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A Party for Local Farming And Locally Grown Food

COLD SPRING, N.Y.

Jennifer Small and Michael Yezzi, the husband-and-wife proprietors of Flying Pigs Farm, which raises rare breeds of pigs that roam around 150

PETER APPLEBOME
OUR TOWNS
acres in Shushan, N.Y., near Saratoga, made an extra stop Saturday night on their way back from their weekly deliveries to the eight restaurants they regularly serve and the farmers' markets in Union Square in Manhattan and Grand Army Plaza in Brooklyn.

They drove down a two-mile dirt road, walked up a path marked by dozens of candles in prim white bags and made their way to a brightly lighted barn to celebrate a place, an idea and a moment.

The place was the Glynwood Center, a working farm, advocacy group and agricultural research organization devoted to the modest goal of "helping communities in the Northeast save farming." The idea — or maybe it's ideas — is that sustainable local agriculture is an old way of life whose time has come again. And the moment was the series of events that have made the gathering of 200 people on a September night something other than a quixotic fringe assemblage.

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Yes, most of us still buy our Froot Loops from the A.& P. and our Big Macs from McDonald's, and much of the food from local growers is too expensive to suit most people. But for the farmers, eaters, friends and donors from New York City and the Hudson Valley who turned out, it was one of those markers of how much issues of sustainable agriculture have seeped into the conversation of what we should eat.

Mr. Yezzi talked about the people he met. One person was in agricultural microfinance. There was a land-use planner, a landscape architect who worked with abandoned farms, a lawyer, a pig farmer from Iowa.

"You could never have had something like this 10 years ago, but there's something that's worked its way incrementally where you have so many people from so many disciplines passionate about these issues," Mr. Yezzi said.

Glynwood is a nonprofit organization dedicated to rural conservation, and includes a 225-acre working farm. It raises animals, does research on sustainable agriculture and runs programs aimed at helping communities keep farmers and rebuild links between the farmers and potential customers.

Saturday's event was a recognition of how much vibrant agriculture still remains in New York State. In the Hudson Valley alone, there are nearly 4,000



KELLY SHIMODA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Bourbon reds, a heritage breed of turkey, at Glynwood Center in Cold Spring, a combination farm, research station and farming advocacy group.

small and midsize family farms on 1,000 square miles of farmland that increasingly reach people at farmers' markets and through community-supported agriculture programs, in which people typically pay a yearly fee for regular baskets of produce or locally produced meat.

And it was a reflection of how pressing the issues remain, both about farming locally (Glynwood said that in 2002, two-thirds of farmers in the North-

east reported an operating loss) and about the industrial food production model nationally (pick your issue: health, nutrition, sustainability, taste, etc., or consult the Michael Pollan canon).

Farmers don't get much recognition, unless they're Cheryl Rogowski, a farmer from Pine Island, N.Y., who in 2004 became the first farmer to win a MacArthur Fellowship for her work that included creating the first low-income

community-supported agriculture program in New York.

Still, Ms. Rogowski said, she's encouraged by the interest in local food and the involvement of people whose jobs don't involve sitting on a tractor.

"It's really important to have people out there connecting these links," she said. "When you're a farmer, you're farming — you're working in the fields, working with your animals, tending your crops, you're on a tractor, you're planting, you're harvesting. You don't have the time or maybe the desire to be out there communicating with people and building the kind of regional food systems and distribution systems we need."

In truth, the event on Saturday felt a little too good to be true.

The rain that had threatened all day held off. The fare included wondrous locally grown food — Hudson Valley duck prosciutto, Pine Island herbed roasted fingerling potatoes, local cheeses and greens, a French-cut chicken breast that was so meaty it seemed an entirely different animal than most of us get to consume. Auction items included pasture-raised lamb, a garden consultation and a Glynwood beehive. Two local bands performed with rootsy verve well into the night as people danced on the sawdust floor.

It's a long way from one sweet night in the country to fixing the gargantuan machine that is the American way of food. But for one night, just an hour north of New York City, you could glimpse a vision, however fleeting, of what was and perhaps could still be.

AS SEEN IN

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