

CREAM OF THE CROP

IN THE HILLS AND VALLEYS NORTH OF SAN FRANCISCO A GRASSROOTS MOVEMENT IS HEADED BACK TO FARM-FRESH INGREDIENTS.

LOCAL
FRESH
ORGANIC
SALADS
PRODUCE
FLOWERS
SANDWICHES
TARTS
DIAPHYTIC
CHEESE
COGNAC WINE
SPECIAL CHICKENS
BREAD
BEVERAGES

Chriscocker
Jan Conley

Spring Onion, Herb and Cheese Tart

Just Picked Squash and Beans

Fresh Ricotta Sandwich with Red and Gold Tomatoes

Chriscocker
Kate Arding

But it all started with milk. Conley and Smith want acclaim for the pristine oysters from Hog Island, and they want a showcase for the local organic vegetables, farmstead cheeses, Marin County wines and the olive oil made minutes ago.

To that end, the two women—friends for more than 20 years—have reskinned the old barn to house their company, Tomales Bay Foods. Inside, they've set up the Cowgirl Creamery, turning out cheeses that show off the richness of the local milk and cream, and installed the simplest of food-to-go counters, with dishes as stylish and flavorful as those of a Zagat winner. Spread out along the barn's interior corridor, a vendor representing local farmers sells organic produce, flowers and honey, and a grocery/wineshop stocks local bread, olive oil, wines and cheeses.

But it all started with milk. Conley met the Straus family, dairy farmers and environmentalists, when she moved to western Marin several years ago. At that time the Strauses were working to create the first organic dairy in California. She was intrigued by the ambitious project and signed on to help them market their product. That partnership worked, and today, Straus milk and butter are in stores throughout the Bay Area.

"Once the Strauses' milk was on the shelves," says Conley, "we started to look for other small farmers in west Marin who needed a voice for the wonderful things they make."

So she scouted for other small producers who needed a market. "What we want is for people who appreciate good products," says Conley, "people who care about this beautiful landscape, to identify these foods with this place, region and soil."

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