
A SHORE THING: MASSACHUSETTS' NORTH SHORE

BY JILL ROSE

A warm day stretches out before you. It's a day for wandering farm paths, discovering out-of-the-way places for local food, and perhaps dipping your toes in the water. You throw the cooler in the car and head north.

Exiting 128 at 1A North, head through North Beverly toward the charm of Wenham center. You take Arbor Street to Asbury, and a short drive down a winding road lands you at your first destination: Green Meadows Farm. Owned by Joanne Patton and run by Andrew Rodgers for the last four years, this 230-acre property features a large farm stand, pick-your-own fields, hiking trails, and farm animals including chickens, Tamworth pigs, and Dorset Horn sheep.



Rodgers, who grew up in Newton and is working on a master's degree in sustainable vegetable production, has his hands full running the farm's large community supported agriculture program

along with pick-your-own vegetables, flowers, raspberries, and blueberries. But he finds time to cater to wholesale customers like Nick Speros, the chef at Beverly's Soma restaurant (more on this shortly) and many other North Shore restaurants and food stores.

The farm stand features products from the farm's fields and greenhouse, artisan products like jam and maple syrup, organic fruits, organic soups and pastries from Beverly baker Kim Bolognese, and cheese from Topsfield's Valley View Farm.

Purchases tucked away, you head further north, this time to wander the fields and walking paths of Ipswich's Appleton Farms (adjacent to 1A), one of the oldest continuously operating US farms. Admission is free to Trustees of Reservations members, \$3 for a non-member day pass. You may want to time your visit to enjoy one of Appleton's many events, including family hikes to view landscapes created by the Appleton family, farmstead tours including the working dairy, and family workshops to meet spring calves and cows during milking.

All this walking has made you hungry for lunch, so you continue north, this time aiming for Ipswich center. Your first destination is the store tucked between Ipswich Shellfish's warehouses (turn down Market, go over the railroad tracks,

turn left at the Gulf station onto Hayward). This is a gourmet's paradise, with a gorgeous fish case and one of delicious prepared foods, the world's prettiest lobster tank, and a plethora of local goodies.

Greek specialties are everywhere in the store, with recipes developed by Chrissi Pappas, the owner's wife and author of two cookbooks. Along with Chrissi's famous lobster pie and cracker crumbs, you'll find store-made Greek seasoning, salad dressings, and seafood bisque.

The store features many local products, including soda from Ipswich's Mercury Brewery and bread and cookies from Gloucester's Alexandra's Bakery, along with New England favorites like Pemberton's gourmet sauces (Maine), Blue Moon Sorbets (Vermont), and Flo's relish (Maine). In season, you'll find Maine lobsters and Ipswich steamers, and the store is a member of Appleton Farms' CSA program, so if you order prepared food, it likely contains local produce.

To complete your picnic, backtrack to Market Street and stop at Coastal Greengrocer, a small specialty foods store run by David Lloyd and his brother-in-law Giovanni Cassano. In season, Lloyd purchases a majority of the store's vegetables and herbs from Appleton Farms and other local Ipswich farms.

Cassano, originally from Bologna, buys the specialty foods, which run the gamut from local products like Marshview honey and flavored salts and sugars from Didi Davis to hard-to-find imported European products. Cassano is also in charge of the store's deli meats and cheeses, including five types of prosciutto, bresaola, Valley View Farm goat cheese, and a large selection of imported cheeses.



The crew at Coastal makes panini using bread from Newburyport's Annarosà's Bakery, as well as soups, biscotti, and cookies. They also create completely custom deli platters and baskets using classic and/or artisanal cheeses and meats.

After a delectable picnic in nearby Bradley Palmer State Park, retrace your steps to 1A, this time heading briefly south until you hit 133 East. Following the signs for Crane Beach, you soon come to Russell Orchard, where you can visit the farm animals, pick your own berries (strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, or blackberries, depending on the month), take advantage of farm or locally grown produce, buy a homemade fruit pie, or pick up a bottle of made-on-premises fruit wine or hard cider. (Note to self: return in fall for apple picking and the best cider donuts in the Boston area.)



After a brisk walk on beautiful Crane Beach and perhaps a look-see in a few antique shops (follow 133 East to Essex), it's time to head south for dinner where two Beverly restaurants make a point of buying local items, putting them together in unique ways.

Organic Garden serves an organic vegetarian menu consisting mainly of raw foods. Owner Robert Reid opened the restaurant in 1999 after developing a passion for raw food and its role in good health.

With no real restaurant experience, Reid plunged ahead, working to make healthy food delicious enough that his restaurant would attract customers from Boston and beyond. Reid buys as much local produce as possible, with Green Meadows Farm as a main supplier. You won't feel like you're eating raw food, notes Reid, but by eliminating the high temperatures used in traditional restaurants, essential nutrients and food enzymes are kept intact.

In his cozy spot on Cabot Street, Reid and his crew serve lunch and dinner, and Reid said he plans to begin opening for breakfast in late spring, featuring organic pastries from Kim Bolognese. The restaurant serves soups, salads, whole grain bagels, wraps, entrees, and desserts. It also features a full line of smoothies and elixirs such as wheat grass and ginger.

Remembering Green Meadows Farm's Andrew Rodgers talking about his close relationship with Soma chef Nick Speros, you decide to splurge on dinner and head south on Cabot Street to the popular restaurant/bar.

Speros began his relationship with Rodgers when he opened his first restaurant in Gloucester—a restaurant customer who was a member of Green Meadows' CSA program introduced the two. Today, Speros and Rodgers talk at least twice a week, and the menu at Soma is built in large part around Green Meadows produce and fish bought from Gloucester day boats.

Speros says he believes most people can discern the difference in quality and that local seafood and vegetables are key to what he's accomplishing at Soma, which is perhaps the closest one can come to Boston dining on the North Shore. There are few places in the world where you can eat fish that came out of the water that morning, he notes.

Cooking seasonally is extremely important to Speros, as is making sure every element on the plate has a purpose, be it flavor, color, or texture. Combine that with an eye toward simple preparations designed to highlight the freshest food he can find, and you have a recipe for a superior meal.

The relationship between Speros and Rodgers has developed to the point where the farm manager is working to expand his animal husbandry to supply local meat to the restaurant. Speros says buying only local meats is cost prohibitive but called the lamb he received from Rodgers last spring a treat and noted that the customers who were lucky enough to try it were very appreciative.

Speros's passion for locally produced foods comes through clearly in his menu and his dishes, and your day ends on a high note. You head home full of Gloucester monkfish (not to mention Speros's famous chocolate Aphrodite cake), your back seat happily filled with the best the North Shore has to offer. ❖

Jill Rose, writer, has worked in magazines for 15 years and has lived in the Boston area most of her life. She is known for making elaborate, sometimes experimental, desserts in her small kitchen on the North Shore, where she lives with her husband and two daughters.

