

Articles

Could the Hudson Valley be the Next Napa?

An Exploratory Discussion Organized by Minetta Brook and Glynwood Center

The Hudson River Valley's strong agricultural heritage is under siege. The farmers who have created the working landscapes that characterize the heart of the Valley struggle to find ways to stay on the land in the face of misguided federal agricultural policy, concentration in the food industry, and increasingly intense development pressure.

Napa Valley serves as a model, for it has successfully created its identity as a place of rich cultural life, beautiful agricultural landscapes, high quality agricultural products and great restaurants featuring a distinctive cuisine based on fresh local foods. This identity has contributed to the value of regional products and to strong tourism.

Does a similar opportunity exist in the Hudson Valley? If a strong bond between identity and cuisine can be forged, it would strengthen the economic base of the farmers and local communities, help stabilize the current agricultural land base, and encourage specialized production, including the reintroduction of nearly forgotten fruits and vegetables.

Minetta Brook and Glynwood Center are convening a diverse group of regional farmers, chefs, food writers, policy makers and restaurateurs from the Hudson River Valley and New York City to explore the existing and potential connection between food, cuisine and the Valley's identity.

This event at Glynwood Center is part of a series of food events and roundtables on the topic of the food and culinary tastes emerging from the Hudson Valley. This convening will build upon the many efforts to develop sustainable agriculture in the Valley, as well as the following Minetta Brook and Glynwood Center initiatives:

Minetta Brook is a non-profit arts organization that organizes public art projects that bring together contemporary artists and communities throughout New York State. Its new Watershed Project will present the work of ten artists that focus on the natural and cultural geography of the Hudson River Valley. One of these projects, Christian Philipp Müller's Hudson Valley Tastemakers, will feature an earth sculpture and food events that examine the specific tastes of food resulting from the changing nature, soil and climate of the Hudson Valley. This project focuses on the interrelationship between the production of food in the Valley and its consumption in New York City. It has been developed collaboratively with Hudson Valley farmers, herbalists, and chefs from Columbia, Green, Dutchess, Orange, Putnam and Ulster counties and New York City.

Minetta Brook's Watershed program will open on Saturday, May 24, 2003. As part of the opening event, a major food event for 500 - 1,000 people will be

organized in connection with Christian Philipp Müller's Hudson Valley Tastemakers project.

Glynwood Center helps communities address change in ways that conserve local culture and natural resources, while strengthening economic well-being. Glynwood Center does this by gathering, developing, testing and sharing ideas and initiatives from the United States and abroad. Because much of its work is in small and rural communities, agriculture is a primary focus of Glynwood's efforts. For example, Glynwood is currently coordinating a Countryside Exchange program through which an international team of professionals will explore how agritourism can contribute to the economic viability of farmers in the Hudson Valley. Glynwood is also undertaking a major initiative to facilitate the evolution of a regional food system in the Valley.

It is our hope that this February gathering at Glynwood Center will serve as a testing ground for ideas about Hudson Valley cuisine, inform Minetta Brook's May event, and help strengthen advocacy for the production and consumption of local food and recognition of its importance to the region's economic development. We anticipate a second gathering at Glynwood in the fall at which we will consider the results of Minetta Brook's May food event, the ideas generated through the Agritourism Exchange and other relevant activities in the Valley, and discuss possible further action.