

'Tastes Like Chicken'

Greener Pastures Poultry: The new age of poultry farming **BY BOBBIE WILLIS**

Vegetarians out there may insist that no meat is good meat, that omnivores perpetuate a distinct kind of mistreatment of animals and the environment that can happen only in the void known as large-scale meat farming. Even as an omnivore myself, I won't argue, because there are definitely some ugly, irrefutable facts about such farming and processing methods.

But I would argue that there are more conscientious and moderate ways to be an omnivore, if it's the food route you choose. Mostly, it's a matter of not buying blindly into the idea that chicken and salmon and halibut come from the grocery store, that beef and pork come from the butcher department, that these foods appear magically from thin air to be purchased, unwrapped and enjoyed for Sunday supper.

Thinking about where food *really* comes from accomplishes two things: It makes us more careful about purchasing high-quality meat, fish, poultry and dairy foods, which in turn makes us more moderate consumers of such foods.

The truth is, if you are buying meats and dairy products that are produced and processed on a smaller, more sustainable level, it is oftentimes going to cost you a bit more (see sidebar). You buy better meat — better flavor, better texture, better meat-to-bone ratio — but you keep things economical by maybe buying less often. This is actually good all around, as far as being omnivorous goes, flying right in the face of large-scale meat farming and processing. Such large-scale operations are fueled by the demands of consumers who, oblivious to the ramifications of large-scale meat farming techniques, want to buy greater quantities more often.

High-quality, locally raised meats are available throughout Lane County. Of particular note is a group called Greener Pastures Poultry, a co-op that has been selling chickens and turkeys through Lane

County Farmers' Market the last three years. GPP made the move this past spring to sell instead through longtime establishment Long's Meat Market, now located at the Southtowne Shops on 28th Avenue just off of Willamette.

The GPP motto is, "Tastes Like Chicken," which plays on the cliché that chicken is bland, taking on only the flavors it's cooked with. Through meticulous feed and care of its chickens, GPP aims to create poultry that has its own distinct, delicious flavor, that does, in fact, taste like chicken.

West of Eugene and Veneta in Noti,

Aaron Silverman and Kelly Rooney-Silverman are the young proprietors of Creative Growers, a farm on an idyllic plot of land just south of Highway 126. Besides producing herbs and produce, Creative Growers operates in partnership with two other families, along with a couple of non-owner families, in the co-op called Greener Pastures Poultry. GPP growers raise chickens and turkeys cooperatively in a small-scale farming environment. Birds from the various farms are processed collectively at a very small, licensed facility in Noti, north of Creative Growers. Aaron functions as both a GPP grower and manager, overseeing production of all birds, as well as the processing of those birds in preparation for market.

Silverman, originally from Florida, studied plant and soil science at the University of Vermont in the mid '90s. He says both he and Kelly "come from food

driven families, where sitting down together for meals every night" was important. He "came into farming as an offshoot of social activism," he says. When asked what keeps him farming he says, "I enjoy the aspect of solving problems in a holistic, system-wide way."

This problem-solving knack is clear upon first sight of the Creative Growers farm site. If you've ever even just driven by a large-scale poultry farm or processing plant, you know the first thing you catch is the smell — not good. But there's none of that at Creative Growers. The air is clear and the land is open; the

farm is tidy and organized;

it seems like a perfect place to raise a few hundred clean, healthy chickens.

And just to make a point, there are actually a few hundred clean, healthy chickens that the Silvermans tend to, rotating movable tents/coops for the chickens, both to keep the birds comfortable and to protect the farm land from the impact of the birds and coops. If you are purchasing a GPP chicken, this is, in fact, one of the farms where your food comes from. And it is the elements of clean air, open space, and well-tended land and diet, according to Silverman, that make Greener Pastures Poultry's chickens unique.

When the birds from each of the co-op farms are six to eight weeks old, they are taken to a small processing plant, which looks simply like a small, white farm outbuilding, just north of Creative Growers. Suffice it to say that this part of things, between when the chickens are chickens and when they are food, is handled with fastidious care and immense humaneness.

During processing and packaging, either Aaron or Kelly is generally around to oversee operations. Not only do the birds get sold to individual consumers now at Long's, but GPP has been supplying upscale northwest restaurants with high-quality poultry for some time now.

There is something very old fashioned about the way GPP raises and processes its birds, something like the farm life that was prevalent in these parts not so long ago: You raise animals as part of your work; you tend to them and care for them; and eventually a few of them become part of your food supply. You're involved in the whole operation, and you know exactly what you're getting in the end.

An Organic Valley-Roper Poll of 1,000 adults this past spring shows that "Americans overwhelmingly say that smaller scale family farms are more likely to care about food safety than large scale industrial farms." The poll also showed that 85 percent of Americans trust smaller scale farms to produce safe, nutritious food.

Long's Meat Market owner Mike Wooley says of GPP that Aaron is involved every step of the way. "I'm talking to the guy who's doing all this," says Wooley, "and stuff gets done." And that's true for the customers as well. Says Wooley, "The [GPP] product is huge ... You couldn't find anyone even eight or ten years ago who's doing what Aaron's doing ... It gives you the ability to look someone in the eye when you deal with them. You just can't beat that."

So for you omnivores out there who are (hopefully) thinking about a more conscientious, community-minded approach to food, there *are* options for you. You can support not only your local vegetable and fruit farmers, but also local, small-scale meat farmers, cheese-makers, fisherpeople, vintners, brewers, etc. This is a way we can all enjoy and be a part of a more locally focused food community. **EW**



Aaron Silverman with his daughter at Creative Growers in Noti.

WHEN YOU'VE MET YOUR PRINCE CHARMING

- **Showers & Weddings**
- **Indoor & Outdoor**
- **Formal to Casual**
- **We Meet Your Budget**
- **Menu Design**
(Seasonal Ingredients, Fresh Herbs)
- **Event Planning**
- **Experienced Staff**
- **Beer/Wine or Full Bar**

CORNUCOPIA
CATERING
485-2300



Latitude Ten Café

Now Open for Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Phone: (541) 343-3460
Hours: 8am-9pm M-Sat
9am-9pm Sun

Address: 2757 Friendly st.
In the Friendly St. Market
www.latitude10cafe.com

We take the time to prepare everything from scratch using fresh, organic ingredients. Our homemade tortillas make our burritos and fish tacos the best ever! Come try our shade-grown organic coffee from Costa Rica and Café Mam (our cream, sugar and milk are organic too). We sell Sweet Life and Palace Bakery desserts and Bagel Sphere bagels. To accommodate dietary variety, we have options for wheat-free, dairy-free, low-carb and vegans, so we can all enjoy homestyle cooking together. Check our website for updated menus and specials.