



Lesbian Localvores

Queer farmers put down roots throughout the country. By Lauren Marie Fleming

Every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, from April to December, local farmers line up in my town square to sell the fruits of their labor. In the midst of the kale, carrots and cauliflower, lesbian localvores flourish, providing fresh produce and eye candy to all who walk by.

Queer people have always been at the forefront of ecological movements, so it's no surprise that farmer's markets everywhere are populated by queer and trans people looking to grow, sell and shop locally. From growing chard in San Francisco, to raising alpacas in Austin, to farming community plots in New York City, queers across the country are getting back to their roots.

In New London, Conn.—a town of fewer than 25,000 people—over 60 local teens from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds have worked approximately 15,000 hours in the F.R.E.S.H. community garden (freshnewlondon.org). Chelsea Cleveland, a self-identified “brown queer,” works over 20 plots of land for the community education program and with keeps up with her own two plots as well.

Cleveland says the diversity at F.R.E.S.H. makes it different from the other places where she's worked. “I thrive off areas that are as varied as the things I am growing,” she says. “I want

to learn what an old Puerto Rican woman does with her tomatoes when she's done growing them. I want to know what that teenager is going to do with that big old squash he just grew.”

That kinship is apparent in many farm communities. In the Pacific Northwest, the queer farming society is particularly strong, spanning an area from San Francisco to Seattle. Eugene, Ore., a town known for its commitment to local, organic food is right in the middle.

Honor Earth Farms lies 10 miles outside Eugene, Ore. and is run by Linda Perrine, her partner Catherine Konrath and their trusty farm dog Maddie. The farm, which used to cultivate a variety of crops, now specializes in growing certified organic hazelnuts.

During her sophomore year at the University of Oregon, Alisha Babb got a job through a fellow lesbian working with

Dykes in the dirt (from left): Liza Rencountre (right) and Frankie Cohen at home with their flock; Chelsea Cleveland's urban garden; Dana Gentile (top left), partner Abbi Jutowitz and their “kids”; farmer Linda Perrine (bottom left), partner Catherine Konrath and dog Maddie; Margo Fernandez-Burgos digs her hands in the soil in *The Queer Farmer Film Project*

Read our interview with Catherine Friend, the author of *The Compassionate Carnivore*, at curvemag.com. Friend and Melissa, her partner of 24 years, share their lives with nearly 100 sheep, three llamas, two dogs, two cats and various ducks and chickens at Minnesota's Rising Moon Farm.

LIZA RENCOUNTRE (FRANKIE), NATALIE CLEVELAND (CLEVELAND)



dairy goats to prepare them for shows. By the time she left that same farm last December, Babb was responsible for everything from vaccines to blood draws, from breeding to helping tough labors, for nearly 300 goats.

“I could name every goat,” she says, “just by looking at their faces, and even their udders!” Babb loves goats so much she even has a goat tattoo.

Babb made friends with Frankie Cohen and Liza Rencountre while working on the same goat farm. Cohen and Rencountre now live on 38 acres and have chickens, horses, goats and a medium-size garden. However, most of their time is spent cleaning up the over 60 years of garbage dumped previously on their land and returning the area to a nurturing place for themselves and the native plants, animals and peoples.

“We want our farm to serve as an educational opportunity for people,” Cohen said. “Eventually, we would like to see it made available to, or returned to, the indigenous peoples of this area.”

Across the country, fellow goat farmer Dana Gentile runs the 50-acre Darlin’ Doe Farms with her partner Abbi Jutowitz in Mt. Saugerties, N.Y. (darlindofarm.com). The farm focuses on healthy lean meats, and Gentile hopes to get into raising rabbits and bison farming eventually.

Growing up on suburban Long Island, Gentile dreamed of farm life and helped her Italian immigrant father in their backyard garden. Later, when she decided to leave a successful position in the art world to start a goat farm in the Hudson Valley, her family, especially her father, was shocked.

“He left Italy for a better life in America and is a little

surprised that his daughter is now a farmer,” Gentile says. “It’s kind of amazing that our parents tried so hard to get away from farming and food production, and now myself and the young farming generation are reclaiming local food production as our livelihood.”

The reclamation of food production is a fast-growing movement, and queers young and old seem to be setting the trend. The Queer Farmer Film Project, directed by Jonah Mossberg, has been documenting this rapid growth in queer farmers (queerfarmer.blogspot.com). The project seeks to “explore the dynamic relationships between gender, sexuality and agriculture, with a particular focus on the hearts and hard work of America’s queer farmers.” Mossberg’s blog has links to various queer farms, activist sites and workshop info for unique queer endeavors like “fagriculture,” and is a great place to start a search for your own lesbian localvore community. ■

Itty Bitty Farming

Want an edible landscape of your own but not enough space to garden? Woman-owned Star Apple Edible Gardens has the answer. They’ve designed a series of mini kitchen garden starter kits perfect for apartment and office dwellers. Try the edible

greens planter, made from salvaged wine crates and complete with a burlap bag filled with organic soil and fertilizer and all the seeds you need to grow your own salad. (\$29 and up, starappleediblegardens.com) ■

