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rive or take the train just 40 minutes from Manhattan and you'll hit farmland. The Hudson Valley is a fertile, food-rich agricultural area, perhaps best known for its sweet produce, pasture-raised meats and gourmet finds such as earthy truffles and foie gras.

Just up the hill from the Tarrytown train station lies a sprawling, stone building, nestled in a sea of rolling hills characteristic of this area. In the distance you might see a few pigs, some goats, maybe a chicken or two grazing on the green pastures below. This is Blue Hill at Stone Barns.

Eight years ago, award-winning chef and restaurateur Dan Barber opened this outpost of his famed, Manhattan-based Blue Hill restaurant as an extension of his farm-to-table way of living and eating.

Barber has spoken extensively on the subject of sustainability. At Stone Barns, he has aimed to “blur the line between the dining experience and the educational, bringing the principles of good farming directly to the table.”

Adam Kaye, the *chef de cuisine*, has helped Barber manage and maintain the restaurant on the farm as an extension of this vision. He's keen to point out that the Blue Hill restaurant is a tenant, not an owner or operator of the >

Going local

A growing number of farmers, chefs, restaurants and universities are transforming the US food system. Amelia Levin heads up the Hudson Valley to visit the Blue Hill restaurant at Stone Barns for a glimpse of how our food should be produced, cooked and eaten



JONATHAN YOUNG

AN EXTENDED VERSION... of this article can be found at foodserviceconsultant.org

Stone Barns farm. And the farm doesn't only sell food to Blue Hill – though it is the largest buyer. It also sells its products to the public at its own and other farmer's markets.

Barber's brother David founded the Stone Barns Center for Food and Agriculture in 2004. "After winning a bid to run the restaurant the same year, Dan and David worked with the Rockefeller family to bring in agriculture experts to manage the farm," Kaye says. The non-profit education and

farming centre trains new farmers and the community, and also provides fresh, pesticide-free produce, humanely-raised meat, eggs and honey to Blue Hill, local residents, and other businesses in the area. "The farm here is 100% tied to the local food community," adds Kaye.

Jack Algiers manages the produce side of the farm, including the 22,000-sq ft greenhouse, while Craig Hainey manages the livestock, overseeing a rotational grazing operation on 23 acres of pastureland.

"We purchase about 70% of what's produced on the farm," says Kaye. Blue Hill takes cues from the farmers onsite to plan its menus, maintaining an open dialogue and holding meetings once a year to discuss what worked and what didn't.

"We have no written menu," says Kaye. "We offer a number of courses our guests can choose from. We create dishes around the ebb and flow of ingredients from the farm."

Last summer, during a heatwave, Algiers called Kaye

to tell him he would be pulling all the spinach and would he like to buy the bounty. "I bought it all on the spot," he says. "Every dish that week was guaranteed to have some spinach in it." Spinach was creamed and served with pressed parsnips and a runny-yolk pullet egg. It even blended with speck for a filling for rolled Berkshire pork.

Such variety challenges Kaye's creativity daily. While successful dishes may be reworked, he also says he's tried to think out of the protein-as-centre-of-the-plate tradition to present these heirloom vegetables more front-and-centre.

"Jack once let his parsnips grow longer over winter so we ended up with giant parsnips about 14 or 15-inches long, and very thick," Kaye says. Thinking along the steakhouse lines, Kay roasted each one under a whole brick until it softened, then sent it out to the dining room to be carved tableside like a traditional rib roast for two.

"We believe in the importance of raising animals

THOMAS SCHAUER

“We have no written menu. We create dishes around the flow of ingredients from the farm”

right and certainly celebrate meat, but oftentimes, we think how can we stretch the idea of a main protein further?” Kaye says. “Serving dishes in this way engages people and lets us celebrate and have fun with what we create while at the same time making something incredibly delicious.”

Blue Hill at Stone Barns takes in whole animals raised on the farm, from Berkshire and Ossabaw hogs to pastured chickens and turkeys. A smoker out back allows the team to cure, preserve and smoke every part of the meat. “We have a full-time butcher here and he is a very busy guy,” Kaye says. The restaurant will go through two or three pigs a week and hang extra meat for

the Manhattan location. It also buys from other farmers in the Hudson Valley and upstate New York. “At the height of the growing season, up to 80% of what we’re getting is easily from within 100 miles,” Kaye says. Even during the colder months, Stone Barns’ greenhouse can provide fresh produce.

Once the produce comes in the back door, handling it with the highest health and culinary standards and intentions is important. “Everyone, from the prep cooks to the chef, knows they need to treat this food with respect,” says Kaye, “because it’s very delicate and not cheap. All the farmer’s good work can easily be destroyed by poor handling on our end.”

Kaye says he’s confident access to local, healthily-raised food will continue to increase for both consumers and chefs.

“Accessibility to good local produce has been constantly on the increase,” he says. “There has also been a huge growth in small scale, local and regional distribution for farmers. Another interesting change is that chefs have this consciousness that all locally produced food tastes better and fresher, but that’s not always the case. It matters how the food is grown or raised.”

Moreover, chefs are playing a more integral role in the development of local, sustainable food. Many now work much more closely with farmers to ask questions, learn about new varieties and even plan – and plant – ahead, given space and capacity.

“Chefs have become part of that supply chain and can be a force for change as well,” Kaye says. “They’re not just passive recipients or end-users anymore; they’re actively participating in the entire life cycle of our food system.” ■



ANNABEL BRAITHWAITE

Stone Barns Center for Food and Agriculture

Located 30 miles north of Manhattan in Pocantico Hills, New York, the Stone Barns Center for Food and Agriculture is a 501 (c) 3 non-profit institution operating an 80-acre farm in the Hudson River Valley with a mission to improve the way America eats and farms by creating a “healthy and sustainable food system that benefits us all.” Established in 2004, it works with farmers and the community to train young or new farmers in resilient, restorative farming techniques through its Growth Farmers Initiative. It also educates children about the sources of their food and raises public awareness of healthy, seasonal and sustainable food.

Stone Barns grows more than 200 varieties of produce year-round without using pesticides, herbicides or chemical additives. Products, grown in 6.5 acres of outdoor fields, gardens and in a 22,000-square foot, minimally-heated greenhouse, are also used for classes. Stone Barns also welcomes 18 apprentices a year to farm and learn and is host to about 250 beginner farmers every December at its Young Farmers Conference.

The Center also participates in frequent seed trials to help ensure that small and mid-size farmers continue to have a wide variety of ecologically and financially viable crops.

