

NOTABLE EDIBLES

BY MICHAEL WELCH

FARM TO CONSUMER LEGAL DEFENSE FUND

Ever wonder what a farmer does when he or she needs a lawyer?

With astronomical hourly fees, enough paperwork to choke a camel and baffling legalese, it seems unlikely that a farmer would ever want to step off the farm for legal counsel. Most growers would prefer to handle agreements with a handshake and a good deal of trust. But this is America and farmers get sued, even arrested. And not just by their local authorities, but by large corporations and even our government.

So where do farmers go when they need legal help but have already put this season's funds into feed and fertilizer? Well, for certain cases, particularly those involving their rights to work directly with consumers, they turn to the Farm-to-Consumer Legal Defense Fund (FTCLDF). This nonprofit organization was developed in 2007 "to defend the freedoms and to broaden the rights of sustainable farmers and their consumers to produce and consume local, nutrient-dense food."

A group of lawyers and consumers got together to start this organization when sales of raw milk caused controversy and legal difficulty for farmers who chose not to pasteurize their product before sharing with informed customers. The fund provides affordable legal counsel to farmers and consumers and has been quite active in the Finger Lakes.

Last year when the Smith family of Meadowsweet Farm in Lodi had product seized and their livelihood endangered, the FTCLDF stepped in. Many courtroom hours followed, which would have bankrupted the Smiths, not to mention kept them away from their first priority, their cows.

"We could not possibly be doing what we're doing without them," says Barbara Smith. "The FTCLDF is covering all expenses for the case and as of now, they've incurred \$40,000 in costs. Even if we lose, they're prepared to appeal and keep our case going."

Smith continues with praise, "The lawyers are passionate about supporting small family farms and are working to create change in our national system. Many of them grew up on farms and know the challenges American farmers are facing."

"We hope to restore family farms to the prominent place they once held in American society," says Taaron Meikle, president of the FTCLDF and a fifth-generation member of a Colorado farm-



Photo by Carole Topalian

ing family. "Our founding fathers saw family farms as the very backbone of American society. Yet today small farmers are an endangered species because of government laws and regulations that serve big agri-business and make it difficult for small farms to be profitable."

In addition to the retail of raw milk, the FTCLDF has several other issues to contest on the roster, namely, the USDA's National Animal Identification System, which requires farmers to attach radio frequency tags to their livestock and report on their whereabouts. To find out more about the Farm-to-Consumer Legal Defense Fund and how you can support its efforts, visit www.farmtoconsumer.org.

DO WHAT MAMA SAYS

If you're a *real* Finger Lakes local, even your cookbook collection is local. The usual suspects are there: a smattering of Moosewoods, the Dinosaur Barbeque tome, and now you have a new one to add. Sam Izzo at Simply Red Lakeside Bistro has just come out with a collection of her greatest comfort food hits. *Mama Red's Comfort Kitchen* is a 134-page celebration of lip-smacking, oooh-inducing, tried-and-true comfort food recipes. In 2002 Sam turned Trumansburg on its head by offering the region's best fried chicken and biscuits at rock bot-



tom prices every Monday night, and anyone who liked to eat found his or her way there. Live music got the place jumping and Sam's creative touch with spices from her South African heritage hooked people deep. Now she's setting you up to create your own Monday night celebration, wherever you are. The book is filled with classic recipes, but one nice and unusual touch is that it starts with some lovely drink concoctions like Mint Juleps and "Porchswing Cocktails." Home cooks know the best way to get going in the kitchen is to pour a sweet one before settling in to work. In addition to the recipes, there is a companion disc of songs available from the Evil City String Band for you to enjoy while you cook. Even if you're not a cook and have no intention of ever picking up a whisk, you'll enjoy this book for the creative recipe titles that would make a proper Southern lady blush, like "Kickass Cornbread." Other favorites are "Truck Stop Barbeque Beans," "Angry Vinegar" and "Family Reunion Dinner Ham." The book sells for \$14.95 and is available at Sam's Simply Red Bistro at Shel-drake Point Vineyard, at Amazon.com, and several local, independent bookstores.

YOU MOW IT, THEY MUNCH IT

Just like in South Beach, LA or NYC, there is an obsession with diet these days in the Finger Lakes. Not in humans, mind you, but in our livestock. What the animals eat before we eat them is the latest topic of consideration for foodies looking for the best quality, flavor and health in their meat products. Thanks to books like Michael Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma* and Catherine Friend's *The Compassionate Carnivore*, we can all learn about the multi-compartmented stomachs of cows and why grass is a better diet for them and us. Meat from cows that forage on wild greens (alfalfa, clover and the many types of grass) is said to be lower in saturated fats and higher in good Omega-3 fatty acids as well as beta-carotene, than those raised on grain diets. However, the flavor superiority of grass-fed over factory meat might be what wins you over. I did a test run of some steak I bought from High Point Farms in Trumansburg on my Irish-American brother-in-law, a lifetime hard-core carnivore. It was as if he had been released from mediocre-meat prison and set free to discover a whole new world of quality steak, chops and roasts. We're fortunate in Central New York that there is plenty of pasture and many farmers have the luxury of abundant grassland for the cows to roam and dine on what's in front of them. My own dilemma is that when meeting these cows out in pasture, I see what gorgeous creatures they are and wonder if I can still eat them. Chef Jonah McKeough of Hazelnut Kitchen offered me a motto: "The cuter the cow, the better it tastes." Well then, make mine downright adorable. And grass-fed for sure.



Photo by Carole Topalian

ICE WINE IN THE SUMMERTIME

Ice wine gets a lot of attention in the winter, when the grapes are freezing on the vine and field workers are out in layers of coats and gloves picking fruit, but who wants to drink something icy cold when it's zero degrees outside? Summertime, when the temperature soars and there's no shade in sight, is a perfect season to appreciate this sweet dessert wine. Best served at whatever setting you like to keep your refrigerator, somewhere around 40°, a sip should give you a shiver up the spine and cool you down, if only momentarily. It can be enjoyed as an aperitif, or with a dessert of chilled fruit and some mild, soft cheese. For the "wine cocktail" lovers and mixologists, shake 2 ounces ice wine with equal parts vodka and some ice in a cocktail shaker, strain into a chilled glass, garnish with sliced grapes and you've got what's known as an "ice-tini." The cold climate in the Finger Lakes gives us some world-quality choices when it comes to choosing a local version. Wagner Vineyards, Castle Grisich, Standing Stone, Hunt Country and Casa Larga are just a few of the wineries that keep ice wine on their shelves year 'round. It's pricier than regular wine because of the low yield of the fruit and high labor of production, but if you want to bring a bit of winter into your summer, this could be just your thing.



HOW DO YOU DUKKAH?

These days I dukkah just fine, thank you. Dukkah being a mixture of ground pistachios, hazelnuts, sesame seeds and the earthy spices of coriander and cumin. Egyptians have enjoyed this appetizing condiment for centuries, dunking fresh bread in heady, rich olive oil and then dipping it in the fragrant ground spices and nuts. But you don't have to get out the passport to nosh like a pharaoh. Allens Hill Farm in Bloomfield has come up with a great combination using all the authentic ingredients and is selling them in convenient packages throughout the Finger Lakes. They've even given the mixture a spicy twist with their "Dukkah Hazzard" version, which includes smoked sea salt, garlic and habanero powder. These savory mixes are good for sprinkling on salads and for coating fish, chicken and shrimp. There's also a sweet dukkah, creatively called "Let's Dukkah Breakfast," which has roasted almonds, hazelnuts, macadamias, freshly toasted sesame seeds and coriander with organic sugar and cinnamon—a perfect topping for some yogurt and fresh fruit. John Loveland, who owns and runs Allens Hill Farm, already had a full roster of various baking mixes and apple cider molasses and syrup concoctions when he decided to take on the dukkah. Piqued by a conversation he had with a woman from Australia who mentioned her frustration with not being able to get dukkah in the United States, he went to his kitchen laboratory and started tinkering with ingredients until he got a dukkah that he, and the frustrated Australian, found worthy. A year has passed since he put the packages on the market and dukkah is now one of his most popular items. The ingredients sound simple enough to make yourself, but if you've ever peeled the skin off of hazelnuts, you'll know if you get your dukkah from someone else, you'll spend more time dipping and less time laboring. Just like Cleopatra would have wanted.

