



Watershed Agricultural Council

Farm To Market Update



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It's Time to Get In the Guide!

For the third season, farms and businesses have an opportunity to join together to promote local agriculture by registering for the *Pure Catskills* Guide and campaign. Members are being sought for the 2006 *Pure Catskills Guide to Farm Fresh Products* which will be ready for release in May, just as fresh, local crops begin to become available. The purpose of the Guide is to promote the protection of the Catskills' environment by showcasing the farms and businesses that raise or sell products here.

The demand for fresh, local and value-added products is growing at an unprecedented rate, so the Guide presents an opportunity to let people know where they can find these products. Last year, over 25,000 copies of the Guide became dog-eared companions to local residents and tourists who say they want to know where to find locally-grown food, when they can visit farms, and how they can support the businesses that support the agricultural heritage of the Catskill Region.

New in 2006 will be a searchable on-line database at www.buypurecatskills.com listing all member farms and businesses. The basic cost of farm membership is covered by the \$25 fee to be included in the Guide. Business listings in the Guide begin at \$90 and include a small display ad. The Guide will include farms and businesses throughout Otsego, Delaware, Schoharie, Sullivan, Greene and Ulster counties and will be distributed throughout those counties and beyond at farmers markets, Chambers of Commerce, tourist destinations, dining and lodging establishments and resorts.

To become a listed member, call Peggy at the Catskill Mountain Foundation at (518) 263-4908 ext. 210 or download the application at www.buypurecatskills.com. The deadline is March 31, 2006. Funding for the *Pure Catskills* Guide is provided by the Watershed Agricultural Council with support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, New York City Department of Environmental Protection, and the Catskill Mountain Foundation.

Real Good for Free

Going Wild with Ramps and Fiddleheads

Our northern hardwood forests produce an abundant supply of plants and animals that have historically served as important "wild" foods for both Native Americans and settlers. Early spring is a particularly good time to harvest two of these

treasures that appear in our region as soon as the snow begins to melt.

Ramps, also called wild leeks, (*Allium tricoccum*) appear on the forest floor before the trees even leaf out each spring, usually in areas with rich, moist soil. They are generally found in colonies ranging from a few plants to places where an acre or more of the forest floor may be covered with them. They feature two elliptical leaves joined at the base of the plant. Each leaf is six to ten inches long and they are easily identified by the characteristic onion smell and taste. The leaves are ephemeral, which means that they disappear after a few weeks, even before the flower stalks arise.

The best time to harvest ramps is early in the spring as soon as the leaves appear, when their white, somewhat bulbous, but more leek-like root is least pungent in flavor. Ramps taste like a cross between onion and garlic with a strong flavor and distinctive bite that gets hotter as the season progresses. They can be grilled, sautéed, or eaten raw. Some communities in Appalachia feature ramp festivals to celebrate the arrival of spring.

Fiddleheads are unopened fern fronds (leaves) that somewhat resemble the necks of violins or bass fiddles. All fern fronds (leaves) begin as fiddleheads and are edible while in this stage. Certain fern fronds are toxic when consumed later in the season, but in early spring their young, unfurled leaves provide a tasty treat when sautéed, blanched or pickled. They are wonderful paired with morels, another foraged delicacy, and can often be substituted for asparagus.

Both of these wild spring foods should be carefully and responsibly wild crafted for one's own personal use. Restaurant and gourmet food suppliers buy both ramps and fiddleheads on a wholesale basis. Storing these vegetables properly is extremely important as they deteriorate quickly in plastic bags.

Breathable paper bags or boxes are the best bets for extending shelf life. Harvesters should learn how to propagate ramps and fiddleheads in order to insure future sustainable harvests. If your woodland produces a good supply of these plants, the odds are good that you can even expand the supply with a little conscious effort.

This article was written by Bob Beyfuss, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Greene County Development Office for New York State. For more information please call (315) 477-6409.

Workshops and Lectures

Meat Producers' Meeting

March 10 from 10:00am – 1:00pm

Cornell Cooperative Extension, Hamden

The Watershed Agricultural Council invites all local meat producers to attend a "Meat Producers' Meeting" at the Cornell Cooperative Extension in Hamden on March 10, 2006 from 10:00am until 1:00pm. The intent of this meeting is to create a network of local meat producers with similar growing practices and products and to organize marketing, sales and distribution efforts.

George Faison of Artisanal and former co-owner of D'Artagnan, one of the most prestigious specialty meat wholesalers in the New York metropolitan area, will be present to share what he has learned about demand for local and specialty products. He will also inform the group about his new venture and his plans to expand marketing and distribution efforts. A gathering of local meat producers will provide him with invaluable information about local product availability.

The meeting will also feature Rick Bishop, Agricultural Economic Development Specialist for Sullivan County. Rick will talk about the new slaughterhouse that he has been planning and building in Liberty. He will share his experiences dealing with direct sales to restaurants throughout the region and in New York City.

A light lunch will be supplied by the WAC. Please call Allison Bennett at (607) 865-7790, ext. 125 if you are planning to attend.

Farming On the Emerald Isle

March 15 at 7:00pm

Lucky Dog Café, Hamden

In the spirit of St. Patrick's Day, Dan Flaherty, owner of Tir na Nog Farm in Walton and Small Farms Coordinator for the Watershed Agricultural Council, will give a slide show and talk of his recent journey to Ireland. He attended the International Grassland Congress in Dublin, where farmers and agriculture professionals from over ninety countries throughout the world met to discuss grass-based farming practices. Coffee, tea and desserts will be available, and Hannah Lamont of Delhi will perform Irish melodies on the Celtic harp.

Sullivan County to Host Ag Day

March 25 from 10:30am – 3:30pm

Rubin Pollack BOCES Education Center, Liberty

The Cornell Cooperative Extension of Sullivan County is sponsoring "Ag Day" this year to expand upon the "Dairy Day" event that was held in previous years.

The new program will focus on a broader spectrum of agricultural production including dairy and livestock, commercial horticulture, natural resources and agronomy. It will feature speakers and vendors associated with these areas of production.

Interested vendors may contact Cooperative Extension at (845) 292-6180.

Farmstead and Artisan Cheese Making Workshop

March 27, 28, 29 from 9:00am – 4:00pm

Dairy Incubator Center, SUNY Morrisville

The New York State Farmstead and Artisan Cheese Makers Guild, in collaboration with the Watershed Agricultural Council, is sponsoring the Farmstead and Artisan cheese Making Workshop to be held March 27, 28 and 29 from 9 am to 4 pm at SUNY Morrisville.

This hands-on program is offered to farmers and others intending to develop or refine an artisan cheese making business. Workshop participants will gain experience in the practical aspects of manufacturing a mature, hard-pressed cheese, a non-pressed cheese, and a surface ripened cheese. The practical experience will be reinforced with the teaching and discussion of the scientific reasons for the various aspects of cheese.

To allow for a hands-on experience and individual attention, the course is limited to 15.

This workshop will be led by seasoned teacher, cheese maker and farm-based entrepreneur, Kathy Biss of West Highland Dairy in Scotland. Kathy is the author of *Practical Cheesemaking*. In addition to running a sheep dairy with her husband, David, Kathy has taught cheese making and dairy courses for farmers for several decades, and has had an active consulting business with a diverse clientele. At West Highland Dairy, a small commercial farmstead dairy, Kathy and David manufacture a variety of artisan cheeses, including hard, soft, blue and surface ripened cheeses.

Kathy Biss will be available for consulting with farmstead and other artisan cheese makers and dairy processors during her visit.

For more information about consultation or accommodations in the Morrisville area, contact Jane North at (607) 849-3328 or e-mail jbarbernorth@juno.net or Linda Smith at (607) 829-8852, or e-mail Linda@sherman-hill.net.

The cost of the workshop is \$300.00 for the three days of training. The Watershed Agricultural Council will provide five scholarships for \$150.00 each to the first five people to apply who are also members of the *Pure Catskills* campaign. *Pure Catskills* membership is presently defined as being registered to be listed in our 2006 products guide. Prospective scholarship recipients may register to be listed in the *Pure Catskills* Guide in order to qualify for a scholarship. Registration forms are available at www.buypurecatskills.com, or by calling Allison Bennett at (607) 865-7790, ext. 125.

Farm to Market Update is published by the Watershed Agricultural Council with funding from the New York City Department of Environmental Protection and the W.K.Kellogg Foundation.