

'sustainable, local cuisine'

is it a trend? is it a fad? is it real?



WHEN THE NATIONAL RESTAURANT ASSOCIATION (NRA) surveyed 1,800 chefs nationwide, they concluded that at the head of the top ten menu trends for 2012 are locally grown produce, locally sourced meats and seafood, and locally produced wine and beer. "Sustainability" tops the list for the latest and most popular culinary theme.

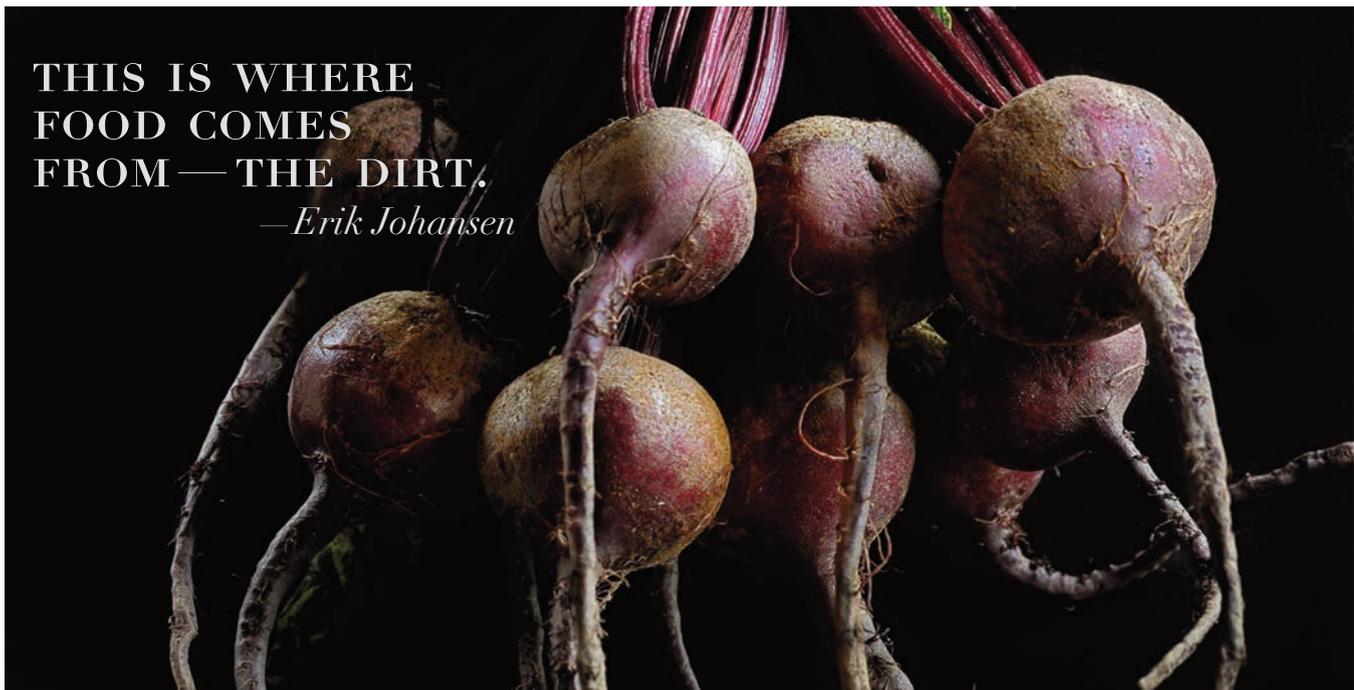
Is the popularity of "sustainable" cuisine a trend? A fad? Will it peak and ebb, as trends tend to do? The farm-to-table, field-to-fork, farm-to-school, farm-to-chef and other multi-hyphenated food "movements" have been evident for years in the Hudson Valley, and throughout the valley, the popularity of farmers' markets has clearly revived many small, local farmers and strengthened their connection with local chefs and restaurant owners. Selling and serving local produce, meats and drinks isn't a trend here—it's a way of life, or at least a way of doing business.

We thought, though, the announcement was a good cue to catch up with some of the chefs and purveyors in the valley to get their take on what effect, if any, the announcement might have here on the ground.

by abby luby

THIS IS WHERE FOOD COMES FROM—THE DIRT.

—Erik Johansen



When the Pleasantville Farmers' Market set up directly behind the **Iron Horse Grill** about ten years ago, chef/owner **Phil McGrath** was thrilled—he could walk through the stands early on Saturday mornings to check what was available. Since then, the Pleasantville market has become one of the largest in Westchester and has moved to a larger area that can accommodate what McGrath estimates are about 1,500 people and numerous vendors every Saturday morning. McGrath watched as the variety and quality of the produce changed and grew.

"A few years ago, my wife asked farmers at the market for escarole, a vegetable we couldn't get locally. Now farmers are asking what they can grow for me. The farmer's market enabled local farmers to produce fruits and vegetables that they could actually sell. Before that, small, local farmers produced only what they could sell to larger companies, like tons of corn. The green market movement has saved many of the small, local farms."

On a typical Saturday, McGrath will feature a green market soup or salad. McGrath adjusts his menu by the seasons and by what's available. "We make sure we tell our customers which vegetables are from which farms. I don't serve strawberries, tomatoes or asparagus when they are out of season. I have sun dried tomatoes and I do dry some fruits."

McGrath regularly talks to kids at the middle school—educating youth about local produce gives him the chance to plug the advantages of buying from the farmer down the street versus buying commercially grown produce. "I tell the kids that every head of iceberg lettuce looks the same because they were bred to fit 24 heads snug in a box so they could travel long distances. They get it."

Erik Johansen has an indelible memory of when he first understood what "local" meant—he was 14 and the dishwasher at the **Iron Forge Inn**, near Warwick, the restaurant he now owns. The awareness of how much better local, fresh

produce can taste and how it can carry the *terroir* of a region is keeping the "local" movement alive. "I had to wash a box of beets that had been dropped off from a black dirt farm. It looked like just a box filled with black dirt at first, with beets underneath. They were the dirtiest vegetables I'd ever seen—all I was thinking about was getting the black dirt out from under my fingernails. After I washed them, they were steamed and tossed in butter and I tried one. I thought it was one of the most amazing things to eat. I remember thinking to myself, 'This is where food comes from—the dirt.'"

Rhubarb compote

I make this relish with rhubarb from a large patch in my yard and use it with seared Hudson Valley foie gras in the spring, but you could use it with chicken, duck breast, pork, veal or turkey as well.

Ingredients

1 quart diced rhubarb, peeled if large.
½ cup light brown sugar
½ cup orange juice
½ teaspoon grated fresh ginger
2 pieces star anise
½ teaspoon grated lemon rind
Salt and coarse black pepper to taste
Makes 1 quart

Method

1. Combine all the ingredients in a sauce pan.
2. Cook over low heat until the rhubarb is tender, about 10 to 15 minutes.
3. Let cool, remove the star anise and serve.

Phil McGrath
Iron Horse Grill

I KNOW WHERE THE PRODUCT IS COMING FROM BECAUSE I AM LOOKING RIGHT AT THE GOATS.

—Chris O'Brien



A growing awareness is keeping the “local” movement alive, says Johansen. “There’s more news out now about buying and eating local. The Food Network helps—people seem to follow celebrity chefs who support eating locally grown produce and meats.” Johansen says using local produce and calling it a hot menu trend is precarious. “I hate to call it a trend. It sounds like something that could change or go away. People truly want to know where the food is from. I try to incorporate foods that grow around here. As a chef, it’s the responsible thing to do—put great flavors on the plate and build relationships with local farmers.”

Pam Brown, owner and chef of the **Garden Café** in Woodstock, features homemade vegetarian organic food from such local farms as Sunfrost Farms, Breezy Mountain Farms, Taliaferro Farms and Wild Hive Farms. For Brown, sustainability is not just a cool new trend—it’s a fact of life.

“I’ve believed in sustainability and recycling since the early 1970s. The real issue with local has to do with being fresh and supporting the local economy. It’s very important to know your farmer and know what’s going on and how they grow their food. Passing this information on to your customers helps educate them—that helps the farms, too.”

Brown tries to purchase produce within a 50-mile radius, but will consider some items local if they are grown in New York State. “I concentrate on things like wine from upstate and around the Finger Lakes. We also pick from our own garden. I don’t offer anything that is not of the season—no tomatoes in sandwiches by September and no asparagus, green beans or zucchini offered in the winter. That’s the excitement about eating seasonally; we

will wait for the strawberries and after a long winter season, they will taste wonderful.”

There are exceptions, Brown says. “We won’t give up coffee or chocolate, and some people want bananas for breakfast or a few frozen blueberries in their pancakes. The global economy is also a major issue. Food is huge and it isn’t just what you are putting on your plate and eating, it’s all tied into the environment, health and worker’s rights.”

Chris O’Brien, chef/owner of **Farm to Table Bistro** in Fishkill, gives great credence to knowing your local farmer as integral to the long-term sustainability of the Hudson Valley.

“The big companies like U.S. Fruits or Sysco aren’t interested in 25 cases of produce—they want to buy from farmers that can sell them 4,000 cases, or a month’s worth of produce. But who are you more concerned about—a large farm in Pennsylvania or the farmer down the street whose kids go to school with your kids? The guy down the street is the kind of guy I want to support. I want him to do well. We need the local [farmer] to survive, otherwise the valley will become one big empty tract of land—you will get McMansions on property that used to be full of local food.”

Buying from nearby farms not only has a positive impact on the local economy, but it ripples out to the community. “Local means know your farmer, know your source. I’ll drive around from 7AM to 1 in the afternoon and hit five or six farms—it’s like a day out of the office. The goat cheese from Sprout Creek may not be cheaper, but I am paying a little bit

extra versus buying something that's shipped from West Virginia and burning a lot of diesel fuel in the process. At Sprout Creek, I know where the product is coming from because I am looking right at the goats. While I'm there I can also rant with [Sprout Creek co-founder] Sister Margo [Morris]—she's my neighbor."

The key to sustaining the local farm-to-table movement lies in the hands of young farmers. **Miriam Haas**, founder of **Community Markets**, who first started the Ossining Farmers Market in 1991 with just two farmers, and has now expanded to 19 markets in the Hudson Valley, says she has seen many farmers in their 20s and 30s taking over the family farm business. "Whereas 40 years ago people may have skipped a generation on the farm, today the children of farmers embrace the challenge. I think it bodes well for the future. People want to know where their food comes from, and more and more, they realize it should keep coming from the land that's been in their family for generations."

Haas also sees support for young farmers from newly formed organizations. "In the last few years we've seen the formation of new groups serving young farmers, such as the Greenhorns and the National Young Farmers Coalition, who originally started in the Hudson Valley. For many supporters, the momentum in local food is best described as a shift, rather than a trend. This is a shift that has shown growing enthusiasm. These markets provide an opportunity for people to gain closer control of the source of their food."

Jerry Crocker, who, along with his wife **Susan**, owns **Back Yard Bistro** and **Holbert's Catering** in Montgomery, says the Hudson Valley has come to personify "local" because of the close and growing relationship between chefs and area farmers—something that could not be said 10 years ago. "They [chefs] weren't really embracing farm-to-table as much as they do now. It's a million times easier now, especially with all the farmers markets. Now, there's a demand for the local produce. Over the last two or three years farmers are

Beets: roasted, pickled & fried

Serving the same food in multiple preparations is a great way to add complexity to a single flavor. Different textures and temperatures add to the dish as well, keeping the palate more interested and "searching" for the contrasts.

Pickled beets (quick pickle method)

Ingredients

- 1 cup water
- 1 cup cider vinegar
- ¼ cup sugar
- 1 tablespoon mustard seeds
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 2 large beets sliced ½-inch thick

Method

1. Bring all ingredients except for beets to a simmer.
2. Add beets, simmer to just soft, let cool in liquid and store for future use.

Roasted beets

Ingredients

- Kosher salt as needed
- 2 whole beets, green top removed

Method

Preheat oven to 400°F.

1. Place a bed of salt (about ½ inch) onto a cookie sheet or baking dish.
2. Place the beets on top and cover with foil.
3. Cook until a knife can easily pierce the beet (about 45 minutes to 1 hour, depending on size).
4. Let sit until cool enough to handle, peel and cut into desired shape.

Fried beets

Ingredients

- 1 beet, sliced very thin
- cooking oil as needed
- salt to season

Method

1. Heat at least 2 inches of oil in a narrow pot to 360°F (use a candy thermometer).
2. Gently place the sliced beets into the hot oil, giving enough room to cook separately from each other.
3. Fry until they are just under crisp.
4. Remove with a slotted spoon and place on paper towels to drain and crisp.
5. Lightly season with salt.

To assemble

Arrange the warm roasted beets and chilled pickled beets alternately. Drizzle with olive oil and a little of the pickling liquid. Top with fried beets to finish. Add greens and cheese to the plate if you like. Watercress, arugula or any other green will add a nice fresh note to the plate. Goat cheese is always good with beets as well. Use local if you can.

Erik Johansen
Iron Forge Inn

AGRICULTURAL SOILS CAN HAVE AN ECONOMIC VALUE THAT FITS INTO THE WHOLE COMPLEX OF A SUSTAINING ECONOMY.

—Deborah DeWan



meeting more chefs and chefs are buying more from local farmers. We are New York City's backyard garden. The farms are everywhere. I can't drive more than five miles in any direction without hitting some kind of farm."

Crocker says local produce may cost more, but he's learned over the years that it's worth it. "I can pay \$14 for a box of mass-produced mesclun greens and about \$24 for the same box from a nearby farm. The difference is when I get the stuff from the farm, I wash it, dry it, cover and store it and it will last one whole week. The other stuff is wilted in a day or two. What I'm buying was picked the day I get it—I'm getting stuff from the ground within 10 hours. The taste of fresh vegetables is so incredible that it makes dishes like salads easy to make. With just a dash of vinaigrette, it's delicious. People ask what the secret ingredient is. It's just very fresh mesclun."

Deborah DeWan, executive director of the **Rondout Valley Growers Association** (RVGA), a non-profit organization of farmers, residents and businesses, agrees that the NRA's "hottest menu trend" ultimately pertains to local growers as much as to chefs and restaurateurs. Sustaining local farmers in the Hudson Valley is one of the main goals of the RVGA. Finally, DeWan stresses, "economic development" includes the preservation of local agriculture—not just more industry and housing—something that was unheard of just 10 years ago.

"Obviously, the Hudson Valley was ahead of that curve," DeWan says. "Now that the NRA has picked up this theme, and because of the heightened interest in fresh, local food associated with health, it gives us an opportunity to help develop that appreciation. The soils that we farm today in the Hudson Valley are important, agricultural soils that can have an economic value that fits into the whole complex of a sustaining economy."

DeWan is especially sensitive to this—as a youngster growing up on Long Island, she saw neighboring farms sell

out to development. "When I moved to the Hudson Valley, what was so relevant and important was the working landscape. [On Long Island] there were so many farms that went the way of tract housing and malls—my family really mourned the loss of those farms. Here we are—farming and eating local, fresh food—which is now in the mainstream from the First Lady in Washington, D.C. to the farm down the road."

Sustaining local dairy farmers has been **Sam Simon's** *raison d'être* for much of his life. Raised in a farming family, Simon is the founder and president of **Hudson Valley Fresh**, a not-for-profit cooperative of nine Hudson Valley dairy farms organized in 2005. Simon and many of the group's farmers have capitalized on local, by bucking the established marketing practices of dairy conglomerates. Over the past six years, Hudson Valley Fresh has achieved notable traction and has cultivated a loyal local following.

"I've been told that in the Hudson Valley, we've created milk elitists," says Simon, who now enjoys seeing Hudson Valley Fresh milk sold at places like Adams and Hannaford's, numerous restaurants and area schools such as the CIA, Marist College, Bard College, Poughkeepsie Day School, among others. "Food service directors tell me they never see the kids drink as much milk as they do Hudson Valley Fresh milk and that they've increased their consumption by 30 percent."

Local and fresh are synonymous; it takes Hudson Valley Fresh milk only 36 hours to go from cow to consumer. Also, the milk isn't ultra-pasteurized but "flash pasteurized" for 20 seconds to keep its flavor.

The success of Hudson Valley Fresh, Simon says, will ensure the financial stability for its member farmers. "Dairy farmers generally have little stability from year to year, but we've made a financial difference for nine dairy farmers. The project has grown exponentially in the last two years. If we maintain the quality and keep the price within reason, it

won't lose its pizzazz. There's a growing mentality that not all milk is created equally."

There's also been an uptick in interest and sales of locally raised meats and poultry, according to **Paul Oakley**, who, with **George Cubillas**, owns and runs **Nat Kagan Meats & Poultry** in Woodridge. Nat Kagan Meats has been around since 1989, but Oakley sees the current interest in local products putting them in the limelight. "We never really had any interaction with farmers until now, even though we've been around for a long time. The buzzword is 'local,' and we are actively pursuing local farmers to supply us with pigs and lamb and other products our customers want."

Oakley says the "trend" defined by the NRA is not all that new. "The NRA could have said the same thing last year about local being a hot trend," Oakley says. "It's been going on for at least four or five years here in the Hudson Valley. We've definitely seen an increase in chefs who want the local product. They've become a very dedicated clientele."

One snag local farmers raising animals for meat have had to deal with is the high cost of getting their animals to a USDA-certified slaughterhouse. Oakley, too, has been dealing with different slaughterhouses in and out of the region, but he is looking with hope toward the proposed new slaughterhouse planned in Liberty. "I hope they will be breaking ground in the spring and used by local farmers selling their products privately. That way I will be able to distribute their meat throughout the whole Hudson Valley."

Kevin Terr, of **Red Barn Produce** in New Paltz, has been in the distribution business with his wife **Tamara** for 23 years, and he sees the "buy local" movement from a different perspective. He took over the business from an existing distributor at the New Paltz location who "was not locally oriented," but, with the help of a local farmer who spread the word that Red Barn Produce was interested in locally grown vegetables, area farmers started showing up at the warehouse door. Last fall, he says, 15 crates of green

Northwind Farm chicken pot pie tortellini with Madura Farm Maitake mushrooms

Ingredients

1 3-pound Northwind Farm whole chicken
fresh pasta sheets
2 onions
6 carrots
3 pounds celery root
2 parsnips
3 cloves garlic
2 ounces olive oil
1 pound shelled peas
4 ounces flour
6 ounces butter
2 quart water
1 teaspoon fresh thyme leaves
½ cup parsley leaves
3 pounds or more Madura Farm Maitake mushrooms
3 shallots
salt and pepper to taste

Method

Preheat oven to 325°F.

1. Season whole chicken with salt and pepper and roast at 325°F to internal temp of 160°F.
2. Rest and cool chicken; pick meat off bones.
3. Combine bones with 1 large onion, 2 carrots, 1½ pounds celery root, 1 clove garlic, ½ teaspoon thyme leaves, ¼ cup parsley leaves, 2 quarts cold water. Bring to boil, reduce heat and simmer for 3 hours. Strain liquid and reserve.
4. For roux, combine 4 ounces flour and 4 ounces butter in sauté pan. Roast in oven for 25 minutes at 325°F.
5. For tortellini filling, dice remaining onion, celery root, parsnip, carrot. Saute in olive oil with garlic.
6. Add chicken stock, reserving ½ cup. Bring to boil.
7. Wisk in roux, simmer 10 minutes to thicken.
8. Finish with peas, parsley, thyme, salt, pepper to taste. Chill mixture overnight.
9. Assemble tortellini to desired size (works as ravioli as well). Cook in salted, boiling water until done.
10. Clean and slice Maitake mushrooms and shallots, then saute both in butter.
11. Combine tortellini with mushroom mixture. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

Jerry Crocker
Back Yard Bistro

‘LOCAL’ TAKES PRECEDENCE OVER PRICE.

—Kevin Terr

beans from a local farm sold for \$25 a case while commercial beans from Hunts Point sold for \$12.50 a case—and the local beans sold out first.

“The local produce scene has exploded in the last two to three years,” says Terr. “We’re in a great spot here. My wife has always pushed local produce. It’s gotten so big now, we have two separate areas in our coolers, one for local and one for non-local. Three years ago 70 percent of what we sold was non-local. Today we sell about 60 percent local and 40 percent non-local. The prices are higher, but price has become a secondary issue—local takes precedence over price.”

Terr sees a different consciousness and a growing awareness of buying local. “I don’t think [this trend] has peaked. I have pizza places that call me and ask if they can get some local mesclun. And this is when the price for mesclun is twice as much for commercial mesclun, and we still can’t keep enough here.”

Agnes Devereux, chef/owner of the **Village TeaRoom, Restaurant and Bake Shop** in New Paltz, grew up in Ireland, where her mother ran a small hotel in a village surrounded by countryside farms. The food was always fresh and today Devereux realizes that the connection between fresh food and health has much to do with the increasing interest. “Slowly, people are beginning to see that the food you eat has a direct impact on your life and health—this isn’t anything new—we’re actually going back to the way we used to eat. I’d like to see ‘eating locally’ be like the way we approach tea in Ireland. Here and in England there’s a preciousness about tea—that whole ceremonial thing. In Ireland it’s an everyday element, a little punctuation of your life that’s nice and nurturing and warming. It’s not precious, it’s comforting.”

Devereux emphasizes that the differentiation between ‘food’ and ‘local food’ is not one that has to be made—eating locally and seasonally has become a way of life in the Hudson Valley, not something out of the ordinary or elitist, and she is skeptical about restaurants that sensationalize their



“local” fare. “When I moved up to New Paltz, I was shocked not to be able to get local apples or locally raised beef. I was new to the Hudson Valley and didn’t have as many connections. But that has changed. Now there must be double the number of CSAs in New Paltz area (perhaps less now after Hurricane Irene). But there’s a farmers market here that wasn’t seven years ago. [Restaurants] that have the token thing on their menu that says they are part of the big new trend in actuality are not really going to embrace it—if you truly embrace food that’s grown locally, it comes from a passion for food, not a passion for profit.

“Napa [California] is synonymous with food. Let’s talk about making the Hudson Valley the Napa Valley of the Northeast—let’s get the chef from Per Se to set up a restaurant in the Hudson Valley with Hudson Valley game and Hudson Valley foie gras. The CIA is here and you’re exposed to a lot of the bounty of the Hudson Valley. It’s about educating more people in the city—there should be a “Hudson Valley Bounty” as a designation [of food] the way they do wines. It’s important to have some kind of branding of the Hudson Valley with quality. So far, it’s been everybody’s individual efforts.”

In June, a specialty of the Village TeaRoom is fresh strawberry shortcake. “It’s the cake of the month because it’s the season. We buy the strawberries in the morning and they are still warm from the sun and the flavor is amazing. But then we have folks asking for the cake in November. It wouldn’t be the same cake they had in June—we can’t replicate that taste from strawberries that are from California and were picked two weeks ago. If we used those strawberries, it would be a very different cake from the one we make.”

Like most things, Devereux says that becoming comfortable eating seasonally and locally is a learning process that takes some effort and time, but is its own reward. “You want to find local? Find out where the farmers’ market is and go and talk with the farmer. If that farm isn’t growing



what you want, ask who is—if they're not growing rhubarb, they know who is and they'll tell you who is. If you're new to the area just go to the market. It's all about talking to people—you have to make personal connections with people. This whole elitist thing about eating local. Knowing where your food comes from is not elitist. It's smart to care about where your food comes from—for your health, your children, the future, the future of the land." ❖

Back Yard Bistro

118 State Route 17K, Montgomery; (845) 457-9901

Farm to Table Bistro

1083 Route 9, Fishkill; (845) 297-1111

Garden Café on the Green

6 Old Forge Rd., Woodstock; (845) 679-3600

Hudson Valley Fresh

47 South Hamilton St., Poughkeepsie; (845) 226-3065

Iron Forge Inn

38 Iron Forge Rd., Warwick; (845) 986-3411

Iron Horse Grill

20 Wheeler Ave., Pleasantville; (914) 741-0717

Nat Kagan Meats & Poultry

8 Green Ave., Woodridge; (845) 434-4334

Red Barn Produce

249 State Route 32 S., New Paltz; (845) 255-5200

The Village TeaRoom, Restaurant & Bake Shop

10 Plattekill Ave., New Paltz; (845) 255-3434

Asparagus tart

Ingredients

- 1 good-sized bunch local organic asparagus
- 1¼ cups Ronnybrook Farm Heavy Cream
- ½ cup Ronnybrook Farm Cream Line Milk
- 4 egg yolks from local farm eggs
- 2 tablespoons grated pecorino romano cheese
- kosher salt
- freshly ground pepper
- olive oil
- 1 egg whisked with a pinch of salt in a separate bowl
- 9-inch unbaked tart shell (pate brisé)

Method

Preheat Oven to 400°F.

1. Bake the frozen tart shell blind for 10 minutes, then remove the beans and prick the bottom with a fork.
2. Return to the oven for 5 minutes.
3. Remove the tart shell from the oven and brush with beaten egg. Turn the oven down to 350°F.
4. Cut the asparagus into generous 1-inch lengths, with the spear heads slightly longer. Discard any woody sections.
5. Toss in olive oil and a pinch of salt and roast in oven on a cookie sheet until just tender.
6. Whisk the cream, milk, egg yolks and cheese together in a bowl and season with salt and pepper.
7. Place the cooled asparagus in the tart shell and pour the custard over. Place the tart pan on a cookie sheet and cook for 25 to 30 minutes, until just set.
8. Remove tart from oven, let cool for 10 minutes. *Serve with organic arugula salad and stone ground mustard vinaigrette.*

Pate brisé

Ingredients

- ½ pound butter
- 12 ounces unbleached un-bromated all-purpose flour
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- ¼ teaspoon baking powder
- 3 fluid ounces cold filtered water

Method

1. Cut the butter into 6 to 8 pieces.
2. Combine the dry ingredients and butter in the bowl of a mixer with the paddle attachment on lowest speed. Mix until pieces of butter are no more than ¼-inch across.
3. Stir in water until dough just holds together.
4. Scrape out of bowl. Shape into two flat discs. Wrap in plastic. Chill until firm.
5. Roll out one disc and fit into a 9-inch tart pan with a removable bottom. Trim edges neatly and freeze.

Agnes Devereux

The Village TeaRoom, Restaurant & Bake Shop