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Real Food On The Farm

A Workshop Presenting Nutritionally Vital Foods That Promote Health and Healing

Katrina Prime and Stephen Bramwell

The farm in May is bustling with the vigor of spring; warm soil, vegetable seedlings, fruit and flower buds abound. At S&S Homestead on Lopez Island, Washington, we thought it would be the perfect time to host a workshop. We wanted to celebrate all of the food available on the farm in May, and to identify basic principles of eating well, such as eating seasonally, locally and traditionally. We think of this as eating “real food”, a process that allows deeper connections to be made between quality of food and quality of life.

This workshop emerged from the fact that, increasingly, it is difficult to overlook the poor state of human health in the United States. But while a health crisis seems apparent, nutritional advice has become so varied and sporadic that one can hardly make heads or tails of it. Our workshop argued that small-scale food production and the right meth-

ods of food preparation and preservation offer alternatives to conventional agriculture and conventional medicine, neither of which adequately promotes health in this country.

Held on Saturday, May 14, the workshop began with two presentations pertaining to food and health. Dr. Roy Ozanne, MD, HMD, discussed the fact that today serious degenerative diseases such as obesity, childhood diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer, ADD and depression are becoming commonplace. Roy chalked these up as the byproducts of industrialized agriculture, which uses poisons, synthetic fertilizers and intensive refining processes in lieu of nutrient-rich soil and traditional food processing techniques.

By contrast, Roy then discussed the benefits of traditional

foods as eaten by our ancestors. “If you give the body what it needs, it will build a beautiful temple for us for a lifetime,” he said. “If you give the body an inadequate diet, you’ll develop all kinds of problems.” He then identified what the human body needs: chemical-free whole foods, raw dairy products, saturated fat found in animal products, and even small amounts of raw meat!

The second speaker, Lynn Parr, a nutritional consultant, focused her talk on the mechanics of digestion and the value of enzymes. Lynn identified the three components of a weakened immune system as poor quality “*empty harvest*” food, the presence of toxins, and poor digestion. Her solution was to “re-mineralize, re-enzymize and re-bacterialize” our farms, foods and bodies. This translated into healthy agricultural practices, buying fresh and local whole foods, and eating a diet that includes fermented foods. We welcomed Lynn’s distaste for the current anti-bacterial craze and noted a very real, if comical, correlation between sterile sponges and sterile soil.

Elizabeth Simpson and Katrina Prime followed Lynn’s introduction to the beneficial role of bacteria and enzymes with a presentation on lacto-fermentation of dairy products and vegetables. Elizabeth and Katrina demonstrated how to make butter, yogurt, the European cheese quark, and a variety of fermented vegetables, explaining that pre-industrial, or *traditional* cultures relied on these processes in the absence of refrigerators and modern canning methods.

Many of the foods described and consumed at this workshop were traditional foods, eaten for centuries by our ancestors. We learned that their value is in being tried and true, thus earning the title “real.” They are healthy not because science has told us so, but because humanity has healthfully survived on them for generations. They are not a fad diet; they are just real, as they have always been.

In the middle of their presentation, Elizabeth quoted Sally Fallon, who popularized Weston A. Price’s research on the benefits of traditional diets with her book *Nourishing*



Traditions. Fallon argues that human culture has long been intricately tied to bacterial culture. If you think otherwise, try to forego cheese, yogurt, wine, beer, and many other essential culinary luxuries. In other words, fermentation processes not only keep us healthy; they are an essential part of human culture. That we are losing, i.e. forgetting, these is matter for concern.

With this in mind, Elizabeth and Katrina went on to say that bacteria introduced through fermentation enables the body to absorb nutrients just as soil bacteria enables plants to absorb nutrients. They explained that fermented foods improve digestion, have a higher nutrient content and allow greater nutrient absorption. They also said that most modern diets are sorely lacking in live cultures and enzymes. In a sense, we are no longer getting an essential dose of *life* through our foods.

Much in contrast to this, by two o’clock a rich bowl of cream was whipped into butter, the quark curds were hung in cheesecloth, and everyone was ready for a feast of traditional foods available on S&S Homestead in May. The

meal was served outside in the sunshine, near the pasture and bordering the woods. And in the memorable words of one attendee, “the most interesting banquet I have ever been to,” was about to begin. We served the meal in five courses:

- Clear broth with dropped egg
Herbed French bread and butter
- Corned salmon (fermented, also known as *gravlaks*)
Green salad and whole wheat bread
White wine (from a Lopez winery)
- White sausage with sauerkraut
Potato salad
German sourdough rye bread
Organic beer
- Steak tartar, *fenaalar*, liver paté, and aspic
Fermented carrot and rutabaga
- Custard
Strawberry-rhubarb pie
Pear tart

As each course was served, Henning Sehmsdorf provided a thorough description of the foods, an explanation of the preparation techniques and the health benefits of the dishes. Participants satiated themselves on food, drink and the bucolic environment. And if the oration was not enough, everyone was provided with a thirty-page description of fifty foods available in May on the farm, including items not on the menu, written by farm intern Katrina Prime.

Some of the foods people found unusual included:

- *Gravlaks* is the Norwegian word for fermented salmon. Many cultures eat raw or fermented fish. This version is prepared by filleting and spicing the fish, and burying it in the ground for two to three days. As opposed to burying, a refrigerator works nicely.
- *Fenaalar*, or cured leg of lamb, is a traditional north European food. After a two-week salt lather, two-week brine bath and three month curing period it is thinly sliced and served with dark bread, cheese and beer. Curing meat saves energy, enhances nutritional value by preserving enzymes, and puts us in touch with valuable cultural traditions. They are the epitome of self-sufficiency.
- Aspic is the gelatinous product of boiled pig’s head and pig’s feet. For people wanting to waste nothing, aspic is the ultimate embodiment of using everything. As opposed to most cooked foods, gelatins attract water and

enable easier digestion. Aspic is served as a gelatin with boiled eggs and vegetables molded into it.

- Steak tartar is ground raw beef served with onions, capers and raw egg. According to Sally Fallon, writing in *Nourishing Traditions*, “Almost every world cuisine [includes] raw animal protein.” Of particular importance in eating steak tartar is the imperative to know where the meat is from and how the animal was raised. Of course, this is valuable for any food.
- Fermented vegetables include everything from cabbage to carrots. Cultures around the world have harnessed microbial action to preserve foods through lacto-fermentation. As with cured and fermented meats, fermenting vegetables enhances nutritional content as opposed to heat bath canning methods that damage it. Live fermented vegetables are largely missing from our diet, depriving our digestive tracts of cultures that allow us to break down foods.

The day was wrapped up nicely – digestion in action – as Henning led a strolling tour of the farm. S&S Homestead raises food in accordance with biodynamic principles intended to bring vital life force to the soil and everything that grows in it. Addressing unresolved tensions between conventional, organic and biodynamic, Henning argued that biodynamically-grown foods are rich in vital energy and not just in chemically identifiable nutrients. By way of demonstrating this, Henning introduced the relationship between human health and farm health.

Henning started by showing off the baby chicks and the compost piles, appropriate places to begin as these represent the beginning and end of life on the farm. His discussion went on to blur distinctions between philosophy and practice in demonstrating cyclical versus linear approaches to farm management. For example, Henning talked about water cycles, a process nature accomplishes through oceans, atmosphere and ecosystems. He demonstrated how S&S Homestead harvests rainwater off rooftops, channels it to a pond for storage, and then re-circulates it for use when needed.

Nutrient management is also cyclical and starts with animal husbandry. The farm employs summer rotational grazing, winter strip grazing on a sacrifice field, and builds compost piles from manure from feeding stalls, fruit and vegetable matter, chipped brush and grass clippings.

Henning noted that a cyclical farm system is more attuned to coordination and balance than inputs and outputs. For example, participants saw how the farm builds self-reliance by growing barley on the winter sacrifice field after the cattle are removed. This utilizes a “waste” product – manure – and eliminates an otherwise purchased input – fertility. Animal and plant systems were shown to complement one another.

In the end, we felt the workshop was a much appreciated and yes, uncommon “banquet.” Participants left understanding that eating *Real Food* begins with a few simple principles such as seasonality, traditional preparation techniques, and healthy and holistic farming practices. Happy

stomachs and inspired minds indicated that we had *eaten well*.

Katrina Prime and Stephen Bramwell are interns on S&S Homestead. Unless otherwise noted, the photographs are courtesy of Stephen.