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The FOOD Scene

tea was hard to find and the idea of tea culture was quite foreign.” Tea is more than a drink, he explains, “there’s a culture beyond that: a slower pace, a contemplative life aesthetic.”

One of Frayer’s Dobrá colleagues was John Wetzell. The two also worked together at Stone Leaf Teahouse in Middlebury, which Wetzell opened in 2009. Wetzell travels regularly to source tea for his tearoom and for wholesale customers like Aqua ViTea kombucha and stores and restaurants as far as Brattleboro. Fiddlehead Brewing Company has used his tea in a special beer.

Wetzell and staff lead monthly workshops; a recent one included a slideshow of his travels and tasting of a rare Chinese silver needle tea. More people “are interested in treating tea like other food and beverages, wanting to know where it comes from and who’s growing it,” Wetzell says.

Ben Youngbaer, of Setting Sun Tea Hut in Plainfield, says the farm-to-table movement has built appreciation for “good ingredients from good places,” and craft beer and cheese “have helped people develop more complex palates.” Like Jolles and Beck, Youngbaer first cultivated his love of tea and tea culture as a Dobrá regular. Americans, Youngbaer says, “don’t know how to slow down. The focus and attention you have to pay to tea can help us do that.”



INTERVIEW

A few questions for Curtis Lessard,

winner of a 2017 Land Stewards Award from the Vermont Land Trust, and a Farms 2+2 scholarship for a combined Vermont Technical College and University of Vermont degree with an agriculture business focus.

VL: In third grade, you started a farm business, which lasted until college. How did that happen?

CL: At Pomfret Elementary School, we raised chicks from eggs. At the end of the school year, I asked my parents if I could take three home. We built a coop in the backyard. I

wasn’t planning a business, but soon, I had seven chickens and we were kind of surprised how many eggs they laid. I called it Curtis’ Coop and started selling to neighbors and people at my mom’s work. As the years went on, I kept adding more chickens. I had probably 15 customers a week that would each get a dozen eggs. It was always \$3 a dozen. I never changed the price. I probably should have.

VL: What was the hardest part?

CL: Finding time to take care of the chickens. It’s not hard, but it does need to be done on a daily basis, and you need someone to do it if you go away. I remember the first time a possum got a couple of them too. That was a little tough, but that’s

part of farming.

VL: Sugaring is another backyard enterprise in your family.

CL: We’ve been doing it for more than 10 years. I remember helping to build the sugarhouse. It’s not a big maple business; we make about 60 gallons a year off 225 buckets. We do everything the old-fashioned way with the galvanized steel buckets and a small wood-fired evaporator. I really like being in the sugarhouse. Family, friends, and neighbors come by to hang out.

VL: What’s your favorite way to eat maple?

CL: On pancakes. And maple creemees, year-round.

VL: How did you decide to pursue farming as a career?

CL: I’m not really one to



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sit around. I like being outside and doing hands-on stuff. The first farm I worked on was a dairy farm in Barnard. It started as an after-school job. I was doing chores there and realized I liked being there better than school. It was more than a job to me. Then I did school work-study on a beef farm and with a bigger sugarmaker. I like that there's always something different to do.

VL: What do you hope to get out of school that you might not learn on the job?

CL: I don't come from a farm, and I wanted to learn how to run a farm. I took a livestock production class last fall. There are equations to figure out costs and to make sure you're making money. Farming is always evolving with new techniques and technologies. You get a lot of that in school.

VL: Is there something you think people should know about farming?

CL: It's a lot of work. I didn't realize how much work it was until I started working on a farm. You've always got to be thinking about what you're doing next, not what you've already done.

VL: You were co-president of your school's chapter of Future Farmers of America, which was founded in 1928 to keep young people interested in farming, and that is still a challenge. What do you think would help?

CL: We took a lot of field trips to farms, and it definitely got kids interested, opened them up to different kinds of agriculture. One farm we visited was Spring Brook Farm [in Reading]. They bring kids up from New York to see and participate in the farm. Especially for kids from the city, who wouldn't normally be exposed to farming, I think that must be pretty valuable. They probably don't realize where their food comes from, what it takes to produce food.

VL: Did your high school service trip to Puerto Rico change your perspective on farming?

CL: At the farm we visited, they still used oxen for fieldwork, which I thought was pretty cool. It was interesting to

compare how much technology we rely on and that farming can be done without all that stuff.

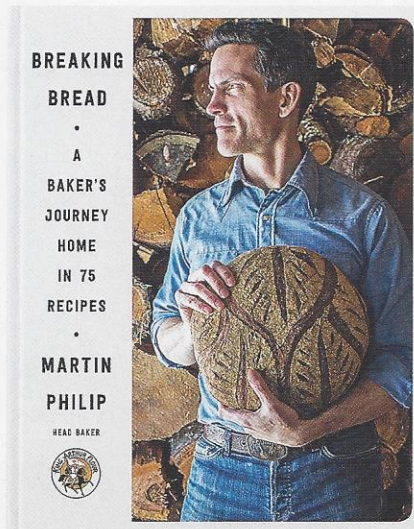
VL: Ten years from now, where are you?

CL: Ideally, managing a large farm and, ultimately, owning my own farm somewhere in Vermont, probably a mix of dairy and beef. It depends on the markets, but I'd probably start working for someone else because farms are expensive. The good thing is that people are always going to need food.

COOKBOOK

Flour power

MARTIN PHILIP, now head baker at King Arthur Flour in Norwich, had no professional bread-baking experience when he first applied for a



job there. It took three tries, but Philip persisted. The former professional opera singer and New York City corporate finance manager shares that story and many others in "Bread: A Baker's Journey Home in 75 Recipes." Through the corn grit hoecakes of his Ozark childhood to his own first sourdough attempts to his daughter's favorite birthday cinnamon rolls, Philip takes delight in making and baking. "I bake," he writes, "because it connects my soul to my hands, and my heart to my mouth." 🌱

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