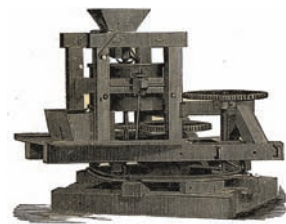


GRIST FOR THE MILL



When students return to the classrooms this fall, they may find a delicious surprise. More and more East End schools are trying to boost their performance in the food and nutrition department. At Sag Harbor Elementary School, students will raise vegetables, flowers and herbs in a new greenhouse designed to teach both good eating habits and practical skills. EECO Farm in East Hampton is building a canary-yellow learning cart to wheel into classrooms and dazzle students with gardening demonstrations, cooking lessons, and nature appreciation. In Southold, the Cornell Marine Center has developed a traveling curriculum for showing students the wonders of clams, scallops, eel grass and other bay life. And in the most advanced program, at the Ross School in East Hampton, meals have been designed to be healthier and tastier by including more fruits, vegetables, and seafood from nearby farmers and fishers.

Such innovations are evidence that you can teach old dogs new tricks. Lunch ladies aren't destined to only dish out greasy meat and tasteless veggies (p. 42). And in a personal story, Springs writer Evan Harris shares a dish she learned from a friend while she was on her "no more not cooking" quest (p. 46).

Evolution seems to be going around, even on big farms that count their history in centuries. At Crescent duck farm in Aquebogue, which produces one out of every 25 ducks eaten in the United States, Doug Corwin has taken his family's business through several generations of challenges, including competition from "Long Island duck" that aren't produced on the Island, rising concerns about pollution from duck waste, and recent threats of avian flu that might force his roaming birds inside (p. 18).

Or consider Long Island wine country. Steve Mudd, whose family has planted about half of the region's 3,000 acres of grapes, says that the last quarter century has seen the industry change "about 5,000 percent," and he has had to alter his planting, pruning, pest control, and harvesting techniques accordingly. "No one has made more mistakes than us," Mudd admits. But they've become the largest custom planting operation on the Island by making each mistake only once (p. 24). At Bedell Cellars in Cutchogue, an ambitious young winemaker with some state-of-the-art equipment hopes to take one of the Island's most respected vineyards to an international audience.

Six years ago, the owners of the Silver Sands Motel and Beach Cottages in Greenport started to seed their pristine waterfront on Pipes Cove where patrons splash and sunbathe with tens of thousands of baby oysters (p. 14). Today, this brand of "eco-tourism" is yielding legendary shellfish that are, according to the manager of New York's Grand Central Oyster Bar, particularly plump with "just a hint of what I perceive when you salt a watermelon."

Finally, both of the farms featured in *Roadside Diaries* (p. 50 and 52) have survived because they changed. At the Halsey Farm in Water Mill, a new deer fence hidden by privet is the latest response to a pest that has been munching more of the crops and discouraging customers from buying flowers for their own gardens. But the veggie business remains strong. Tom estimates that the farm has as much of a diversity of crops today as his ancestors planted in the 1700s. The motivation isn't so much self-sufficiency as the possibility of bringing in customers for more of the season, including deep into the fall with winter squashes and cole crops.

Northville Farms in Riverhead depends on an equally diverse farmstand and an active booth at the Riverhead farmers market. "Farming is in our blood," said Kristina Sidor, who hopes to take over running Northville's stand while her cousin Brian Gajeski handles the farming. "Even a transfusion wouldn't change that."

Lunch ladies aren't destined to only dish out greasy meat and tasteless veggies.

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EDIBLE EAST END

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