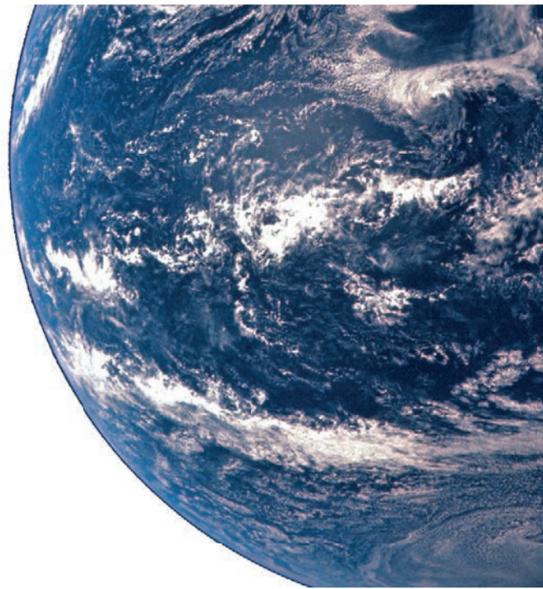


Earth's close up



connecting to
the natural world

Space start-up wants to bring Earth into sharper focus. Watch the video at DailyRecord.com/Grassroots

grass roots

SECTION B

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THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2013

SUSTAINABLE FOOD



Eating *wild*

Fossil Farms offers healthy, organic alternatives to beef

Fossil Farms owner Lance Appelbaum inside the Boonton-based storefront of the purveyor of organic, grass-fed exotic meats. Bison, ostrich and kangaroo are for sale in the shop. BOB KARP/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

By Meghan Van Dyk
@MeghanVanDykDR

Lance Appelbaum's belief that we should know where our meat comes from began with ostrich. It was on a ski vacation in Colorado in 1996 when he and his brother Todd discovered the low-fat alternative to red meat and decided to introduce their find to the East Coast. The brothers started an ostrich farm in Sussex County the following year, and soon founded Fossil Farms to deliver their product and other exotic meats like bison and elk to customers and chefs. "I was amazed by how many restaurants served bison over there. It's second-nature," Appelbaum said. "Out East, no one was promoting exotic meats so we put a plan together to raise ostrich. My brother farmed and I networked with restaurant chefs — no one said no." Fifteen years later, Fossil Farms' business is booming as health-con-

scious consumers look to farm-fresh, organic foods as an alternative to processed food and commodity meat from animals pumped with antibiotics that spend much of their lives in a feedlot. Appelbaum's company, based in Boonton since 2010, sells farm-raised game including ostrich, duck, venison and wild boar in addition to grass-fed beef, pork and chicken. What sets Fossil Farms apart from supermarket competitors is that Appelbaum carefully sources products from 70 farms across the country, from the big sky pastures of Montana to here in the Garden State, including Goffle Road Poultry Farm in Wyckoff, Churutabis Farm in Branchville and LL Pittenger Farm in Andover. "It's great to see the inner-workings of a farm and where animals graze, and to see that, for some farmers, it's not about money, it's about a sense of pride," Appelbaum said.

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GREEN NEWS AND NOTES

Highlands Coalition offers small grants

By Meghan Van Dyk
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Local grassroots organizations working on implementing the Highlands Regional Master Plan or fighting damaging development in the Highlands can apply for grants up to \$5,000 through the New Jersey Highlands Coalition's Small Grants program. "This is the seventh year for our Small Grants program, and since 2007 we've helped about three dozen grassroots groups," said Julia Somers, executive director of the Boonton-based New Jersey Highlands Coalition. "Local citizens groups get funding to get off the ground, and they also gain access to the expertise of experienced environmental groups that are part of the Highlands Coalition." Applications must be received by March 31 and grants will be awarded in June. Grant applications should meet at least one of five criteria, with the items at the top getting more weight than those below: focus on implementation of the Highlands Regional Master Plan; establish a precedent advancing strong environmental protection in the Highlands; assist an organization to fight against an environ-

mentally damaging development in the Highlands; support capacity building of Highlands Region grassroots organizations; educate the public about Highlands water and resources. Last year's recipients included 11 grassroots organizations working on projects that will help protect the Highlands resources that are the source of drinking water for 850,000 people in the Highlands and more than four million outside the region who depend on Highlands water. In Morris, a grant was awarded to Citizens for Better Planning in Morris Township to continue their opposition to Master Plan changes for the Honeywell site, where a large, multi-use development is proposed. The grant enabled the group to fund an attorney specializing in environmental and municipal law as well as a Community Planning consultant. For more information, contact Julia Somers at 973-588-7190 or julia@njhighlandscoalition.org, or visit www.njhighlandscoalition.org and click on the red button on the left labeled "2013 Small Grants Program."



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Julia Somers is executive director of the New Jersey Highlands Coalition. DAILY RECORD 2011

THOUGHT FOR FOOD

The truth behind the meat we eat

By Stefanie Angstadt

I remember looking into the pig pen on Farm Eglantine in Southwest France, picking out “dinner” with the farm’s owner. I was sure I wanted to experience this keystone of the farm-to-table meal, but when it came down to it, the process of slaughtering an animal was much more emotionally and mentally challenging than I had anticipated.

The pork roast these efforts produced was exquisite, but my affinity for eating meat of any kind would be threatened forever.

Granted, one year later, I’m still a carnivore. Meat is only a small part of my diet, but an important part nonetheless. I feel my body craves it after a long day’s work on the farm. But what I know now that I didn’t know back then was that I certainly don’t need as much meat as I once thought. Taking a page from the healthiest diets in the world — namely Mediterranean and East Asian — I have learned to enjoy meat in smaller amounts, and that of higher quality.

For the meat that I do eat, I opt for pasture raised, which is both tastier and healthier. In fact, beef of certain grass-fed, heritage breed cattle actually has a similar fat content to poultry. We can feel healthier and more satisfied at the same time.



Pork is tastiest and healthiest when it comes from happy pigs. When I was traveling and working on organic farms in Europe last year, I came face to face with the process of harvesting animals for meat. PHOTO IS COURTESY OF STEFANIE ANGSTADT

For those who say that purchasing pastured meats is too expensive, take a look at the quantities of cheap meats that you are buying. Now, cut them down by a third (to a healthy portion size) and buy higher quality (for more nutrition). Your net costs end up being about the same.

But there’s another reason besides taste and health, and most of us are familiar with this dark side of America’s love affair with meat: animal cruelty.

That is, somewhere around 98 percent of the meat consumed in America is raised on feedlots, or factory farms dedicated to fattening our pork, cattle and poultry to unhealthy amounts and in incredibly inhumane ways. (Anyone who has read “Eating Animals” by Jonathan Safran Foer might be recalling the abuses on these farms.) These feedlots cram animals into overcrowded indoor spaces where the animals have no choice but to live in their own waste, which necessitates heavy doses of antibiotics to combat disease that spreads easily throughout a feedlot.

If for no other reason than ensuring a minimal level of safety in our food sources, we ought to examine our meat consumption with a critical eye. There are improvements we can make when it comes to our food choices that will result in many, far-reaching benefits to ourselves, our environment, and the animals we know and love.

Stefanie Angstadt is a blogger, farmer and food enthusiast who grew up in New Jersey. To read Stefanie’s blog, visit www.happybeets.com.

WILD

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Fossil Farms ships more than 255 products listed on its website direct to consumers across the country from its 15,000-square foot warehouse on Fulton Street. The distribution hub is also a storefront where locals can purchase popular items like bison burgers, wild boar sausages and grass-fed Piedmontese beef cuts.

Its bread and butter, though, is its restaurant distribution, Appelbaum said. Fossil Farms restaurant clients include David Chang’s Momofuku and Tom Colicchio’s Craft Restaurants in New York City and Tim Schafer’s Cuisine in Morristown, Il Capriccio in Whippany and Rattlesnake Ranch in Denville.

About 25 workers are based at Fossil Farms’ Boonton warehouse and at a leased space in Washington in Warren County. Products like its sausages are made at Arctic Foods, a USDA-certified plant which provides processing for natural farms and distributors.

The warehouse shelves turn around three times a week and shipments of bison, the most popular meat, come in four times a week, Appelbaum said. On a recent visit, three whole 40-pound pigs harvested that morning in Lafayette were destined for Colicchio & Sons.

Health benefits

Appelbaum estimated the company’s profits last year at \$12 to \$16 million. He attributes the success to consumers’ growing interest in what’s on their dinner plate.

“People want to know not only where their meat comes from but what they can do with it at home,” he said. “Celebrity chefs and The Food Network have made good food more accessible to home chefs.”

Beef alternatives like bison and ostrich have a rich flavor but are lower in fat and calories than beef and are raised without the use of antibiotics, steroids or hormones, another added benefit.

While still miniscule compared to the \$79 billion beef industry, sales of grass-fed beef and exotic meats are on the rise.

“These are animals that can’t be raised in pens and given hormones,” Appelbaum said. “They need room to roam and, believe me, animals like ostrich aren’t easy to raise. We pay a premium to our farmers so they stay in business. As a consumer, I don’t mind spending more because it’s about quality, not volume.”

Eating game is about more than fad diets and food trends, Appelbaum believes, “it’s about a lifestyle.”

Hannelie Rheeder is the farmer at the 16-acre Churutabis Farm in Branchville. The farm raises guinea hens, pasture-raised meat chickens, Rouen ducks and rabbits using natural and sustainable methods. Over the years, it has supplied some of its goats and guinea fowl to Fossil Farms, which has helped the farm sell off its product at the end of the season, she said.

“They came to us with a restaurant that was looking for goat, so we supplied them,” Rheeder said. “There’s not a lot of farms that raise goats; it’s lean, very healthy, but most Americans are looking for pork, chicken and beef so that’s what most farmers raise.”

But Rheeder said that might be changing, if only slightly. The farm was one of several organic farms that sold sustainably raised meat at the Slow Food Northern New Jersey market at the Frelinghuysen Arboretum last month. Hundreds of people packed the room in search of winter produce and local meats.

“People were curious,” she said. “We sold a good amount of our guinea fowl, rabbit and farm-fresh eggs. But the demand is not so much that we can invest enough to raise 1,000 goats or anything.”

Fredy Umanzor, executive chef at Tim Schafer’s Cuisine, credits menu offerings like its kangaroo tostadas — on the menu now — and porcini-crusted venison paired with a white truffle demi-



Lance Appelbaum of Paramus founded Fossil Farms 16 years ago to offer farm-raised game and all natural meats. Bison, stored in a -10 degree freezer at the Boonton warehouse, is a top seller. PHOTOS BY BOB KARP/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



Appelbaum holds a semi-boneless quail raised at a Vermont farm.

glaze as a reason the restaurant has weathered the recession.

“We are one of the pioneer restaurants in wild game,” Umanzor said. “It’s a different concept. As a chef, it opens you up to a new range of dishes. We get satisfaction here seeing customers’ heads turn when they see our menu, and even more when they order buffalo over steak and like it.”

The kangaroo special at Tim Schafer’s is marinated and seared with tomatoes and scallions and plated with red corn tortillas and a Guinness stout barbeque sauce. How does kangaroo taste?

“It’s a part of the experience,” Umanzor said. “You have to try it for yourself.”

Hamburger beginnings

A mix of venison, elk and bison, mountaineer stew, a recent favorite of Appelbaum’s family, wasn’t always on the menu for the 36-year-old Paramus native.

“I grew up on hot dogs, hamburgers and beefaroni,” Appelbaum said. “Dinner was about a quick meal.”

Fossil Farms got its name from Steve Appelbaum, Lance and Todd’s father whom they called “The Fossil.” The family’s horses, vacation home in the Poconos, and trips out West instilled in the boys a love and appreciation for the outdoors, Appelbaum said.

Appelbaum initially went into business with

N.J. ORGANIC FARMS AT A GLANCE

The following farms offer naturally raised meats. For more, visit LocalHarvest.org.

- Beechtree Farm**, Hopewell; 609-466-0277
- Bobolink Dairy and Bakehouse**, Milford; Cowsoutside.com
- Flatbrook Farm**, Montague; Flatbrookfarm.com
- Fossil Farms**, Boonton; FossilFarms.com
- Glenmalure Farm**, Branchville; GlenmalureFarm.com
- LL Pittenger Farm**, Andover; 973-786-6147
- Mini Mac Farm**, Washington Township; Minimacfarm.com
- Plaid Piper Farm**, Branchville; Plaidpiperfarm.com
- Riverbend Farm**, Far Hills; Rbfangus.com
- Simply Grazin’**, Skillman; Simplygrazin.com

his brother Todd, but the two parted ways in 2008 so Lance could focus on Fossil Farms and Todd on his ostrich farm, one of the largest in the country with more than 400 birds.

“Our goal is to make each other sustainable,” Appelbaum quipped. Appelbaum himself is not a hunter, but he knows what it takes to raise ostrich and once slaughtered a pig for the experience, he said.

“It gives you an appreciation and respect for the product,” he said.

Fossil Farms is preparing to launch a new website that offers virtual

tours of the farms from which it sources its meats that will make it easier for customers to buy online, Appelbaum said. Other developments include plans to develop a locally sourced charcuterie line and, Appelbaum hopes packaged Fossil Farms meats will be available on supermarket shelves before year’s end.

“I love what I do,” Appelbaum said. “Good food is what it’s all about.”

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NEWS

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King Corn screening in Morristown

A limited number of seats are available for the screening of King Corn, a feature documentary about two friends, one acre of corn, and the subsidized crop that drives our fast-food nation, at 7 tonight at 14 Maple Ave. in Morristown.

The screening is part of Grow It Green Morristown and the Foodshed Alliance’s Thought for Food film series.

In the film, Ian Cheney and Curt Ellis, best friends from college on

the east coast, move to the heartland to learn where their food comes from. With the help of friendly neighbors, genetically modified seeds, and powerful herbicides, they plant and grow a bumper crop of America’s most-productive, most-subsidized grain on one acre of Iowa soil. But when they try to follow their pile of corn into the food system, what they find raises troubling questions about how we eat - and how we farm.

After the film, there will be a discussion led by panelists Chef Dan Rothman, a Foodshed Alliance board member, and Samantha Rothman, co-founder and president of Grow It Green Morris-

town. A \$5 donation is suggested. For more information, visit GrowItGreenMorristown.org.

Businesses probed on sustainability practices

The Institute for Sustainable Enterprise will be conducting its first survey of New Jersey’s businesses on sustainability topics.

Based at Fairleigh Dickinson University’s Florham Park campus, the ISE will conduct its First Annual Survey of New Jersey Business Sustainability, in partnership with PublicMind. This study aimed to pro-

vide an assessment of the external sustainability-related factors that New Jersey companies are considering, the extent to which they are taking steps to improve sustainability, their motivation for doing so, and the internal conditions they’ve got in place to assist their sustainability efforts, according to a news release.

“We hope this research will help policy makers, government agencies, and others to understand what businesses are doing now in sustainability management and what can be done to engender even more constructive behavior to improve New Jersey’s ecology, economy, and quality of life,” the re-

lease says.

An ISE speaker event will be held at 4 p.m. Feb. 20 at which time the study will be presented.

Pequannock River Coalition hike

Join the Pequannock River Coalition for one of its most popular outings Feb. 16 at a winter hike through the north area of Copperas Mountain in Rockaway.

Snow or not, this is a great opportunity to see how our woodlands and wildlife endure the rigors of Jack Frost and also see the aftermath of superstorm Sandy, said Ross Kushner, the group’s executive director. Featur-

ing moderate exercise and education, Kushner said the 4-mile winter hike is a “perpetual crowd-pleaser.”

Hikers will meet at 10 a.m. at the gravel parking lot on Green Pond Road. The lot is on the right hand (north) side of Green Pond Road, just a quarter mile from Route 23. Hikers should wear appropriate clothing and bring a snack and drink for a lunch stop.

Non-members are asked to contribute a minimal \$5 contribution.

Send green news and notes to mrvandyk@njpressmedia.com