

NOTABLE EDIBLES

A CHICKEN IN EVERY PLOT?

“We thought, we should do something,” remembers Kathleen McTigue, Director of City Farms!, which provides urban agriculture support. She’s talking about a light bulb that went off when she realized that although some community gardeners quietly keep chickens, they don’t crow about their successes. In fact, because most weren’t sure whether keeping chickens in NYC was even legal—they didn’t make a peep.

Heifer International awarded the City Chicken Working Group funding to develop nine urban chicken projects over the next three years and Kathleen began by compiling a handbook of best practices for integrating hens into city gardens: they eat garden scraps, their manure is rich compost, and their eggs are a source of healthful food or micro-enterprise.

But perhaps the handbook’s section of greatest interest explains the city and federal codes that govern urban flocks. Live roosters are prohibited city-wide, as are ducks, geese and turkeys. But hens are legal throughout NYC, whether in commercial, industrial, or residential zones. If you’re raising chickens to eat, they must be enclosed. You may only sell eggs on your own property, and if you sell live chickens, you need a permit—which is free. But unless you plan to eat them, you need neither permit or nor enclosure, and although you could get into hot water over problems like smell or rats, there’s no legal limit to the size of your flock. The handbook also includes suggestions on coop design, and how to talk to your neighbors about your feathered friends.

City Farms! surveyed gardeners to identify interested parties and heard from 18 Brooklyn community gardens excited to learn more. Given the news this spring, feedback included more than a few



appalled clucks expressing anxiety about avian flu.

They also heard from Brooklynites who already keep chickens, including one whose flock of eight is right at home a few blocks from the Coney Island boardwalk. Several gardeners wrote that their chickens make them happy. One, an immigrant from Puerto Rico, wrote, “This reminds me of my childhood. Keeping chickens helps me keep my culture, too.” For more information, visit justfood.org/cityfarms.

BROOKLYN GIRL SPREADS CSA GOSPEL TO GREECE AND BEYOND

For five years Kristy Apostolides lived in Fort Greene and coordinated CSAs— that is, she organized communities to buy shares in a farmer’s harvest; the farmer got paid in advance and delivered crops weekly. She loved Brooklyn and never thought about living anywhere else. But she’s Greek by birth and on a visit there was surprised to see the same problems that threaten local farmers here. Europeans are building vacation homes on what had been the best farmland, Greek

youth are leaving their family farms with no one to run them, and Greece has just joined the E.U., which has a fair-trade environment similar to NAFTA’s. “I knew firsthand,” she remembers, “that the CSA model can keep farming an attractive, viable option while providing a source of great food for urban people. It re-encour-



ages people to value farming and has real possibility for any place dealing with the pressures of urbanization.

She returned for a three-month stay through last December during which she formed an information-exchange network of about 50 organic farmers on Crete who grow vegetables, wheat, grapes, citrus, and olives. “It’s funny—their resources for organic agriculture are ten years behind ours. Here, universities, cooperative extension, and regional certifiers like the Northeast Organic Farming Association all provide technical instruction. There’s really no support for organic agriculture there.” She also developed an intern program, through which people new to farming can work with organic farmers. And she laid the groundwork for starting a CSA program, which she will work on again when she returns this October. “All the farmers think it’s very possible,” she says.

Kristy says her work in Brooklyn convinced her of the benefits of the CSA model. At the Clinton Hill CSA, which she started and was a member of, she “saw Brooklyn people change. They saw the seasons and noticed things around them for the first time, not only what they were eating but, say, when there are mulberries on Brooklyn’s trees.” (Not initiated yet? That would be June.) “I heard that story over and over again, and want to make it happen overseas too.”

Greece isn’t the only country where Kristy is making it happen. She’s now on a committee starting an organization called Urgenci that will use the CSA model to make agricultural connections between urban and rural communities on six continents. Only six? “There’s no food grown in Antarctica so we skipped that one.”



A PARTY FOR CAPABLE FRIENDS WHO CAN



in jars. The space was perfect: ample burners for multiple pots and extra counter space for assembly-line style chopping. Though the kitchen hasn't hosted such a party in recent memory, a church employee said that decades ago, it was a common setting for Brooklyn women

“You girls having a jam party?” asked the guy ringing up Michelle’s boxes of Kerr jars at the Tru-Value on Court Street. Bingo.

On a Tuesday night, a dozen friends rendezvous’d in the basement of the Unitarian Church on Monroe Place in Brooklyn Heights to learn to preserve food by sealing it

to gather and “put by” summer’s harvest.

They brought in produce from the Brooklyn Heights Greenmarket, jars with two-part lids, a stock pot for sealing the jars, and takeout Middle Eastern from Fatoosh—and boiled the night away, from 6 to 10 p.m. Two of the women were experienced canners but everyone got their hands in the mix. Said Kate, who organized the event, “The strawberries just seemed endless but the hulling went quickly as we chatted. Each of us had wanted to can, but were afraid to learn from a book and get it wrong and kill our whole family with botulism. This way we knew it was safe. Plus it was fun!”

By 10 p.m., the popping sound of sealing lids subsided, and each participant had five pints of strawberry jam, a quart of pickled beets, two pints of mostardo (strawberries cooked with balsamic vinegar and mustard, to be served with meat), and two pints of “strawberry-rhubarb business” to top ice cream, pound cake, or yogurt.

Said Kate, “It had a great feeling of self-sufficiency. The strawberries were so sweet we decided to use less sugar. It was a powerful thing to have that control.”

All agreed this was a warm-up in anticipation of the main event: a tomato-canning extravaganza in August.

EVEN BROOKLYN'S TINIEST TASTE BUDS EAT WELL

Shazi Visram got the idea for her Brooklyn startup, Happy Baby, after talking to a new mother who was lamenting the quality of commercial baby food. “It was that light bulb moment. I was like, what if there was something better?” she recalls.



Peas & Thank You Carrots, Smarter Squash & Wiser Apple, Sweeter Potato & Purer Pear. There’s even a flavorful Baby Dahl & Mama Grain, made with black beans, banana and quinoa.

Frozen into cubes rather than sealed into jars, the foods can be separated into individual portions, and are available in two stages: Very Smooth, for babies six months and older, and A Little Chunky, for babies nine months and older. A toddler line is in development.

Three years later, with the help of business partner Jessica Rolph, Happy Baby was born in DUMBO.

Now busy parents who don't have time to peel, steam and puree can serve their babies food that is almost homemade. “One of the things we’re focusing on is trying to introduce new flavors and spices to baby’s palette in a way that they can really embrace,” Visram said. The menu includes Yes

A portion of proceeds goes to Project Peanut Butter, an organization that feeds malnourished children in Malawi, Africa. Gourmet Garage carries Happy Baby and soon Whole Foods will too, but for now the only way to buy them in Brooklyn is through Fresh Direct. - Jessica Merrill

SWEET & LOCAL

A block from the BQE on a busy stretch of Williamsburg’s Metropolitan Avenue, trucks filled with packaged snacks routinely rumble past the tiny storefront of Cheeks Bakery, but inside there is not an ounce of hydrogenated oil or a preservative in sight. “I don’t even have a freezer in the shop,” says chef-owner Melanie Schrimpe, who developed her menu of simple sweets—including decadent red velvet cakes, plump scones, wheat-free vanilla bean cheesecake, and her signature espresso-sea salt cookies—using almost entirely local and organic ingredients. Everything is made from scratch on the premises, a



rarity in this part of town, where most cafes tend to hawk shrink-wrapped or previously frozen pastries.

Having cut her cupcake teeth at Magnolia in Manhattan and then gone on to co-create the menu at the Red Hook pastry shop Baked,

Schrimpe, an 11-year Williamsburg resident, now hopes to show just how delicious—and affordable—sustainable fare can be. The produce she uses in her fruit pastries and savory fare comes from local farmers like New York State’s Red Jacket Orchard and the Hearty Roots Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program, which brings her a weekly crate of fruits and veggies (fresh greens and garlic scapes are some of the latest arrivals). She says she uses organic eggs and dry goods whenever possible, and other ingredients from East Coast-based artisans like Vermont’s Cabot Creamery.

While the moist, lightly frosted cupcakes at Cheeks might command block-long lines in the West Village, Schrimpe says she is pleased with the shop’s location and enjoys helping to revitalize the neighborhood. She appreciates the local customers as well. “In general, Brooklyn is more community based,” she says. “I feel that Manhattan customers come so they can say they’ve had it—not that they don’t appreciate the goods, but I get more of a ‘saw you in the Times, been there, had it, next please’ vibe from them. More of my Brooklyn customers are interested in seeing what rotates due to seasonal ingredients and get excited about new combinations.”

- Christy Harrison
Cheeks Bakery, 378 Metropolitan Ave., Brooklyn, 718-599-3583,