SAFE FOOD COMMITTEE REPORT

December 26, 2022



PLOW TO PLATE PRESENTS: *THIS ORGANIC LIFE—HAWTHORNE VALLEY FARM*

By Adam Rabiner

This Organic Life is a television series found on HUDSY, a community-inspired app and media platform with a mission to bring the Hudson Valley "closer together online and in-person, fostering connection in innovative, collaborative and unique ways." Episode one, hosted by Wen-Jay Ying, owner and founder of Local Roots NYC, focuses on Hawthorne Valley Farm in Ghent, New York. In the course of Wen-Jay's visit to the farm, she talks to Executive Director Martin Ping, Field Vegetable and CSA Manager Todd Newlin, Dairy Herd Manager Jess Brobst and Creamery Manager Jeremy Shapiro. These conversations show that Hawthorne Valley Farm similarly fosters connection, community and innovation through its biodynamic and regenerative farming, farm store, Waldorf school and educational programs.

Ping, who oversees the whole operation, provides the big picture: a farm striving to create a balance between the land, animals, plants and people—all the more challenging due to climate change and COVID. He explains the need for imagination to attempt this balance. The farm seeks to foster connections among co-workers, consumers, producers and members of the community, near and far. Like our own Food Coop, Ping sees the exchange of goods and services as being about relationships, not simply transactions. When you personally know the farmers who produce your food, the nourishment you receive from a meal exceeds its nutritional value. Ping rejects the market-based paradigms of industrial agriculture focused exclusively on balance sheets and profitability, and looks beyond them to determine the farm's return on investment. Admiring the beautiful Berkshire mountains in the distance, he points to his favorite peak, spreads his arms and pronounces that he is among the one-tenth of one percent—one of the wealthiest men on the planet.

THE CYCLE OF LIFE ON A FARM

Todd Newlin explains how the farm makes compost, laying piles of food waste and other organic matter in covered windrows. The compost is not for direct use on any vegetable crop but for cover crops which will eventually be plowed into the earth in preparation for the subsequent vegetables. The cover crop's purpose is not simply to strengthen the soil and hold the land in place, but also to enrich the soil by adding organic matter like nitrogen. Newlin is harking back to the farming practices of the original Native American stewards of the land, who respected and replicated the natural systems, which resemble a self-feeding circle. He concedes that it is tough but worth it: when achieved, the land is more resilient and the vegetables, with roots deep in the rich soil, taste better.

Wen-Jay was fortunate to visit Jess Brobst on the very morning that Bertha gave birth to a baby bull. Jess explains that the act of giving birth turned Bertha into a cow. Before that, she was actually a heifer. Bertha, who still has her placenta attached, is part of the B line. Her baby's name will start with B to better track its lineage. The placenta, which is nutritionally rich, will be left for Bertha to eat if she desires. Jess hy-

pothesizes that some cows do this instinctually, to clean up the birth site and keep predators away. If not eaten, it will be added to the compost heap. Jess points out a lame bull lying nearby who may be put down if he cannot recover. She then points at the newborn (perhaps to be named Billie) and says these two animals are a great example of the cycle of life on a farm.

THE HUDSON VALLEY IS A MAJOR SUPPLIER OF OUR COOP

Jeremy Shapiro demonstrates how Hawthorne Valley milks its cows, with a mechanical suction device attached to the teats on the udder. Each cow can give anywhere from five to ten gallons a day, more or less, depending on the soil and grass or particular cow. He explains that smaller dairy farmers have a hard time competing with larger operations due to the cost structures and lack of economies of scale. He observes that the dairy industry as a whole is suffering from less demand due to changing dietary habits and the belief that cows contribute disproportionately to methane production and global warming.

One can only look forward to future episodes featuring Gopal, Kinderhook and Deep Roots farms. We are fortunate that the Hudson Valley is a major supplier of our Coop.

This Organic Life—Hawthorne Valley Farm, coming up on Tuesday, January 10, 2023, at 7 p.m.

Screening link: https://plowtoplatefilms.weebly.com/upcoming-events.html