



From

Increasingly, chefs are incorporating local ingredients to meet member and guest demand for farm-to-table fare.

By Joanna DeChellis, Managing Editor

Farm to Table

SUMMING IT UP

- Sourcing products from local purveyors is not exactly new, but the phenomenon has become national in scope and impact.
- Bringing members into the loop through garden committees, menu writing or educational cooking classes will help to generate more buy-in.
- Working with suppliers, in addition to cultivating relationships with farmers and shopping farmers markets, can help clubs connect to a network of local purveyors.

Farm to table is a romantic philosophy. Chefs like Alice Waters (Chez Panisse), Thomas Keller (The French Laundry), Peter Hoffman (Savoy) and Dan Barber (Blue Hill) were all pioneers in the locavore movement. But the phenomenon has only recently broadened its scope and impact. Chefs from all over the country, in one zip code after the next, are now using local sourcing as both a guiding principle and a marketing tool.

The tendrils of the farm-to-table movement reach deep into the club and resort industry. There is value in working with locally sourced ingredients for those who both produce and consume the food, as well as the environment. However, to properly meet the needs of all members and guests in a cost-effec-

tive fashion, practicing the farm-to-table concept at a club or resort calls for finding the right balance between sourcing the freshest regional ingredients from local purveyors, while also using the best of what traditional suppliers and distributors can provide.

“We simply have too much volume to be entirely farm to table,” says Max Knoepfel, Executive Chef at Westchester Country Club, Rye, N.Y., who oversees four club restaurants in addition to a busy banquet business (see “Swiss Precision,” *C&RB*, October 2011). “But we feature those ingredients as often as possible.”

Starting Small

Knoepfel came to Westchester CC in September 2010. With an impres-



PHOTO COURTESY OF RED ROCKS CC

heirloom radishes I want him to reserve for us,” says Knoepfel. “At 6:15 yesterday morning, I received a message on my iPhone with a picture of a beautiful lettuce that another farmer partner was ready to harvest for us. This is how we communicate with the farms, and it’s been a critical component to our success with the initiative.”

These dialogues, as well as his relentless desire to serve his members only the highest-quality foods, have inspired Knoepfel to help connect other area

chefs with local farmers, too.

Last year, Westchester Land Trust, Slow Food Metro North and The Chefs Association of Westchester and Lower Connecticut organized the “Local Land, Local Food” Farmers-Chefs Networking event, to bring together local farms and culinary communities.

The event, “Tasting Our Local Harvest,” was held on September 27th in Westchester CC’s ballroom. For the event, Knoepfel and his staff created passed *hors d’oeuvres* and specialties fea-

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sive resume that featured lots of experience in sourcing local products, he felt that incorporating the philosophy into Westchester’s F&B operation would help to boost the club’s culinary profile.

“I started small by working with two local farmers,” he says. “We discussed availability and seasonality. The challenge at that point was quantity—we needed much more than many of the farmers could produce on their own—so we mostly used local products in specials.”

That was just at the start, though. Today, farm-to-table dining thrives at Westchester CC, especially in its upscale beach club restaurant, The Gun Club Grille (named for its history as a trap-shooting location).

“One of our farmer partners called me this morning to ask how many feet of



C&RB CLUB RECIPE

Roasted Skuna Bay Salmon

with local wild mushroom risotto, asparagus, and pomegranate gastrique

Amt	Ingredient
4	6-oz. salmon filets, preferably Skuna Bay
1 oz.	olive oil
2 cups	cooked risotto
1 cup	local wild mushrooms cooked and turned into duxelle
1 cup	pomegranate gastrique
to garnish	basil oil
1 cup	fennel orange salad
1 bunch	asparagus (we use asparagus from the Sacramento Delta, blanched in salted boiling water and shocked in ice water)

Procedure:

- Season salmon filets with kosher salt and freshly cracked black pepper. Heat a 10-inch sauté pan with 1 ounce of olive oil and sear the salmon filets on one side until they are nice and browned. Turn over and repeat the process. Then place the pan in a 400°F oven until it reaches the desired temperature. For medium, this will take about 4-5 minutes. Let it rest.
- While the salmon is cooking, heat risotto, add in duxelle and season. (View component recipes at www.clubandresortbusiness.com)
- The gastrique can be made a day ahead and reheated.
- Saute or steam asparagus. Toss the fennel salad together and plate.
- To Plate: Spoon some risotto onto a warm dinner plate and garnish with asparagus. Then lay the Skuna Bay salmon next to the risotto, and drizzle with the gastrique. Garnish with the orange salad.

Yield: 4 servings

RECIPE SUBMITTED BY JOHN MILLER, EXECUTIVE CHEF, COTO DE CAZA (CALIF.) GOLF & RACQUET CLUB

turing local ingredients. Meanwhile, at action stations positioned throughout the ballroom, one farm and one chef collaborated to offer a variety of dishes to share with the crowd.

A selection of the region’s wines, beers and signature micro-distillery cocktails were presented as well. In addition, a variety of tasting tables were presented by some of the most notable local vendors and producers.

Although primarily a networking event for farmers and chefs, other participants in the community—as well as Westchester CC members—were invited to attend the mixer. “More than 175 participants got a first-hand look at how our local food system is developing, and the opportunities that are available for supporting the harvest,” says Knoepfel, who presented at *Club & Resort Business’* 4th Annual Chef to Chef Conference. “Farm to table definitely takes some extra work, but the end results are worth the time invested.”

To Market, To Market

At Ramsey (N.J.) Golf & Country Club (RGCC), Executive Chef Arthur Toufayan was hired specifically for his farm-to-table roots.

“The club’s F&B operation wasn’t bad, but the food was old-fashioned,” says the chef, previously the proprietor of The Village Green in Ridgewood, N.J., where he instituted a tasting menu and developed a farm-to-table approach to food purchasing. Prior to that, in New York, he was Executive Sous Chef at Aureole, helped to open the Gramercy Tavern, and was a chef at the Union Square Café. “The membership wanted to take their dining operation in a new, fresher direction.”

It was a huge undertaking that started with cleaning out the freezer, says Toufayan. “We wanted to get away from fat-driven foods, and move toward fresher fare of higher quality,” he explains.

With his background, Toufayan already had a number of farmer connections. But he wanted to cast a more local net while simultaneously promoting the club’s dining offerings to nearby foodies.

“We source a lot of our products from the farmers market,” he says. “So we decided, since we’re there buying already, that it would make sense for us to set up a booth with an action station, to help promote our club.”

During market days, Toufayan prepares a dish made entirely from local ingredients he’s purchased onsite. “The market was really impressed that a chef cared so much about their products, so they invited RGCC to be a permanent fixture,” he says.

The booth not only serves as good marketing exposure for the club, it also allows Toufayan to pick and choose the best products before the market opens and after it closes, thus helping him to maintain a 38% food cost.

Much like Westchester CC, the products Toufayan purchases are used as specials on the club’s ever-changing menu.

“We offer a balance of classic and modern dishes,” he says. “Our *a la carte* menu, which changes seasonally, features products that we purchase through our traditional supply chains, while our specials feature local ingredients from the market and local farmers.” Special are changed daily, he adds, with six to eight offered at lunch and ten to twelve at dinner.

Some of RGCC’s most popular farm-to-table dishes include a grilled vegetable terrine that uses an eggplant as the shell, gazpacho, tomato sorbet, baba ghanoush, and even some

berry-themed desserts.

RGCC's farm-to-table shift seems to be a success so far. According to Toufayan, F&B revenues rose a few percentage points last year, to roughly \$3 million. "The staff has been the driving force behind our success with this initiative," he says. "Chefs are inspired by quality products, and this has given them the chance to let their creative juices flow."

Local Sourcing 101

California, with its fertile soil, optimal weather and abundant agriculture, offers a bounty of farm-to-table fare. And at ClubCorp's Coto de Caza Golf & Racquet Club, near San Diego, Executive Chef John Miller has begun harnessing all the ingredients the Golden State has to offer for his members.

Miller, who has been with ClubCorp for 19 years, says he stresses member awareness at Coto de Caza. "There is an educational element that is crucial to the success of this type of purchasing," he says. "There's a certain level of stuffiness associated with the farm-to-table movement, so it's our challenge to decode it and make it more realistic and practical.

"We also have the challenge of defending some of the products that aren't as uniform or 'pretty' as their commercially produced counterparts, which are grown to be a certain size and color," Miller adds. "The bottom line is taste. And fortunately



PHOTO COURTESY OF RAMSEY G&CC

Snapper with organic braised escarole is just one of the many farm-to-table dishes featured at Ramsey Golf & Country Club.

with our membership, that seems to trump beauty."

Coto de Caza will feature the local ingredients in nightly specials to gauge whether or not the dishes will be successful. "We're always on the floor talking with members to get feedback," says Miller. "If it does well—and I know I can get enough product—then I'll add it to the menu and note the farm in the description."

In addition to walking the floor, the club's educational initiatives include cooking classes, wine dinners and 100-mile radius meals, where every ingredi-

ent, all the way down to the beverage selection, is sourced from within that distance.

"Awareness is one thing," says Miller. "Sourcing is another."

With 1,900 members on his roster, it's difficult for Miller to work directly with farmers, so he relies on his suppliers to do some of the legwork.

"It's just not practical for me to swing by the market and pick up the ingredients," he says. "There's a big push for local sourcing in the industry. In response, my suppliers now put together a list of products sourced from within a certain radius north and south of my location."

Miller and his chefs collaborate to create dishes that feature whatever ingredients are at their peak. "Right now, we are



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What YOU'RE Saying...

WE ASKED OUR LINKEDIN GROUP: "Does your club host farm-to-table events? Do you have a farm-to-table menu? What are the most important factors to consider when integrating farm-to-table cuisine?"

Here are some of your responses:

- "Our Farmer's Market is consistent for about three months and our chef will create a *prix fixe* menu around what was fresh at the market. We've had mixed results; seems that older members who like the classic menu would not even bother talking about it, but the younger crowd loved the idea."
—Luke Connors, Staff Manager, The Montana Club, Missoula, Mont.
- "Our chef has been all over this for the past two years, which makes my job easier and the membership much happier." —Matt Guzik, General Manager, Stock Farm Club, Hamilton, Mont.
- "One year we did a "farmer's wine dinner," where every ingredient was from within a 50-mile radius of our club. It is now sold out every year. For gardens planted on the grounds, be careful. Even without pesticides in certain areas, some of the irrigation might be pumped from lakes on the property. We are very lucky our superintendent gave us space in his greenhouse. We even tapped some maple trees to make homemade maple syrup." —Rob Marbs, Executive Chef, Glen Echo Country Club, Normandy, Mo.
- "Our club has a wonderful, 1.5-acre garden and several small gardens throughout the property. The culinary team maintains the gardens and harvests what we need daily. We also have 500 orange trees, 80 avocado trees, dozens of assorted citrus trees and a three-acre vineyard. We produce about 2,000 bottles of wine every year. We also have a few dozen bee boxes and produce about 600 pounds of honey per year. The garden produces just about 60% of all the produce used in our four restaurants. The membership is very involved with all of our farming practices, and takes great pride in what we produce. Members are involved with the winemaking process as well. We have several chef's wine dinners in the garden every year. These practices are all a very big part of our membership marketing plan." —Sean McCune, General Manager, The Bridges at Rancho Santa Fe (Calif.)

working with a lot of spinach and mixed greens, and mushrooms are also coming in because of the rains," he says. To get total buy-in, he adds, it's important to include the sous chefs in the recipe development process.

"I think some chefs are afraid to try farm to table because they don't think it will work in their club," Miller says. "Ultimately, you have to know your membership. But it's worth giving them the chance to embrace it. Start small, with one or two dishes, and see what kind of feedback you get. You never know—it just might take off."

Bringing the Club Table to the Farm

What was once a two-acre wasteland between the 9th hole and a local fire station at Red Rocks Country Club in Morrison, Colo., has been transformed into a culinary garden by Executive Chef and Master Gardener Robert Meitzer. The idea came to him after his own organic herb garden, which he planted behind the clubhouse kitchen, got members raving about the resulting flavors.

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The recipient of more than 30 honors, including twice being named the American Culinary Federation's Colorado Chef of the Year, and the youngest member of the American Academy of Chefs, Meitzer has demonstrated his enthusiasm for sustainable, locally grown food as a teacher at Johnson & Wales and the Art Institute of Colorado.

"Chef's dream was to build a garden on property," says General Manager Mark Condon, who grew up on a Wisconsin farm and managed a crew on an organic farm prior to his career in private club management. "So over the winter, we did our research and met with professors at the local university, as well as gardening experts and horticulturists. Building a garden is like renovating a green. You need to have the right people, and a plan, to pull it off."

All hands were on deck when it came time to build the garden, says Condon who, with Meitzer, ran the dozers to grade the land. The plot is now home to herbs, peppers, carrots, beets, cucumbers, squash, onions, lettuces, leeks, radishes,



PHOTO COURTESY OF RED ROCKS CC

and even eggplant. Vines for 300 tomato plants in seven varieties climb towards the sun, while six varieties of chiles emerge from another 250 plants. The 22 saplings bordering the garden will eventually yield plums, pears, peaches, sweet cherries and five types of apples.

"Building and maintaining the garden has been a team effort," says Condon, who notes that members are getting into the act, too. "We have a program for kids called 'Sprouts,' where Chef teaches them how to grow, care for and harvest vegetables."

Members are welcome to tour the gar-

At Red Rocks CC, members dine on farm fare beneath the pergola on a table repurposed from the thick Frank Lloyd Wright doors that originally graced the clubhouse entrance.

den, volunteer to help with its care and maintenance, and relax under the pergola, which stands in the center offering diners an unbeatable *al fresco* dining experience.

"Clubs are becoming less about exclusivity and more about experiences," says Condon. "Red Rocks wants to be viewed as progressive and non-traditional. The gardens helps us do that." **C&RB**

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