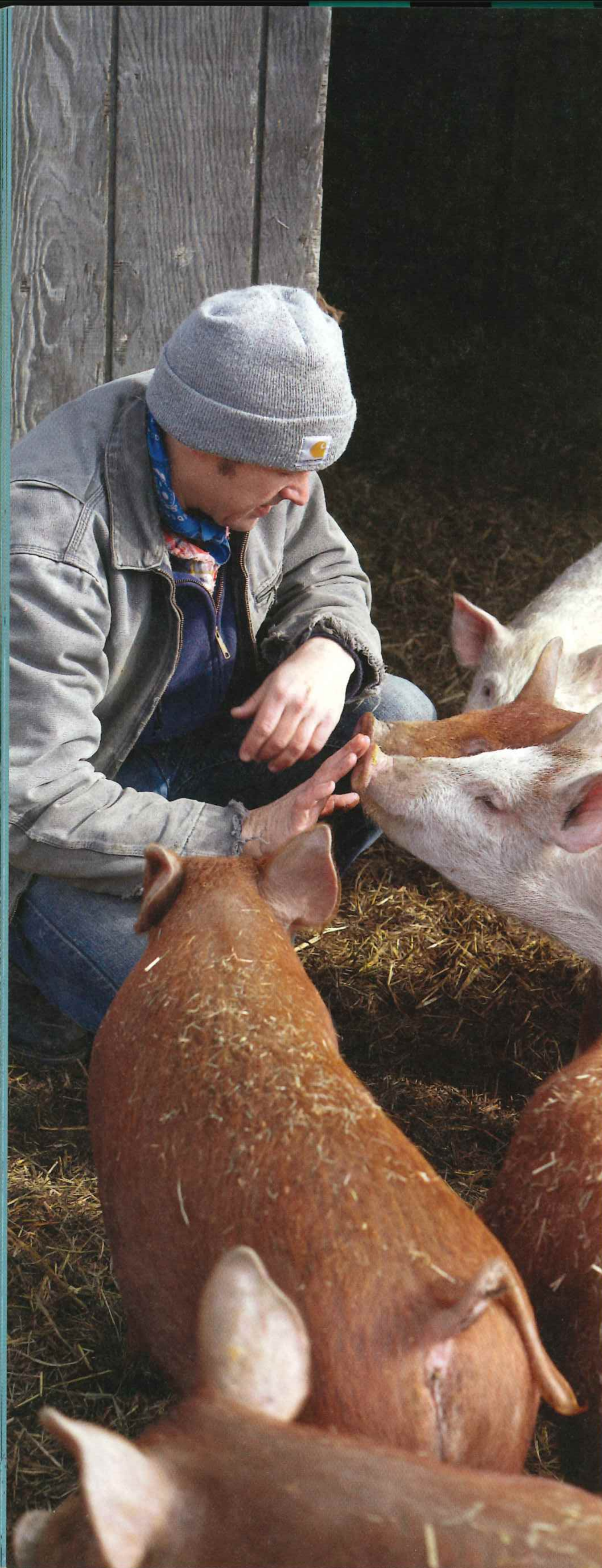
> *Selections ran the gamut from the mild, nutty Brigid's Abbey to the stinky, gooey washed-rind Hooligan, all proudly "farmstead," meaning they contain only milk from the farm's own herd.*

While Mark turns out wittily named offerings like Womanchego, Dairyere, Misty Morning, and Vivace, his mother, now seventy, still tends the herd and milks her forty-two cows at four o'clock each morning. Not only does the family not buy milk from other farms—they also do not buy cows. Every single animal in the herd—with names such as Dana, Shiobhan, and Dierdre—was born on the farm. And unlike most dairies, they never ship their bull calves to auction, instead raising them for beef or veal, which they sell at the farm.

A 2001 grant helped finance an underground cave with precise conditions for aging and storing. Elizabeth laughs that it's not some gleaming state-of-the art facility, but the temperature and humidity boosted both their quality and quantity, helping them land awards from the esteemed American Cheese Society and praise from magazines such as *Saveur* and pride of place on the menu at many top Manhattan restaurants.

But for Elizabeth, all those successes are inconsequential compared to protecting her farm; she once declined an $800,000 offer for the land that would have had her pastures bulldozed into housing tracts. Her decades-long preservation dream came true when she arranged not one but two conservation easements on the property: A federal program now protects her farm fields in perpetuity, while the Connecticut Farmland Trust preserves the woods, wetlands, and ledges. Today the whole property is permanently protected from commercial development.

It's the payoff for Elizabeth's decades of dedication, but she says it never would have been possible without her city sales. "It all worked because of Greenmarket," she says. "If we hadn't been able to go to New York, we wouldn't have been able to make it. No way. No way."



Farmer MICHAEL GRADY ROBERTSON

SAWKILL FARM

While most Greenmarket farmers are passing through middle age, others are fresh-faced twenty-year-olds—the second, third, or even seventh generation to work their family's land. Michael Grady Robertson doesn't fit into either category. Instead he's a part of the growing phenomenon of young people trading office jobs for agriculture.

Growing up in the Kansas City suburbs, he never gave farming a moment's thought, and after graduating from college during the Internet boom, he made good money at dot-com jobs in Austin. But he hated sitting at a desk all day while the computer screen made his eyes water, and in 2004, in his mid-twenties, he quit.

Still, he needed to pay the rent, and when an organic vegetable farm that sold at the Austin farmers market posted a job opening in the local paper, he thought it sounded better than another sentence in a cubicle. Soon he was hand weeding all day under the Texas sun. He was the slowest member of the crew, and sometimes fire ants crawled up his pants, but he loved being outside and realized he felt at home in a world he'd never known existed.

After some travel he landed in New York and applied for a position at Hawthorne Valley Farm in the Hudson Valley. While learning the animal side of agriculture—from grass-fed dairy and beef to pastured chicken and pigs—he researched job possibilities and came across a place called Queens County Farm Museum. A historic piece of land owned by the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, the property was open to the public, but its "farm" was little more than a few ancient apple trees, a petting zoo, and a candy shop. Robertson proposed to turn the sleepy project into a model farm, and he landed the job.

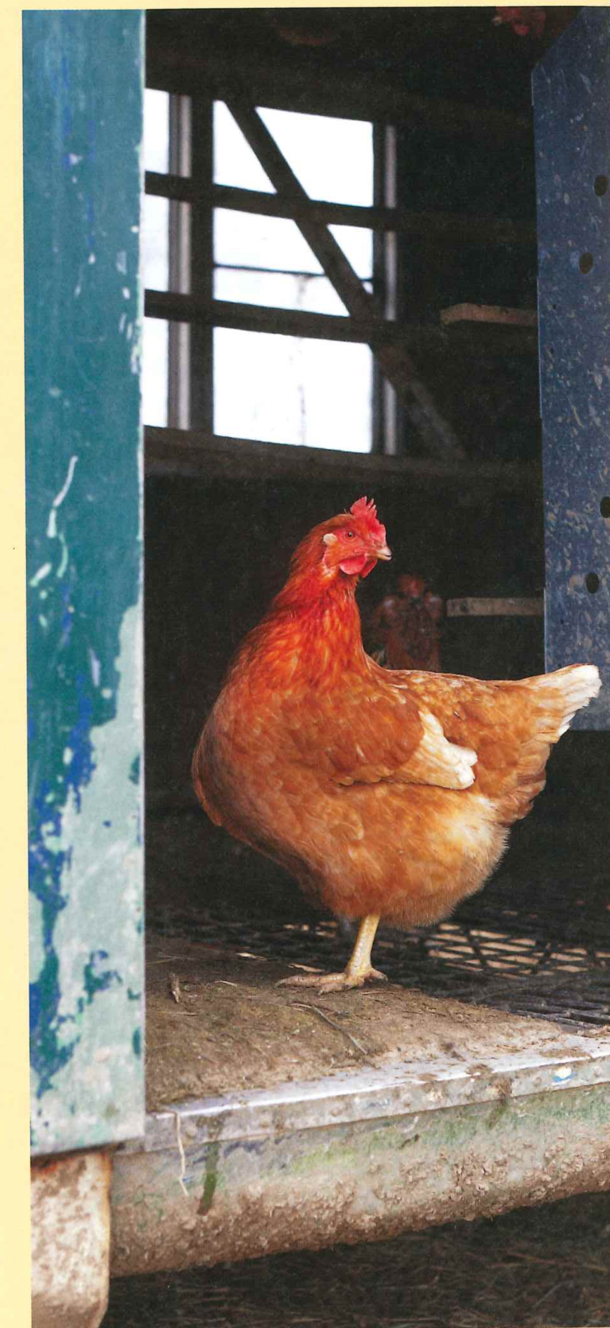
◂ Growing up in the suburbs, Michael never gave agriculture a moment's thought. But when an organic farm posted a job opening, he thought it sounded better than a cubicle.

True to his word, he spent two years transforming Queens County Farm into a vibrant demonstration of sustainable agriculture, right in the city, complete with fields of heirloom vegetables and heritage-breed hogs lolling under trees, while 747s from nearby LaGuardia Airport roared overhead. QCF applied to sell at Greenmarket, and soon New Yorkers were buying chard and carrots grown on a farm they could take a taxi to.

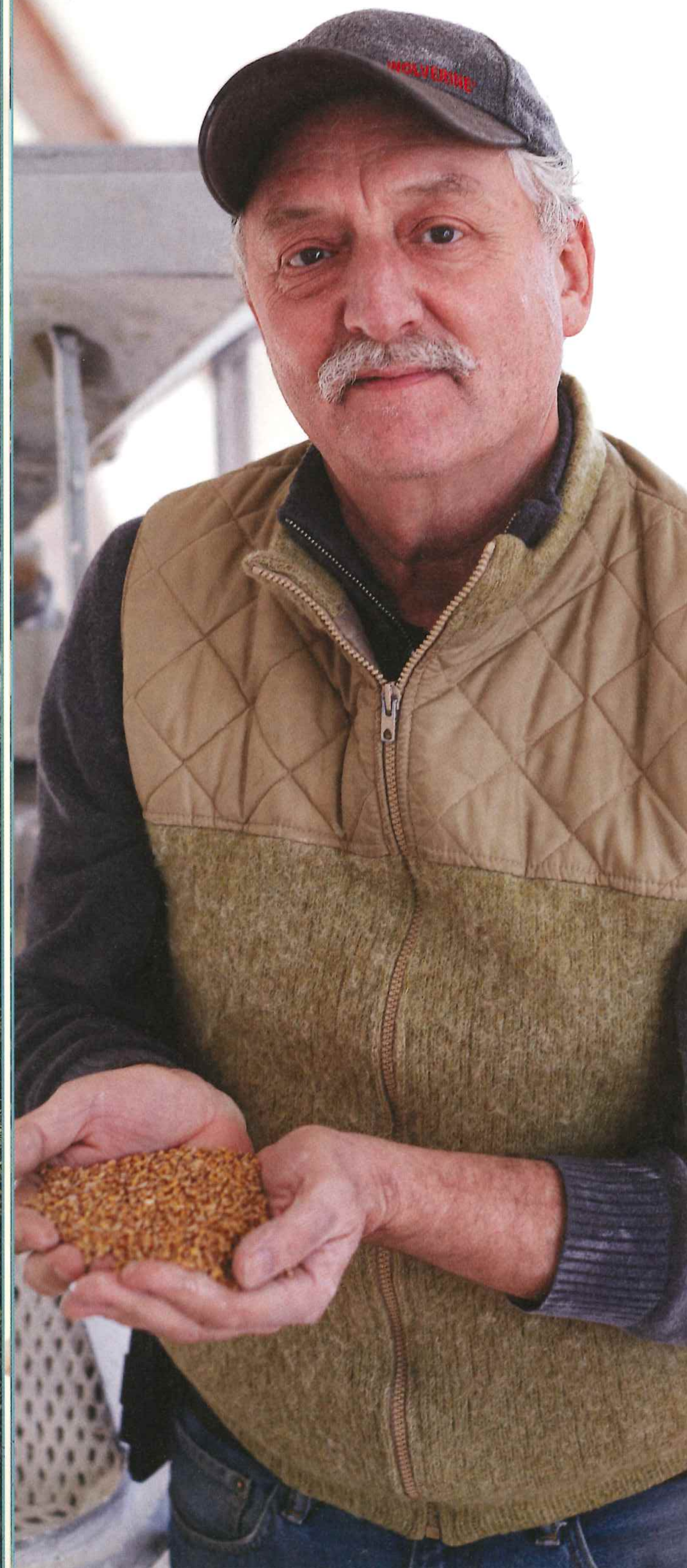
Meanwhile Robertson was looking for land and eventually found his dream spot in Red Hook, New York: 65 acres with good water and great soil, complete with a conservation easement that brought down the price and ensures that the farm can never be sold for development.

Less than a decade after first learning to weed, Robertson now brings his own vegetables to market but is best known for his pastured chicken, woods-raised pork, and grass-fed, grass-finished beef and lamb.

In the years since he left office life, thousands of young people nationwide have followed a similar path from suburbia and college out onto farms, drawn to ecological agriculture instead of digital ad sales or search engine optimization. Robertson is something of a trailblazing success story, but at thirty-eight, he laughs that he's not sure he qualifies for the term "young farmer" any longer. When it comes to that category, "I'm like Justin Timberlake," he jokes. "An elder statesman."



Less than a decade after learning to weed, Michael is known for his free-range chicken and pastured pork.



Miller DON LEWIS

WILD HIVE FARM

It all began with a single bag of flour.

Don Lewis had been keeping bees and chickens his whole life when he heard about a farmer near him in the Hudson Valley who was growing organic animal feed. Don, who also baked to supplement his eggs and honey income, says he "ran up there" to buy grain for his birds. He was met with a surprise: In addition to the feed grain, the farmer, Alton Earnheart, had also grown an experimental patch of wheat for human consumption, and as luck would have it, Don pulled up on the day Alton had ground it into flour. "You're a baker," Alton said. "Maybe you could do something with this."

The farm was called Lighting Tree Farm, and that just-milled flour struck Don with an unforgettable bolt. "When I touched it," Don recalls, "I realized there was a world of difference between this and commercial flour. It had flavor! Terroir! I could taste the actual grain!"

Soon Don was buying as much flour as Alton could grow and grind, baking it into the scones, biscuits, pastries, and breads he sold at his Wild Hive stand at Union Square. But Don didn't just bake—he also immersed himself in studying the history of grain in New York State.

When Alton had asked area farmers about growing wheat, they'd laughed the idea off as if he'd proposed planting bananas. Widely forgotten was the fact that the Hudson Valley had once been the region's breadbasket. From the days of the Dutch, wheat and barley had been major crops there for more than two centuries. Martha Washington herself wrote that she had to send for New York wheat to be able to bake a decent loaf of bread in Virginia.

◂ *Don didn't just bake. He immersed himself in grain history and soon mastered milling.*

But poor farming practices depleted the soil over the centuries, and when farmers moved west, they found that varieties that only grew 6 feet tall in the Northeast towered to 10 feet in the virgin ground of the Ohio Valley. The Industrial Revolution and the Erie Canal conspired so New York farmers abandoned their mills, and by the twentieth century, the only grains grown in New York were for animal feed.

So when Don stumbled upon a source of local flour, he first thought it would give him a niche in the marketplace. But the more he used—and learned—the more he realized that grain was such a fundamental ingredient, he didn't want to hide it under a bushel.

"Politics took over," he recalls of his evolving views. "I realized my children did not have access to the food I had access to when I was young, because of corporate domination of the food system. I said, 'It's ridiculous that you can't get a decent egg at the diner, and the pancakes are terrible.' I worked my way back and realized just how important grain was to this region. It was the mainstay of the community, and it had been completely lost. And I said, 'I'm gonna try to do something.' It was raising children into teenagers that helped me formulate that; I realized the example you make for your children is what you hope to get back."

Don worked with Alton to grow more grain, look for more seed, and expand his plantings and diversity; within a few years, Alton's yield increased from 5,000 pounds of flour to more than 25 tons, and from one variety to six, including rye, triticale, several wheat strains, and a flour corn—all of which Don bought and baked. Soon Don bought his own mills, too, and through time and trials, he mastered milling and came to understand the variables of speed, humidity, temperature, and grain blend. He started selling small bags of flour first at Greenmarket, then wholesale, and then to larger and larger bakers.

The appetite for local grain grew, and now Don works with a half-dozen New York farmers who make more selling to him than they did growing commodity animal feed. Don has even grown a few test batches himself, including a heritage handful he brought back from the International Slow Food conference in Italy.

> *I realized there was a world of difference between this and commercial flour. It had flavor! Terroir! I could taste the actual grain!*

Don now mills five days a week, and while that means he no longer has time to bake, his flour is sold from Manhattan to Albany, and his customers include top city chefs who are as taken with his flour as he was with that very first bag. His single biggest customer is Eataly, whose Manhattan outpost buys as much as Don can mill. The local farmers he buys from now grow more than a hundred acres of grain, but Don hopes to get that number up to 500 acres—and that he'll get competition as more New Yorkers are inspired to buy their own mills.

Don and his peers have worked "to get grains grown, processed, and distributed in this region. The farmers are happy, growing more acreage, getting a premium. It's about rebuilding the fundamentals of the food system and also making a decent living. I keep doing it because I believe in it. That's how I got here."