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Whatcom Locavore: Spring arrives with French shallot soup

NANCY GING - FOR THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

It's official, both according to the calendar as well as the produce rack at the Community Food Co-op! Spring is here!

How can you tell by looking at the produce rack that winter is over? DEVine Gardens' wonderful mix of salad greens is now available again! This is one locavore who has been eating crispy fresh salads all week. Dressed with a simple mixture of yogurt (Grace Harbor Farms, Custer), apple cider vinegar (Bellewood Acres, Lynden), salt, and fresh herbs such as rosemary (home garden, Lummi Island), the DEVine mix is quick to prepare and a colorful delight to eat. DEVine Gardens is located near Custer.

For today's recipe below, I served a DEVine salad with my locavore version of French onion soup, made with shallots instead of onions. The trick to really rich flavor is to caramelize the shallots well. I do this very slowly because I don't want them to burn, especially since they are cooked in melted butter which burns easily. Even though I use medium high heat, I put the pan on the smallest burner of my stovetop. I later move the pot to the largest burner to simmer after I add the stock and herbs.

Last week's Whatcom Locavore article about local beef drew some interesting additional information from readers. First of all, the Community Food Cooperative now carries local grass-fed, grass finished beef from Matheson Farms, owned and managed by Dr. Sandra Matheson, a certified educator in holistic management and a retired veterinarian. If you want to buy in larger quantity, Matheson also has beef for sale by the whole, half, or quarter and is currently taking reservations for this year's beef. See their website at www.mathesonfarms.com, or call at 360-220-5103.

I also heard about Legacy Herefords, owned by Erick and Allison Aurand, who have their main operation on a farm near Ferndale, as well as 12 acres in Bellingham.

Says Allison: "Legacy Herefords is a small beef operation; our beef is pastured its entire life and is all sourced from my grandfather's old herd, which he spent nearly 5 decades developing here in Whatcom County. Our Herefords are more efficient than commercial beef, with a lower 'wastage' percentage at butchering, and excellent flavor and tenderness. They are handled daily from the time of weaning so that when we do load up to go to

Keizer's (or if we're doing a custom-exempt butcher, put them in the pen for Keizer to come to us), they experience no stress and have familiar human hands, sounds, smells, and touches, preventing that shot of meat-tainting adrenaline that stress produces. We process USDA because most people cannot use a full side or quarter of beef, nor do they have the freezer space; our beef is available by the pound and in 'Legacy Packs,' which are discounted and include a mix of cuts."

Keizer in Lynden is the only USDA-certified packing plant in Whatcom County.

For more information, see Legacy's website at www.legacyherefords.com or call 360-510-7180 or 360-255-3063.

Another local source of beef mentioned to me is Farmer Ben's near Lynden. According to their website (myfarmerben.com) they are "a sixth generation farm in Whatcom County, Washington focused on pasture raised beef, pork and chicken products that are antibiotic-free, chemical-free and grass fed." I've heard really good things about their meat from several people. You can call them at 360-354-8812.

Finally, I was reminded that the Whatcom Food & Farm Finder booklet published each year by Sustainable Connections includes only SC-member farms. Another good online source of farm information can be found at localharvest.org. Enter your zip code to find nearby farms, CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) programs, or even specific farm products in our area.

For example, a search on "beef" and my zip code located the following farms in Whatcom County: Legacy Herefords (Ferndale), Pleasant Valley Farm (Ferndale), Dandy Chicken (Lynden), and Goldrush Farm (Sumas). Detailed listings are shown for each farm.

Don't forget! The Bellingham Farmers Market opens for the first time this year on Saturday, April 2, at 10 a.m. Hope to see you there!

FRENCH SHALLOT SOUP

INGREDIENTS

6 large shallots, peeled and thinly sliced (Hopewell Farms, Everson)

4 tablespoons butter (Breckinridge Farm, Everson)

1/2 teaspoon honey (Guilmette's Busy Bees, Bellingham)

2 cloves garlic, minced (Joe's Gardens, Bellingham)

1/3 cup apple cider vinegar (Bellewood Acres, Lynden)

8 cups of beef stock, homemade (soup bones from Second Wind Farm, Bellingham)

1 teaspoon fresh rosemary (home garden, Lummi Island)

1/4 teaspoon of dry thyme (home garden, Lummi Island)

Salt

1 recipe Cherokee fry bread dough (see below)

1 1/2 cups smoked farmstead cheese, grated (Pleasant Valley Dairy, Ferndale)

DIRECTIONS

In a large saucepan, melt the butter on medium high heat, then add the shallots and mix well.

Saute until well browned, but not burned, at least 30-40 minutes, though it may take longer. Stir often, about every 5 minutes or so. Add the honey about 10 minutes into the process. The shallots should be well caramelized.

Add garlic and sauté for 1 minute.

Add the vinegar and mix well.

Add the stock, rosemary, and thyme.

Cover partially and simmer until the flavors are well blended, about 30 minutes. Season to taste with salt.

To serve either use individual oven-proof soup bowls or souffle dishes, or one large casserole dish.

Ladle the soup into the bowls or casserole dish. If you are using bowls, shape the bread dough into thin patties. Lay the patty over the top of each bowl like a lid.

For a casserole dish you can drop tablespoon spread small patties of the dough on top like flattened dumplings. If the dough sinks into the soup, let it stand for a couple of minutes and it should float enough to be right at the surface.

Sprinkle the top of dough with grated cheese. Set bowls or casserole dish on a cookie sheet to catch anything that might boil over.

Put into the oven for 12-15 minutes at 350 degrees or until the bread is done, and the cheese bubbles. Serve immediately.

Yield: Serves 4-6.

CHEROKEE FRY BREAD DOUGH

INGREDIENTS

1 cup flour (Fairhaven Organic Flour Mills, Burlington*)

1/2 teaspoon salt

2 teaspoons baking powder

3/4 cup milk (Twin Brook Creamery, Lynden)

DIRECTIONS

Mix ingredients, adding more flour if necessary to make a stiff dough.

* Note: commercial flour making is currently not local to Whatcom County.

LOCAL RETAIL FOOD RESOURCES

Appel Farms Cheese Shoppe, 6605 Northwest Road, Ferndale; open Mondays
to Saturdays 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.;

Artisan Wine Gallery, 2072 Granger Way, Lummi Island; open for tasting Saturdays 1-5
p.m.;

Bellingham Farmers Market opens on Saturday, April 2, Railroad at Chestnut, 10am-
3pm;

Cloud Mountain Farm Nursery, 6906 Goodwin Road, Everson;

Community Food Cooperative, 1220 N. Forest St. or 315 Westerly Road, Bellingham;

Red Barn Lavender Farm (eggs), 3106 Thornton Road, Ferndale; open Saturdays 3-5
p.m. (call

360-393-7057 Fridays for availability);

The Islander, 2106 S. Nugent Road, Lummi Island;

Terra Organica, 1530 Cornwall Ave., Bellingham.

Read more: <http://www.bellinghamherald.com/2011/03/29/1933665/whatcom-locavore-spring-arrives.html#ixzz1I7NvpQIV>