

North Carolina Fresh

Chefs and farmers in the Triangle work to bring the season's bounty to your plate. BY JENNIFER V. COLE

I'm a sucker for seasonal, local produce. Feed me a tender asparagus stalk in spring, and the corners of my mouth crinkle in a toothy grin. Tell me it's from a farm 10 miles up the road, and the farmer delivered it that morning, and that grin becomes a downright swoon. To say I like to know where my food comes from is an understatement. So in the Triangle area (Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill), where oh-so-many restaurants rely on local growers, I practically become catatonic with glee.

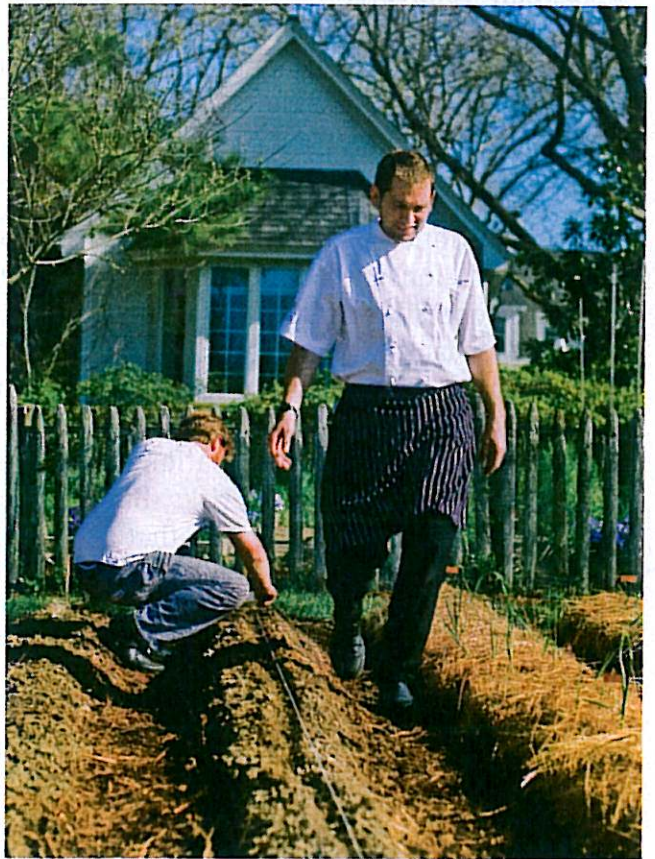
From Farm To Table Chefs such as Andrea Reusing at Lantern, a pan-Asian spot in Chapel Hill, believe it's all about the relationship between people and those who grow their food. She's the head of the Slow Food Triangle chapter (one of the first in the United States) and a regular at the Carrboro Farmers' Market in her red Mercedes, powered by oil from Lantern's kitchen. For foodies, ordering from her menu is like cherry-picking labels at a high-fashion sample sale: Millarckee Farm pea greens (20 miles away). Fickle Creek Farm eggs (15 miles away). In short, Lantern means more than merely food with pedigree; Andrea serves up the freshest local food with pride of place.

Down the road, at Ferrington House Restaurant, the chefs care for a small chef's garden and four greenhouses of micro-herbs. Pesticides stay far from this menu, thanks to the organic practice of removing insects by hand.

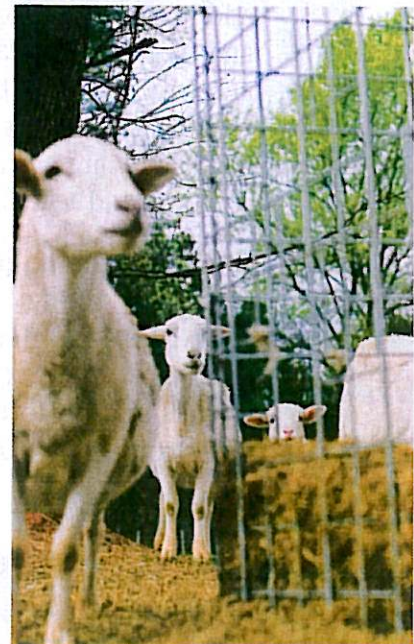
Coon Rock Farm in Hillsborough takes it one step further. This family-owned, biodynamic farm is practically a self-contained experiment in the nitrogen cycle. The pigs root around the garden, tilling the land. Chickens peck the ground, ridding the earth of insects, while adding lots of nitrogen-rich fertilizer for the vegetables with their waste. "We're lazy farmers—we let our animals do as much work as we can," Jamie DeMent, one of the owners, says wryly. Jamie runs the 105-acre farm with partner Richard Holcomb. But they don't only act as restaurant suppliers, they've gotten in the game themselves. Richard partners in Zely & Ritz, a tapas-style restaurant with a Middle Eastern flair in Raleigh. This year, Jamie cuts the ribbon on her own vision—Eno Restaurant & Market, named after the nearby Eno River, in Durham. Here, the menu relies on Coon Rock's seasonal harvest, with a heavy focus on establishing a connection between farmer and diner. Jamie says she wants to see the faces of people when they eat the very food she planted several months before. ●

Our Favorite Spots for Local Food

- **Lantern:** www.lanternrestaurant.com or (919) 969-8846
- **Ferrington House Restaurant:** www.ferrington.com or (919) 542-2121
- **Zely & Ritz:** www.zelyandritz.com or (919) 828-0018
- **Eno Restaurant & Market:** www.enorestaurantandmarket.com (opens in 2009)



ABOVE AND BELOW: Chefs tend the garden at Ferrington House Restaurant, harvesting organic vegetables, herbs, and microherbs. **RIGHT:** Coon Rock Farm raises heritage breeds, such as these lambs.



A Cooperative Effort

Weaver Street Market attracts Triangle shoppers who crave organic products and a chance to be an important part of the community. BY NICK PATTERSON



One of Carrboro's favorite haunts, Weaver Street Market offers a cool place to hang out and a great source for all-natural products.

Near the corner of East Weaver and Greensboro Streets in Carrboro, earnest college students, professors, and soccer moms all meet up for their fix of the organic, the eco-friendly, and a decidedly laid-back community spirit.

Weaver Street Market caters to folks from in and around The Triangle who want to sample homegrown produce and environmentally conscious products. Eat lunch inside, or grab a table outside near the fountain and small sculpture garden.

The owners happen to be the citizens of Carrboro who choose to pay a small fee to support the co-op that bills itself as "Your Community-Owned Grocery." In

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fact, Weaver Street Market's membership consists of 100 worker-owners cooperating with 10,000 consumer-owners in the hybrid organization. Anyone can join for a onetime fee, which ranges from \$75 for an individual membership to \$135 for a couple to \$175 for a household with more than two adults.

Membership gives Weaver Street Market's owners a point-of-sale discount—profit sharing is available for worker-owners—and a voice in the operation that serves an average of 26,000 customers a week in Carrboro.

"They like to give us feedback," says Cat Moleski, spokeswoman for the market. "We try to address those concerns. A lot of issues are brought to us by our customers. We get on it, research it, and make a policy on it."

That feeling of ownership comes with the tendency to treat the market like home. "We work hard to make people feel comfortable," Cat says.

A focus on natural foods attracts health-conscious customers. Small family farms in the area keep the market well stocked.



Community at Heart "We have a diverse cross section of customers," she continues. "You'll hear French, German, Chinese, and Yiddish."

Bringing together all the folks in Carrboro was part of the point when the market opened 20 years ago, says founder and general manager Ruffin Slater. (Since then the co-op has opened stores in Hillsborough and Chapel Hill.) Regardless of the location, Weaver Street Market's plan included having not only high-quality foods but also a central locale "so it would serve the old-time function of being in the center of the

community," Ruffin says.

Despite the store's laid-back atmosphere, making such a market work is no simple task. "It takes the desire of the group, and then it takes a lot of hard work," Cat says. Everyone involved agrees that it's worth the work if it helps people live healthier. "A market like Weaver Street can do great things," she adds. "I'd like people to come here, look at what we are doing, and take it to their communities." ●

For information on store locations, co-op ownership, and special events, visit www.weaverstreetmarket.coop.

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