

A Mother and Daughter Farm-to-Table Forum

Stonybrook Meadows

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Many parents have hosted their child's class pet over a school vacation, or have found themselves feeding and walking the puppy little Tommy swore he would take care of, but how many have had a child's 4-H project turn into their life's work?

Ann del Campo of Stonybrook Meadows farm in Hopewell can raise her hand. In 1997, Ann's daughter Laura, then 11 years old, decided to raise a horse for 4-H. They were living in Freehold at the time and bought the filly while she was still in utero. Later that year, when they bought their second horse, Ann thought, "Well, if we're getting another horse, we might as well get a barn." Any hesitation she might have felt was no match for a pre-teen girl's passion for horses.

"Come on, Mom," said Laura. "You can do whatever you want!" and, thus, Stonybrook Meadows farm was born.

Laura recalls when her mom purchased the land. "She was a single mom, and she bought this property with nothing on it."

"This was all briar bushes," Ann chimes in, gesturing widely around the nearly 20-acre tract. She had a barn built, bought a stallion a couple of years later, and began breeding sporting horses.

Meanwhile, Laura went on to the University of Victoria in British Columbia, where she majored in environmental studies and philosophy. She became interested in the ethics of



Thomas Welch collects eggs at Stonybrook Meadows in Hopewell. Below, left to right: Laura del Campo shows a Katahdin lamb to her mother, Ann; Stonybrook eggs come in many colors; Laura drives a cart pulled by Rambo, a miniature horse.



landscape development and agriculture, which in turn led to an interest in food. Laura started cooking at British Columbia's Lake Shawnigan eco-village. She learned to cook in an outdoor kitchen, milking goats, grinding local grain and using produce from the eco-village's garden.

In 2010, Laura moved back to Stonybrook and began cooking at Elements in Princeton, where she still works 55 hours a week. "They taught me all my professional skills," she says.

The restaurant also provided her with a focus group for her burgeoning interest in raising animals for food.

At that time, Ann had already been raising some meat chickens, and the two decided to do a test run of laying hens.

They experimented with different chicken breeds: Bantams, Aracaunas, Egyptian Fayoumis and various crosses. Now the farm is home to more than 100 chickens, which provide enough eggs for Elements, Ann and Laura's farm market customers and City Market in Lambertville. And yes, many of the eggs are a gorgeous pale blue.

"It's not just raising so many dozen eggs, it's about raising quality," says Laura. "The food we raise has to taste good, look beautiful, be nutritionally

valuable and be raised in a way that respects the land."

Within that framework, there is room for creativity and experimentation. For example, when Ann and Laura decided to raise hogs, they chose Duross, a heritage breed. Just as farmers in Italy have done for hundreds of years, they feed the hogs almonds and hazelnuts to impart a nutty flavor to the meat. Then, when Elements chef Scott Anderson was searching for the best pork to use for charcuterie, the del Campos began raising Guinea hogs, a fatter breed.

Stonybrook Meadows also has a produce garden and an herbal-medicinal garden. New this year at the farm are fraises des bois, the tiny Alpine strawberries that are much beloved by chefs and very hard to come by.

Last August, Ann and Laura held Stonybrook Meadows' first open-tasting event as part of Eating for Education, a fundraiser launched by Alice Waters' Edible Schoolyard Project. They raised \$500 for the

Waldorf School of Princeton.

It's all part of the del Campos' vision for Stonybrook Meadows. "This farm, this land, is a forum," says Laura. "It's a communal space that's about service."

Underneath it all lies another, very simple, reason mother and daughter do what they do. "I farm because I like to eat well," says Laura.

Stonybrook Meadows farm market is open on weekends and by appointment. Eggs, pork, lamb, chickens, turkeys, produce and herbs are available according to the season.

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