



FOOD & SOCIETY POLICY FELLOWS

Food Sleuth: Thanksgiving Menu Reflects Pleasures of the Good Life

By Melinda Hemmelgarn, About Angie Tagtow

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Angie Tagtow taught me a lot about how to enjoy dinner. It was at her table in Elkhart, Iowa, several years ago that I learned the power of attaching a name and a face to my food.

Here is the posting from her menu board:

Garlic Roasted Turkey (fresh, heritage, pasture-raised) — Pella
Niman Ranch Ham — Western Iowa
Whipped Potatoes — Maxwell
Candied Squash — ours
Kelly's "Fly-off the plate" rolls — flour from central Iowa, eggs from a nearby farm
Mini-carrot Bundt cakes with Orange Cream Icing — our carrots, eggs from a nearby farm and flour from central Iowa
Organic apple cider — Minnesota
Organic Mulling Spices — Pella
Organic wine
Tap water
Milk from Sheeder Farms

A fellow dietitian and advocate for sustainable agriculture, Tagtow and her husband, Kelly, had invited several friends to gather at their home before driving to Ames to hear the famous farmer, writer and poet Wendell Berry speak about the state of farming and the pleasure of eating.

We started with cheese, crackers and fruit. Artfully arranged serving platters and clinking wine glasses beckoned us out to the screened porch, where we could feast on a vista of prairie the Tagtows are restoring - a legacy of native plants and trees.

I noticed that by each plate, Tagtow had placed a card identifying the type of cheese, farmer and location of the farm that had produced it. Same with the fruit and wine. Oh, and we learned that Kelly made the



crackers from scratch, using flour from a central Iowa farm.

Next came dinner. As Tagtow presented our meal, she announced where every dish originated. The pork loin came from a local family farmer; the roasted garlic from her garden, and the home-baked bread was another one of her husband's masterpiece creations. The acorn squash was the last from her autumn harvest, and the precious berries on our cheesecake came from Wisconsin, preserved last summer and saved for a special occasion. The cream served with fair-trade coffee came from an Organic Valley cooperative farmer, assuring guests the cows were never given antibiotics or artificial growth hormones.

Every bite of Tagtow's meal conveyed love, care and dedication to her guests and respect for the animals and farmers who made the meal possible. I'd never eaten a more sacred meal, and I knew I wanted to recreate her thoughtfulness every chance I could.

So when I learned the Tagtows were hosting Thanksgiving dinner for 20 this year, including two children younger than 5 and one tween, I couldn't wait to hear about the menu and her family's reaction to her unique serving style.

Sure enough, the Tagtows posted the menu, identifying the source of their food. They figured 80 percent to 85 percent of all the ingredients were local or organic. Plus, all the vegetables, garlic and herbs came from their garden. In keeping with the Tagtows' green philosophy, they bought no disposable paper products. Instead, they used cloth napkins and "every dinner plate we owned."

But, "other than a few food scraps, there was no garbage!" Tagtow exclaimed proudly.

The Tagtows didn't think anyone noticed their menu board, cared about where the food came from or how it was raised or served. However, one family member took notice for sure. Their 12-year-old nephew, Ian, stopped to tell them "the ham was the best" and "thanks for dinner."

Funny, what I remember most from Berry's talk was asking him how we could help children care about where their food came from. He thought for a moment and replied, "Let them taste it."

Berry's inspirational "Pleasures of Eating" essay never gets stale. Read it with your family and, like the Tagtows, try to practice what Berry preaches. I promise your food will never taste better. Just ask Ian.

The essay: www.ecoliteracy.org/publications/rsl/wendell-berry.html.

Melinda Hemmelgarn, M.S., R.D., is a clinical dietitian, advocate for sustainable food systems and 2004-2006 Food and Society Policy Fellow. She lives in Columbia.