

Sustainable farming is about community and accountability

Written by Laura Modlin

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It was one of the hottest weeks this summer and I did what any sensible person might — I got in my car and headed north.

For me, in addition to the incentive of a cooler climate there was the draw of the Kneading Conference in Skowhegan, Maine — three days dedicated to discussing wheat production, artisan bread-making and the outlook for the future of farming.

Fellow Eastonite Jeff Borofsky also opted for the cool breezes and a chance to learn a thing or two that week. He chose to go to the conference to supplement his chef skill set for his portable brick oven pizza business.

I went for the farming portion of the event. It was incredibly interesting, and initially a bit daunting, to finally dip into the fountain of wheat-growing wisdom.

I had wanted to learn about this piece of the farming picture for a long time. And I was excited to infuse my blog with fresh topics.

What I came away with was a basic understanding of grain production as well as a reinforcement of my perception of the needs of an agrarian future — if we are to have one, which we must if we want to survive.

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The first of the two major themes in the future of farming portion of the conference was the importance of community. This is relevant on a number of levels since an agrarian society is about more than growing food. It is based in the strength of local roots — in the land, but also among one another.

Many of the talks at the conference focused on the importance of keeping a community strong by hiring from within.

It was noted that it is fiscally sound to give business to those in your community. And it is good to be in close proximity to the people you depend on for your goods, services and basic human needs.

Gracing one's neighbors with the dignity of valuing the work they do creates an environment where the entire community may flourish. The fruits of that respect and validation are important ingredients for sustainable futures.

It strengthens the whole.

The second major theme was personal accountability.

To me, it should go without saying that we ought to do our best each and every day to help nurture a sustainable living environment. Even if discussing this at the conference was a bit of preaching to the choir, I think it helped inspire the participants to up their enthusiasm a bit.

People in a town like Easton have a huge influence on the community. Really, though, every person anywhere makes choices every day that impact the environment — and the future — locally and globally.

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The conference was definitely fulfilling for me. I got to meet and learn from farmers, scholars, advocates and artisans. Jeff Borofsky and I had meals together and bonded over discussions of local Easton farming issues.

Borofsky has a large interest in helping to sustain agriculture — and other businesses — in town and in the region. He regularly bases pizza specials on what is fresh at Easton's Sport Hill Farm.

And at each Thursday's Westport Farmers' Market he uses produce from other market vendors as toppings for his brick oven pizzas.

Each bit helps.

Go to thefarmingjournalist.com to read Eastonite Laura Modlin's blog. Go to skinnypines.com to find out more about Jeff Borofsky's business.