

### Dining

#### Farm to Table, Part Two

The second installment of a four-part series: Sunderland's Kitchen Garden Farm and Northampton's Circa Restaurant

By Mary Nelen

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On a sunny day in May, a man emerges from a field in Sunderland and walks up the hill to a farm house. At his back are people hovering over early beds of greens and in the distance is Mt. Sugarloaf. He is wearing a starched shirt, tails out, and shades his eyes in the early morning sunlight. The man is local chef Jeremy Whitcomb. He has made the trip from Circa, his 40-seat restaurant in Northampton, to observe the food he will be serving customer for the rest of the summer. The couple who owns the farm knows what he likes. They've been in cahoots for years.



Mary Nelen Photo

Caroline Pam and Tim Wilcox run The Kitchen Garden, a 7-acre farm that caters to chefs, specialty stores, farmers' markets and their own CSA shareholders. Caroline is familiar with finicky clientele and Jeremy fits that category. "Green Street Cafe," says Jeremy, and laughs. Pam was once Whitcomb's pastry chef at Green Street Cafe in Northampton.

"He was very detail-oriented," Pam says. "If my creme brulee wasn't perfect he'd let me know."

"That was my job," Whitcomb replies gravely.

Now the chef is on Pam's territory, and without her food, his menu might be less than perfect. Pam and Wilcox have been selling to Whitcomb since he bought Circa Restaurant several years ago. He is head chef there and his menu is small, perky and original, relying heavily on fresh food.

On this spring day, the Kitchen Garden Farm is humming along. The tomatoes are going into the ground; under row cover and being irrigated are new lettuce, zucchini and cucumbers. In a few weeks, the zucchini will produce blooms—the kind that Whitcomb will fill with cheese, batter and fry.

"If you buy from a vendor, you don't get this kind of product," says Whitcomb. "Also, I don't want to order from some guy in a warehouse. His heart isn't in it like mine. This is my life."

The farmers are taking several minutes away from planting to talk with Whitcomb. Their boots are caked with mud. Pam is six months pregnant. Her family's destiny lies before them in the fields, and next to them, with one their customers. Whitcomb asks about a particular row of plants.

"Those we'll harvest as garlic bulbs in July," says Pam. Whitcomb takes a handful of stalks from her and looks them over. "I'll probably use these as a pistou," he says, referring to a process that

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turns the plant into a garlicky paste. "Maybe it will go with the mussels," he says. "Like last year."

The tour of the property continues and there is discussion about what vegetables will be coming, and when. Talk drifts to the restaurant's schedule of events, starting with graduation and then moving on to Restaurant Week. There is talk of Whitcomb's new motorcycle and Pam's second baby, due in several months. The group stops to have a peek at a bed of lettuce under a row cover. The plants are still young but will be ready in about a week.

"I can't wait," says Whitcomb. "The hardest part about this job is waiting for the season, waiting for everything to be in season. You really have to have a lot of patience."

The progress for Kitchen Garden had been steady and quite rapid, but the sure hand of sustainability is in evidence. This year they are growing 200 varieties of plants, serving a few stores, 50 CSA shareholders and more than a dozen restaurants. Pam and Wilcox aren't seeking to build a bigger operation.

"This is all of the land we will be working on," says Pam. "Our goal is to stay small. We don't see ourselves becoming a 500-share CSA."

They stop to take a look at the tractors in the barn: a bright green John Deere and an old red Farmall. Wilcox drives out each one, describing how their design determines the width of the beds. He is a happy man, sitting on that old red Farmall.

"We have two types of soil [at Kitchen Farm], Winooski and a Hadley loam. We are part of a big meadow that, 100,000 years ago, was a lake," he says. "It was fairly well drained in some areas and our farm house and some of the barns used to be the shore of the lake. The soil is great for veggies. There is not a rock to be found." Wilcox is ebullient and, at the same time, fairly mellow about the hours and years of work that stretch before him.

As they walk away from the fields and up toward the house, Whitcomb says, "Now if the farmhouse were a restaurant, then we would have something."

The Kitchen Garden website, [www.kitchengardenfarm.com](http://www.kitchengardenfarm.com), reports on the changing landscape of farming and provides recipes and other information.

#### Recipe of the Week: Spring Garlic and Eggs

Spring garlic is a seasonal delicacy only to be enjoyed in June. As with scallions, you can eat both the white stalk and the green leaves—both have a sweet flavor and are bursting with garlicky juice. This recipe is also terrific with garlic scapes, the flower bud that forms on certain types of garlic in June, just before the bulb starts to bulge and divide into cloves.

1 cup chopped spring garlic

2 Tbsp. olive oil

Quarter cup grated Parmesan or Romano cheese

4 eggs

salt and pepper

Saute the garlic in the olive oil for 5 minutes or so, until the garlic is soft and starting to brown. Add the cheese in an even layer and immediately crack the eggs on top. Fry the eggs over high, sprinkle with salt and pepper, then flip. The bottom should be a slightly charred mass of crispy, salty, garlicky goodness. Cook the yolks easy or hard as desired.

Serves two.

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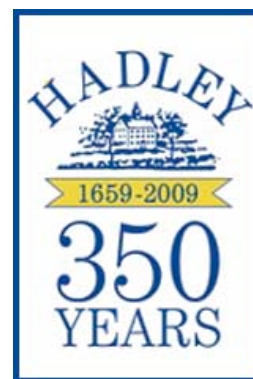
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