



Farm Fresh Dining

Kane County couple offers a truly organic culinary experience, where you see and learn about what you eat

Photos by Erin Chan Ding

Five miles west of downtown Geneva, on a patch of six acres called Heritage Prairie Farm, a field of fennel grows.

Accompanying the fennel are swaths of Swiss chard, spinach, carrots and kale. Much of the organic produce grown on these fields is sent to local farmers markets and area restaurants like Wildwood in Geneva and Naha in Chicago.

But some of it travels just a few feet.

On a recent Saturday evening, garlic and parsley and spinach grown on the property enhance platters of salad and steak set atop long tables on the farm's grassy grounds.

At least once a month from February through November, the farm hosts multi-course dinners that draw 80 to 120 people. Most dinners have themes, like the upcoming Bastille Day Farm Dinner in July and the Midsummer Night's Dream Farm Dinner in August, and all integrate farm-grown herbs and vegetables.

"People are so excited to reconnect with where food is grown," says Bronwyn Weaver, 45, who owns the farm with her husband, Bob Archibald, and started hosting the dinners when they opened the farm to the public three years ago. "It's not really magic until people see where their food is grown. Then they start caring about their food and its flavors."

Before the dinner begins, Archibald, a slender 55-year-old who is smoking an English pipe while he works, bustles about a beverage station, readying bottles of Prosecco for strawberry, rhubarb and ginger welcome cocktails.

Before they acquired the farm, Archibald and his wife lived on the island of Antigua, but, he says, "85 degrees and sunny every day gets old." So seven years ago,

Archibald, who was raised in Butte, Montana, and Weaver, who grew up in a rural area south of Akron, Ohio, moved to the Fox River Valley, hoping, says Archibald, gesturing around him, "to find a place like this."

They wanted space for their horses, and Weaver wanted to pursue a passion for honey cultivation.

And so six years ago, they acquired the property off Brundige Road in La Fox and named it Heritage Prairie Farm. They refer to it simply as "the white farm" because its barn is painted toothpaste white.

New for the farm this year is a CSA, or Community Supported Agriculture program, which runs through October and supplies subscribing suburbanites and Chicagoans with the farm's squash, tomatoes, cucumbers, eggplant, leeks and dozens of other vegetables.

Parents of four children, the couple

lives on six acres adjacent to the farm, where many of Weaver's beehives are located. It's referred to as "the red farm" because of, yes, the barn's maroon hue. Most of the horses also live there, though the white farm does house goats and a donkey.

At the Saturday dinner, after an appetizer sampling of peppercorn bacon-wrapped dates and crostini with farm-grown microgreens, Weaver does what is customary. Clad in well-used brown riding boots, she strides up to a large metal bell and rings it. The clanging signals the start of a pre-dinner farm tour. If guests didn't know where part of their meal came from, they would now.

Weaver leads a cluster of people, most from nearby St. Charles, Geneva and Elburn but also from as far as Munster, Indiana, through one of the farm's four greenhouses, where herbs and tomato plants grow. The greenhouses, also called hoop houses, are movable and keep plants considerably warmer (around 40 to 50 degrees) in winter months, allowing Weaver, Archibald and

Upcoming Farm Dinners



- July 22 – Bastille Day Farm Dinner, 6 p.m.
- Aug. 19 – Midsummer Night's Dream Farm Dinner, 6 p.m.
- Sept. 16 – Oktoberfest Farm Dinner, 6 p.m.
- Oct. 21 – Fall Fiesta Farm Dinner, 6 p.m.

Cost is \$65 per person. \$10 for children's meal. Free babysitting provided. Registration required.

Heritage Prairie Farm and Market is open Tues-Fri 9 a.m. – 6 p.m., Sat 9 a.m.-5 p.m. and Sun 10 a.m. -5 p.m.

2N308 Brundige Road in La Fox (Off of Route 38); 630 877-0407 or 630 443-8253; www.hpmfarm.com

their staff to grow produce year-round.

The couple's dedication to organic farming means they frequently rotate crops, refrain from using genetic engineering and pull weeds by hand. They acknowledge that organic, locally produced food costs more – often as much as double that of conventionally-grown products – but point out that it is better for the environment because food does not need to travel far distances.

Portia Belloc Lowndes, 48, executive director at Heritage Prairie Farm, adds that there is a distinct difference in taste.

"Take a South American strawberry versus a local strawberry," she says. "If we get tired and jet-lagged after traveling all of those miles, imagine what happens to the strawberry! Local food just tastes better."

That taste, coupled with a desire to support his neighbors, repeatedly brings James Zukowski of St. Charles back to the farm's dinners and its market. Eating food straight from the farm, he says, tastes "like wonder and joy filling your mouth." – Erin Chan Ding

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