

# savor

## THE GORGE

*A celebration of fresh, local food*

### **Saving the Family Farm**

Preserving Hood River's  
agricultural heritage

### **Gathering Around the Table**

Cooking and eating together  
at Roots Farmacy

### **The Flavor of Rain**

Simple, seasonal mushrooms

Who's your  
**FARMER**  
INSIDE

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FALL 2018

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 **LOCAL  
FOOD  
FIRST**

FALL 2018

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Savor the Gorge is published twice a year in June and September by Hood River News. No part of this publication may be used without written permission by the publisher. ©2018. Every effort is made to avoid errors, misspellings, and omissions. If, however, an error comes to your attention, please accept our sincere apologies and notify us.

Thank you to Gorge Grown Food Network for contributing to and supporting this publication.

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# 2018

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# editors Note

The first time I saw the Hood River Valley was in the mid-1980s. I'd driven up the Gorge from Portland with a college friend who was from Hood River. He wanted to show me his hometown. We pulled off on the west Hood River exit and zipped up Country Club Road. I vividly remember cresting the hill and the valley coming in to view. We drove around among the orchards

for a while before heading to his house. It was fall and the trees were heavy with fruit. It seemed like the orchards and farms went on and on, one abutting the next, everywhere we went. They appeared bountiful and unending.

Thirty-some years later, things are still bountiful this time of year. The trees laden with fruit are lovely and comforting in their annual recurrence. But as for unending? Sarah Sullivan, executive director of Gorge Grown Food Network, tackles the issue of preserving farmland in the Hood River Valley in this issue, beginning on page 8. Multiple pressures — including soaring real estate prices, aging farmers with no succession plan, and increasing corporate ownership of farmland — are focusing attention on what the future of agriculture in the Hood River Valley might look like. With the help of an extensive public report on Oregon farmland recently published by researchers at Portland State University, Sullivan goes on a deep dive into the

issue, and also looks at work being done in various places in Oregon and elsewhere to address some of the issues we're facing here. It's a topic we all should pay attention to, whether farmers or consumers.

Writer Peggy Dills Kelter takes us to Stevenson, Wash., to Annie McHale and Curt Gray's ROOTS Farmacy (page 16). After changing her diet to improve her health (successfully), McHale sought to share her epiphany with others. The couple has created what they call "an underground culinary experience," offering cooking events, food education classes and culinary retreats, along with catering and a meal service. Their farm-to-table dinners provide a unique way for people to gather together and share in planning, cooking and eating a meal. It's an inspiring story of melding local foods, healthy eating and camaraderie.

Kacie McMackin gives us yet another fun and delicious recipe to make with our kids — a tried and true Italian staple with the unique and healthful addition of veggies (page 14). And Lindsay Gott takes us along as she recounts a past journey to Italy, where she came away with a perfect, simple, delicious preparation for mushrooms (page 18).

We hope you find much to savor this fall in the Gorge. Cheers!

—Janet Cook



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RIVER GORGE

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May thru first  
week in October  
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week of November  
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downtown Hood River

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FARMERS' MARKET  
January through April  
First and third  
Saturdays of the month  
1 to 4 p.m.  
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THE DALLES  
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week of October  
Saturdays, 9 a.m.-1 p.m.  
City Park  
Union and E. 5th Street

STEVENSON  
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first week of October  
Saturdays, 10 a.m.-1 p.m.  
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downtown Stevenson

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Mid June thru  
first week of October  
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White Salmon City Park

more information at [gorgegrown.org](http://gorgegrown.org)

fresh BITES



Photo: Austin Smith/Bear Boot Productions

Harvest Fest

Celebrate the Hood River Valley's harvest season at the 36th annual Hood River Valley Harvest Fest Oct. 12-14. Held along the scenic Hood River waterfront, this is the Columbia Gorge's biggest celebration of the region's fall bounty. The old-fashioned fall festival brings together more than 120 vendors offering local produce and food products, plus arts and crafts, wine, cider and beer tastings. This year's festival includes an expanded beer, wine and cider tasting experience featuring the Gorge

Cider Society, Columbia Gorge Winegrowers Association and Full Sail Brewery. Load up on boxes of Hood River favorites, including fresh pears, apples, pumpkins, berries and flowers, and a wide variety of local foods, from pies and jams to smoked salmon and chocolate-covered cherries. A kids' activity area includes bouncy houses, face painting and more. All festival-goers ages 15 and up are invited to take part in the popular pie eating contests on Saturday and Sunday at 2 p.m. For more information, go to [hoodriver.org](http://hoodriver.org).

Produce by Season in the Gorge

FALL 2018

APPLES  
ASIAN PEARS  
BASIL  
BEANS  
BEAN SPROUTS  
BEETS  
BOK CHOY  
BROCCOLI  
BRUSSELS SPROUTS  
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CAULIFLOWER  
CELERIAC  
CHARD  
CIDER  
COLLARDS  
CORN  
CUCUMBERS  
CURRANTS  
EGGPLANT  
FIGS  
GARLIC

GOURDS  
GRAPES  
HAZELNUTS  
HERBS  
KOHLRABI  
MELONS  
MUSHROOMS  
MUSTARDS  
ONIONS  
PEARS  
PEPPERS

POTATOES  
PUMPKINS  
QUINCE  
RADISHES  
RUTABAGAS  
SPINACH  
SHALLOTS  
TOMATOES  
TURNIPS  
WALNUTS  
WINTER SQUASH



## Fruit Loop

Fall is the perfect season to hit the Hood River Valley Fruit Loop. Fruit stands along the 35-mile loop are in full swing, and many farms along the way offer U-pick apples and pears during the fall harvest season. Along with fruit stands, the route includes lavender, alpaca and chestnut farms, as well as wineries and cideries. Look for special events at many Fruit Loop farms during fall. For more information, go to [hoodriverfruitloop.com](http://hoodriverfruitloop.com).

## Fill Your Pantry

Stock your pantry and freezer for the winter at the 4th annual Fill Your Pantry event, Nov. 4 from 2 to 6 p.m. at the Rockford Grange (4250 Barrett Drive, Hood River). Locally grown and produced staples available for purchase in bulk include potatoes, onions, root crops, winter squash, beans, grains, fruit, honey, cheese, dried herbs, jams jellies and more. The event includes food storage and preservation demonstrations, educational materials, kids activities and live music. For more information, go to [rockfordgrange.net](http://rockfordgrange.net).



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# saving the family farm

BY SARAH SULLIVAN

Hood River County has the most expensive farmland in Oregon. How do we preserve our agricultural heritage and our ability to grow food for future generations?

Agriculture is the cornerstone of our rural community, yet farms and ranches are increasingly challenged by fragmentation of farmland, development and other non-farm uses, complex regulations, and planning for generational transfers.

Hood River County now has the most expensive farmland in the entire state of Oregon. The average cost of an acre of farmland rose from \$11,951 in 2002 to \$19,000 in 2012. That's a whopping 59 percent increase, and anyone who has looked at property values recently knows that the cost of land in Hood River County has increased even more in the last three years.

The average age of a farmer in the Columbia River Gorge is now 58, and most farmers do not have a plan for transitioning their farm to the next generation. This is a statewide problem: 64 percent of Oregon's farmland — 10.45 million acres — will change hands in the next 20 years.

Researchers at Portland State University recently released a sobering public report called "Analysis of Oregon Farmland Sales 2010-2015." According to the report, in 2015, Hood River County had by far

the highest median price per acre of farmland in Oregon in all categories, including exclusive farm use zoned (\$29,300), non-exclusive farm use zoned (\$91,822) and improved (\$42,477).

Other counties in the Gorge have relatively more affordable land, but it doesn't always come with epic mountain views, substantial rainfall, irrigation rights, or prime soil.

"Who owns farmland matters, for our agricultural economy and workers, rural communities, environment, food system, and our landscape," states Dr. Megan Horst, assistant professor of urban studies and planning at Portland State University and primary author of the Oregon farmland report.

A lot of players, including out-of-state buyers and corporations, are involved in farm property sales. While individuals and trusts continue to comprise the majority of buyers, there appears to be a shift underway to greater corporate ownership. Statewide, corporations accounted for a little more than one out of every five sales and more than 40 percent of acres purchased from 2010-2015.

In other words, corporations are buying larger properties than other buyer types.

As Portland grows and newcomers seek rural estates, second homes, short-term rental property, or other investment opportunities, those that actually work the land (farmers) are in jeopardy of getting forced out.

Hood River, Sherman, and Wasco counties are all in designated "Opportunity Zones." The Tax

Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 establishes a new federal tax incentive to encourage long-term investments in certain low-income communities newly designated as Opportunity Zones. Through Opportunity Funds, private investment within a designated Opportunity Zone may earn tax relief on both the capital gains invested in the funds and those generated through the investment by the fund.

Corporations unrelated to agriculture (for example, involved in real estate and development) are among those purchasing farm properties, increasing the price of land for the farmer and raising concern over the future. In part because of non-farmers' demand for farmland, the average sales price is almost three times the assessed rate. The increased demand is driving up the cost of the land to far more than any farmer can cash flow with income from their crops. These owners may also be more likely to develop the land if that means more profits for their shareholders.

The report identifies the top ten buyers between 2010 and 2015, by price and acreage, in each region and statewide.

- The Columbia Gorge region had the highest percentage of properties purchased by out-of-state buyers (14 percent) in Oregon between 2010 and 2015.

- The percentage of corporate buyers was highest in the Columbia Gorge (25 percent) and Central Regions (25 percent) of Oregon.



## Top 10 Purchasers By Price in Hood River County 2010-2015

BUYER	TYPE OF BUYER	PURCHASE PRICE	PRICE PER ACRE
Greg Te Velde	Individual	\$65,000,000	\$8,918
Oregon Trail Highway LLC	Real estate, land development and property management	\$13,855,000	\$7,300
Neal J. Dow Family Limited Partners LP	Trust/LP/Estate	\$6,669,000	\$502
Western Rivers Conservancy	Other — Conservancy	\$6,100,000	\$431
Eagle Creek Northwest, LLC	Real estate, land development and property management	\$5,134,971	\$151,922
State of Oregon	Government agency	\$3,610,758	\$1,060
Weedman Brothers	Agriculture	\$3,600,000	\$907
JPD Land Company, LLC	Real estate, land development and property management	\$3,130,000	\$17,056
Meadowbrook Farms, LLC	Agriculture	\$2,775,000	\$2,555
Bellinger Properties LLC	Real estate, land development and property management	\$2,350,000	\$6,930

## Top 10 Purchasers By Acreage 2010-2015

BUYER	TYPE OF BUYER	ACREAGE
Western Rivers Conservancy	Other — Conservancy	14,148
Neal J. Dow Family Limited Partners LP	Trust/LP/Estate	13,273
McElligott LLC	Agriculture	8,483
Greg Te Velde	Individual	7,288
Tritazu Investments LLC	Real estate, land development and property management	5,752
Oregon EAT, LLC	Unknown	5,234
Weedman Brothers	Agriculture	3,970
John D. & Debra Burns Co — Trustees	Trust/LP/Estate	3,949
State of Oregon	Government Agency	3,406
Kamerrer Farms Inc.	Agriculture	3,135

So what does this mean for our local farms and food system? Several of the larger orchards in the Gorge are now owned in part or entirely by corporations, sometimes with a family member as a shareholder. For smaller farms, the value of the land in Hood River has far exceeded the carrying capacity, or what a farmer can make producing food from that land.

### PRESERVING FARMLAND

Few people in the state of Oregon have been more involved in protecting working farms than Michael McCarthy of Trout Creek Orchard in Parkdale. He sits on the board of the State Farm Bureau, 1,000 Friends of Oregon, Hood River Parks and Recreation, and Parkdale Valley Land Trust.

McCarthy and his mother, Kate, started the Hood River Valley Residents Committee in 1977. The organization's mission is to protect farm, forestland, water-

sheds and the livability of urban and rural communities through advocacy, education and monitoring land use processes and decisions.

"The prices of farmland are getting totally out of hand," McCarthy says. "I'm really concerned about the future of agriculture in Hood River."

McCarthy has been farming since he was 8 years old. He settled in Hood River in 1980 and raised his three children on Trout Creek Orchard. McCarthy and his family recently went through the arduous process of transitioning the orchard to McCarthy's son, Adam. McCarthy is really pleased with how it went, but he said it took years of planning and thought, and he worries about Hood River's fruit industry. There is a serious shortage of labor, and the new requirements for food safety certification are an enormous burden and cost to smaller family farms.



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*Adam McCarthy and his dad, Mike, at their Parkdale orchard.*

One tool that is being used increasingly in Oregon to address the issues of succession planning and farmland preservation is a working land conservation easement. These are agreements between landowners and an authorized organization like a land trust or soil and water conservation district to lock up a property's development rights forever, and preserve it for agricultural and conservation values. It allows the landowner to farm, pays them for the development rights they've given up, and reduces the land's value, making it more affordable to the next generation of farmers.

The Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program was created by the 2017 Legislature to provide grants for working land conservation easements and other tools that can help address the issues of succession planning and farmland preservation. Established under House Bill 3249, the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program is the result of unique collaboration between the Oregon Farm Bureau, Oregon Cattlemen's Association, Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts, Oregon Association of Conservation Districts, Sustainable Northwest and the Nature Conservancy.

If funded, the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program would help pay for permanent working land easements, 20-to-50-year easements, called "covenants," and conservation management plans. It would also support succession planning training and a study of Oregon's estate tax. This program

could be an important part of the solution if it receives funding from the legislature for the grant programs. The Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board is requesting \$10 million to administer the program, and the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Commission, which oversees the program, spent the last eight months drafting program rules, which are available for public comment until October 5, 2018.

Ken Bailey of Orchard View Cherries in The Dalles sits on the 12-member commission. Bailey is engaged in transitioning Orchard View to the fourth generation of his family.

Nellie McAdams is the Director of Rogue Farm Corps' Farm Preservation Program, a third-generation hazelnut farmer from Gaston, Ore., and has long been involved with the program. Rogue Farm Corps is training the next generation of Oregon farmers and ranchers, and helping communities develop programs and policies that assist with farm succession and permanent farmland protection.

"Oregon is an amazing state that can produce over 220 crops, but we can't grow them without land," McAdams says. "People tend to settle in flat bottom ground near rivers, which is exactly where you'll find our best soils. The land use program has done an excellent job at slowing the paving of our soil, but we've still lost half a million acres from agriculture and 65,500 acres from Exclusive Farm Use zoning since the program started in 1973."

Last spring, Rogue Farm Corps, Gorge Grown Food Network, Oregon State University, and Washington State University held a workshop on farm access and succession planning in Hood River. Thirty-eight ranchers and farmers attended the event, most of whom are retiring soon and looking for options to transition management and keep their farms productive.

Adam McCarthy of Trout Creek Orchard spoke on the panel, as did Katrina McAlexander who now manages her family's farm, Mt. View Orchards. Mosier lavender grower and lawyer Steven Seymour offered legal advice and insight from his experience helping several families transition farms from one generation to the next.

"Agricultural land is changing hands, aging farmers want to see their legacy continued, and qualified beginning farmers and ranchers are ready to take it on," says Nellie McAdams. "We should continue to explore tools and opportunities for connecting generations of farmers and ranchers for the future of agriculture in Oregon."

Many of the orchards producing fruit in the Gorge are century farms, with third or fourth generation descendants returning to farm that land. Most of the vegetable farmers in the Gorge are first generation, and buying smaller pieces of farmland for intensive vegetable production can be more difficult and cost prohibitive. It takes patience and creativity.



Ben Saur and Anastasia Mejia are from Hood River. They married in 2009, and spent years growing produce on leased land scattered around Hood River, paying landowners in fresh produce. It was a lot of driving, but their experience helped them qualify for a loan from the Farm Service Agency to buy 10 acres in Parkdale in 2015. Two draft horses, Wilma and Betty, provide the power for Ben and Anastasia to grow vegetables for the Hood River Farmers Market, various restaurants, and 35 families who purchase a box of produce a week through a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) share.

Ben Zimmerman was raised in Hood River. After some time away, he returned to the Gorge and managed to buy a piece of land in Snowden, Wash. He soon met Brooke Nicholls who was working as a nurse at One Community Health, and they married in 2017. They grew much of the food served at their wedding – including 80 chickens. They love tending the land, but with jobs off the farm and a new baby they can't manage it all, so they informally lease part of their 3-acre parcel to friends Kristin and Colin Franger, owners of Blue Bus Cultured Foods.

The Frangers enjoy having a hand in growing some of the produce for their sauerkraut and other products, and being able to do so on their friends' property is a win-win. Their products are now in

stores throughout the Pacific Northwest, including New Seasons and Whole Foods, and they've won the prestigious "Good Food Award" several times. Short-term, informal leases may not work for everyone, though. They require trust, and farmers can't build equity on borrowed land. Leasing also often keeps farmers from making long-term investments in infrastructure and soil improvement.

Raices Cooperative Farm, a project of The Next Door in Hood River, connects community members to land and training in marketing, sales, and leadership. The project started as a one-acre plot on Barker Road, where about two-dozen families grow food in individual plots. Another acre off Tucker Road was added to the project, and now some of the farmers are growing food commercially on other satellite plots. Raices members Joel Pelayo and Vitalina Rodriquez sell produce through the Raices CSA and Odell's Mercado del Valle.

The demand for local vegetables has exceeded the supply. Gorge Grown Food Network's Veggie Rx Program now provides hundreds of families with fresh veggies each month, but it's impossible to source all of the produce locally, especially in the late fall and winter. The Hood River Farmers Market runs year round now, so there is a lot of potential for Gorge farmers to sell winter storage crops like squash, onions, and garlic. And the

eastern end of the Gorge, which receives more sun than Hood River, is prime for winter greenhouse production. The demand for year-round food is growing, and the local food system is dependent on access to healthy, productive, affordable land.

What works elsewhere may not translate perfectly in the Gorge because of tax codes and other reasons, but there are some great models to learn from. The Equity Trust, based in New York State, runs an innovative "Farms for Farmers" program, which promotes alternative ownership structures for farms. This program supports farmers who need affordable land, and communities that want a secure source of locally grown food and a way to preserve their environmental heritage. The Equity Trust Fund is a revolving loan fund enabling socially conscious lenders and donors to support projects that are creating new ways of owning, using, and stewarding property.

Dirt Capital Partners in the northeastern states pools capital from private investors to help beginning farmers buy land; and some land trusts help farmers purchase land in transactions that include a working land conservation easement (which the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program could help fund, if it receives support from the state legislature). What about a Gorge farmland trust?



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## **A VISION FOR THE FUTURE, AND A CALL TO ACTION**

Gorge Grown Food Network just updated its Strategic Plan through 2021, and one of our top priorities is working with community partners to ensure that farmers have access to land in the future. Our mission is to build a resilient, inclusive food system that improves the health and well-being of our community.

Preserving farmland doesn't just mean slowing development, it means supporting agricultural productivity and what farmland conservationists call "working lands." It also involves protecting the systems that support farms and farmers like the water, land use laws, habitat for pollinators like bees, and the markets that enable farmers to sell and share their products.

Oregon Farm Link is an online forum where those seeking to transition land after retirement can connect with beginning farmers and investors to preserve farms, and keep them in production. Increasing the use of this tool in the Gorge could help new farmers find land.

A training center, like the Headwaters Farm Incuba-

tor Program outside of Portland, could provide the capital, experience and support for new farmers to launch thriving businesses.

Many of our local healthcare providers now recognize that quality food is a cornerstone of health, like One Community Health. They provide more than \$35,000 a year for Veggie Rx for their food insecure patients from general operating funds. What if some of our local institutions actually employed farmers to grow quality produce for patients, hospital cafeterias, schools and healthcare employees?

We need to be creative and collaborative as we seek to protect the agricultural history of the Gorge with its skyrocketing prices of farmland. The future of farming depends on it.

*The public report, "Analysis of Oregon Farmland Sales 2010-2015," is available on the website of Planning Oregon, a research into action initiative of the Nohad A. Toulon School of Urban Studies and Planning at Portland State University, at: <https://www.pdx.edu/cus/planning-oregon-research-practice-innovation>.*



**Sarah Sullivan is the executive director of Gorge Grown Food Network. Gorge Grown's mission is to build an inclusive and resilient food system that improves the health and well being of our community.**

## **Columbia Gorge Farmland Sales and Prices between 2010-2015**

- Hood River County had by far the highest median price per acre in all categories, including EFU zone (\$29,300), non-EFU(\$91,822) and improved (\$42,477)
- Average sale price is almost three times the market assessment for farmland (323.4 percent)
- 35.6 percent of all sales between 2010-2015 were for less the \$100
- Median prices per acre for improved farmland (\$17,292) were roughly 1.7 times higher than unimproved farmland (\$9,903)
- Median prices per acre for non-EFU farmland (\$69,721) sold for 3.3 times as much as EFU farmland (\$21,155)

## **Farmland Buyers between 2010-2015**

- Agriculture only accounted for two of the top 10 buyers by price and three of the top 10 buyers by acreage.
- Corporations buy approximately three properties of farmland annually, shifting ownership of about 99.46 acres of farmland from individuals to corporations
- Smaller farmland properties have a higher median price per acre than larger properties
- Properties in the 2-3 acre range had the highest median prices per acre (\$139,831) than other properties below 5 acres
- Fannie Mae or Banks Alon purchased farmland at the highest median purchase prices (\$650,000) than other buyer types
- Out-of-state buyers paid the highest median prices per acre (\$28,301)
- Corporations accounted for 1 out of every 4 sales, and 37 percent of acreage sales: Corporations are buying larger properties than other buyers.
- Agriculture accounted for 13.4 percent of all sales, and 21.2 percent of all sales by acreage
- Real Estate, etc. accounted for 8.5 percent of all sales, and 10.7 percent of sales by acreage
- Corporations unrelated to agriculture accounted for 11.5 percent of all sales and 15.9 percent of all sales by acreage





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# cooking with kids

**STORY & PHOTOS BY KACIE MCMACKIN**



The more I cook with my kids, the more fun I have with them in the kitchen. One of our favorite “go to” meals is Cacio e Pepe. It’s a very simple dish, and everyone in our house loves it. My favorite way to serve it is to top it with loads of roasted vegetables and fresh herbs.

Since I have to heat up the fragrant black pepper oil and cook the pasta in boiling water, I let the kids handle all of the vegetable chopping with their kid-safe knives. The goal in cooking with them is always to let them do as much as possible, and to not correct what doesn’t need correcting. In the case of chopping the vegetables, there’s really no wrong way to do it, so it’s a great opportunity for me to just observe and not offer them too much instruction. I’ve found that if I give them space, they are much more willing to actually ask for help when they need it.

One thing I always do before giving them free reign of the kitchen counter is to clean it well. I don’t set out to clean the whole kitchen before we begin cooking together; if I did that we’d never get to the actual cooking! I just make sure that the space we’re about to use is clean enough that we have a calm, less chaotic work environment. For this recipe I cleared off one counter, set it up with the washed vegetables (cauliflower, broccoli, and zucchini), and a pre-chopped onion (they’re too

hard for the kids to cut with their kid-safe knives and tend to make their eyes burn).

With the oven pre-heating, the kids chopped their veggies, and piled them onto the rimmed baking sheet. They drizzled the lot with olive oil, and seasoned it with salt and pepper. When one of them suggested we add some fresh herbs from the backyard, I agreed. It wasn’t what we’d originally planned for the recipe, but it’s wonderful to let them take the reigns and ownership of a dish, dinner, or recipe.

Once the vegetables were sprinkled with a little rosemary and thyme, they went into the oven and I prepped the rest of the ingredients which then, off the heat, the kids helped to stir together — another great tip, not just of this recipe, but for many others. So much can be prepped before it is heated which adds to the list of things they can do, and reduces the list of things they can’t, which, in my opinion, is where empowerment and skill in the kitchen starts.

## Cacio e Pepe

### Ingredients:

- 1-½ lbs Bucatini (spaghetti will work, too, but Bucatini is best)
- 3 Tbsp extra virgin olive oil, plus more for roasting the vegetables
- 2 Tbsp unsalted butter
- 2 tsp freshly ground black pepper, plus more for roasting the vegetables
- 2-½ cups finely ground Pecorino Romano cheese (or Parmesan)
- Sea salt

- 1 small head broccoli, trimmed and very roughly chopped
- 1 small head cauliflower, trimmed and very roughly chopped
- 1 large yellow onion, halved and roughly sliced
- 1 zucchini, trimmed, halved and sliced
- A bit of fresh thyme and rosemary (optional)

### Directions:

Preheat the oven to 400°F.

Toss all the chopped vegetables and herbs with olive oil, a bit of salt and pepper. Roast in the oven for about 45 minutes, tossing occasionally, until deeply golden and browned.

In a large saucepan, heat the 3 Tbsp of olive oil over low heat with the 2 tsp of black pepper until fragrant. Add in the butter and melt. Set aside.

Bring a pot of salted water to a boil. Add the Bucatini and cook until al dente. Before draining, reserve a teacup full of the starchy pasta water. Drain the pasta. Add a splash of the pasta water to the pot with the pepper-butter-oil mixture. Add the pasta and toss to coat. Add in the cheese and toss/stir together with tongs, adding a Tbsp at a time of the pasta water until the consistency is smooth and creamy and the pasta is coated.

Transfer to bowls, top with the roasted vegetables, and enjoy.

Serves 2 adults, 2 kids, and a pasta-loving baby.

**Kacie McMackin is a food blogger, writer and photographer, and founder of [gorgeinthegorge.com](http://gorgeinthegorge.com).**





# *gathering* around the table

**STORY BY PEGGY DILLS KELTER**  
**PHOTOS BY EMILY FITZGERALD**

Spell Check will tell you that spelling “Pharmacy” with an “F” is wrong, but Annie McHale and Curt Gray, owners of ROOTS Farmacy in Stevenson, Wash., will tell you it’s just right. As they describe their business on their website, “ROOTS Farmacy is all about food. And health. And quality of life. Because they go hand-in-hand.” Food. Farm. Family. Friendship. Fun. The “F” word reimaged.

ROOTS Farmacy is not a restaurant, nor is it exactly an inn. It’s hard to describe what makes ROOTS Farmacy so unique — and delightful. Their customers, who soon become their friends, usually find Annie and Curt through Airbnb, and by word of mouth. Time spent with the couple in and out of their lovely Craftsman-style home can involve harvesting organic produce from their community

garden, planning a meal, sharing hands-on cooking experiences, and sitting down together to enjoy the delicious results of their efforts.

As Annie writes, “With hundreds of guests and farm-style dinners under our belts, we recognize a common theme: most folks experience a profound connection while seated at our table, overflowing with just-harvested organic goodness. The smell of earth, of evening dew, of fresh herbs, and edible flowers is palpable. No one wants to leave!”

Several years ago, Annie and Curt traded in their corporate jobs and moved to Stevenson, purchasing a home in need of love and attention. Prior to the move, Annie had been dealing with some health issues, and her friend, a naturopath, suggested it might be her diet that was making her ill. “Within six weeks of changing my diet, I realized that this is something I want to share with people,” Annie says. “So, then I was in my kitchen, which became my laboratory.”

Lest you think that “laboratory” connotes bland or boring food, the meals that Annie and Curt share with their customers are anything but. Guests (no more than eight at a time) register for ROOTS Farmacy events several weeks in advance. Annie e-mails them right away to find out about allergies and food preferences. “That starts the conversa-

tion,” Annie says. “Before they get here, we’ve had three to four e-mail exchanges. We’ve already started a relationship.”

In addition to forming relationships with their customers from the outset, Annie and Curt get ready by contacting their local suppliers, with whom they have also built relationships. These include Stevenson’s Native American fish shop, Cascade Creamery artisan cheese makers, local livestock farmers, and more.

After connecting with all involved parties, the planning begins in earnest, with the couple creating several four-course menus from which the guests will choose. Once the guests arrive, everyone sits down to make final menu adjustments, then they head out to the garden to harvest fresh organic vegetables, fruits, herbs and edible flowers. The kitchen is readied, with prep stations supplied with all the necessary tools, recipes and ingredients.

Curt and Annie offer suggestions and guidance, but leave the prep and cooking to their guests. Jobs may include everything from filleting a salmon to designing table decorations. When the food is ready, everyone sits down at the table to enjoy their efforts. (Guests are encouraged to bring their own wine; ROOTS Farmacy does not have a liquor license to sell alcohol.)





*Guests of ROOTS Farmacy are treated to a unique culinary experience through planning, cooking and eating a meal together.*

Ah, the table — a rectangular slab of wood with a few battle scars. Annie says of it, “My dining table is my most prized possession. Nearly everyone who’s taken a seat has signed its underbelly, striking ink against grain in commemoration of good food, wine, and company. This tradition is in its second decade, and the signatures and accolades serve to remind me that food is the gateway to a heart-connected community.”

Long before adulthood, Annie, one of 11 kids, learned the importance of sitting and sharing a meal around the table. The dining table was the one place the whole family met every night, without fail, to share the day’s events. Annie’s parents were also known for their generous hospitality, frequently inviting an eclectic mix of folks to dinner. As Annie remembers, this group might include the local priest, an automobile executive, and women on furlough from their incarceration at a local jail.

Besides the table, other items in Annie and Curt’s kitchen seem to be infused with history

and magic — the wooden bread bowl belonging to Curt’s grandmother, a Dutch oven carried over the Oregon Trail by Curt’s ancestor, and a large cast iron sink that Annie found partially buried on their property. They lovingly restored the sink, leaving untouched its ancient blemishes.

The bread bowl gets a huge workout every day. When the couple isn’t baking bread for one of their in-home meals, they are baking and sharing loaves with the greater Stevenson community. Every week they bake 30 loaves for the local farmers’ market. The first 30 patrons who purchase fresh food at the Saturday market receive a free loaf of ROOTS Farmacy’s bread. Yup. Free. Annie and Curt call it “tithing,” and soon they will add free soup to their repertoire. Annie says, “We need to tithe, to be good community members.”

In addition to their farm-to-table dinners in their home, they offer classes, and are beginning to branch out into the catering business. Annie and Curt will prepare and serve food for up to 35

guests; they prepare the meals in a licensed kitchen, and use only organic, healthy ingredients. You won’t find a paper plate or plastic fork anywhere near their catering. It all comes down to their values about food.

Before I leave, Annie asks me to help her make a few loaves of bread, and to take some more home. She’s already treated me to a slice and some delicious roasted tomatoes. In a short time, she’s made me feel so welcome in her home. Annie writes, “Breaking bread together is the fabric that weaves families and communities together. Sharing a meal is sacred, and invites people to celebrate friendship, engage in conversation, and connect meaningfully.”

For more information, go to [rootsfarmacy.com](http://rootsfarmacy.com).

**Peggy Dills Kelter is an artist and writer who lives in Hood River.**



## the flavor of *rain*

BY LINDSAY GOTT

I have spent whole afternoons, alone with my brain, trying to find a good alternative to the French word: “terroir” (pronounced: ter-wahr). This word is so accurate and so clarifying in French, but falls flat on its face in English. Not only is it awkward to pronounce, visually, it is one letter away from ‘terror.’ It desperately needs re-branding. Mostly because the concept behind it is a direct path to delicious.

*Terroir: the conditions in which a food is grown or produced and that give the food its unique characteristics.*

This concept, which is rooted in local pride, morphed into trade protection measures in Europe

during the 1980s. The happy consequence either way is the protection of authentic flavor (and tradition). In Italy, you can get tossed in jail for trying to pass off your cheese as Parmigiano-Reggiano if the milk you used came from cows that chewed their cud on the other side of the fence of two designated provinces. These borders are not arbitrary; they account for both minute and significant shifts in climate and soil from one farm parcel to the next, and ensure that the quality of cheese labeled “Parmigiano-Reggiano” blows your mind every time.

This idea, which flies in the face of our current “food industrial complex” in the U.S., was more easily adopted in the wine industry here. The effect of terroir is directly expressed in wine, making it easier to understand. In 2004 the Columbia Gorge AVA became an official designation for wine, a coup for this region’s status on the wine market. It got me thinking: what else could we protect and label, or at least cherish under the terroir concept?

In our corner of Oregon, we get a lot of rain. And while we are all fortifying ourselves a bit at this time of year for the dreary reality of constant

drizzle for months on end, consider that rain also brings ... mushrooms! Mushrooms may seem insignificant to weathered Northwesterners, but for most of the rest of the world, it’s not a given that you can walk through the forest a few minutes from your back door on a sunny day after a few days of rain and spot chanterelles poking out amongst the forest ground litter in quantities that could fill up a grocery bag before your kids can even start whining. My chef friend next door even found morel mushrooms in his city back yard last spring. This truth lightens my dread at the site of another cloudy sky this time of year.

In what now seems like a past life, I had the fortune to enjoy an extended stay in a famous mushroom capital of the western world. A colleague convinced me to accompany her to Italy for a trip to unveil the mysteries and culture surrounding the most noble of mushrooms — the white truffle. We were in the Piedmont region: perhaps Italy’s least known region to Americans, but most revered by chefs and vintners world-round. With a climate similar to our own, the hunting of truffles in the



fall creates a veritable frenzy. Steep market prices reflect their fickleness, scarcity and entirely unique contribution to the palate.

We had a loosely-held idea of writing a book about this famed subterranean gem. So as far as the IRS was concerned, our apartment perched on a hilltop with a breathtaking view of rolling hills lined with grapevines was a base for “research.” Two young American women showing up in a village of fewer than 100 people led to the non-coincidental meeting of a whole cast of local characters. One day, a local dandy showed up on our doorstep with an invitation, offered solely through hand gestures, to come on a truffle hunt with some friends. He was wearing a cravat tucked into his crisp button-down, an oil skin jacket and rubber boots, and was holding a bottle of local Moscato d’Asti (a lovely local sparkling wine). How do you say no to that? With camera and naiveté in hand, into the woods with complete strangers we went, blindfolded for their protection. (How, just how did I...?).

Once we had arrived at their top-secret spot, we were unblinded, and the dogs were let loose. Within a half hour there was a high-pitched bark of delight and urgency, a huntsman knelt down at the base of a tree and gently scratched out a mud-caked orb the size of a farmer’s fist. In spite of its grubby appearance, this homely fungus was likely worth \$500. This set off a series of backslapping, cork-popping, and feasting that lasted the remainder of the day — though not a truffle was touched. They were just too valuable.

To find a meal with white truffles, we had to hit the city it seemed. Alba is the main regional city of Piedmont and along with an impressive collection of ancient towers, it has sophisticated restaurants and shops. My travel partner went on a quest for the perfect Italian leather shoes and I followed my grumbling tummy to a cobbled street with a row of little eateries. I was beckoned into one by a charming maître d’ and with a pitiful look, given the preferential table next to the open fireplace. While I marveled at the possibility there could be such a thing in a restaurant, the waiter took it upon himself to dazzle me with his service. Avoiding the awkward swirl of hand gestures and a staccato of monosyllabic words, he threw up his hand, bowed, and said: “I give you dee best, ok madam?” I replied: “Grazie, fantastico!”

Little did I suspect that this theatrical invitation would deliver the most deeply satisfying and memorable lunch of my life, a truth to this day. Yes, there were truffles — shaved fresh at the table over a creamy risotto—and they were extraordinary. But the unexpected highlight was the first plate brought to my table and one with ingredients I could count on one hand with a finger to spare. The waiter had a look of both nonchalance and pride in his eye as he lowered before me a plate piled high with fresh, delicately-shaved, fresh porcini mushrooms that had been lightly drizzled in the finest extra-virgin olive oil and sprinkled with sea salt and parsley.

The Piedmont is equally blessed with superb growing conditions for porcini mushrooms (also known as ceps). A staple in Italian cuisine in every strata of society, porcini are exceptional in their rich, umami flavor, which is maintained after dehydrating and even pickling. They are also delicious, like most mushrooms, sautéed in butter and garlic. This is how I had always enjoyed them, in risotto or pasta mostly.

I came home with a suitcase full of truffle this and truffle that. And while the flavor of white truffles is distinct and the culture surrounding them fascinating, the most indelible flavor and experience for me was the pure, unadulterated flavor of that mound of fresh porcini. It was a direct expression of terroir if ever there was one: a clear sunny day with crisp air after a downpour that had soaked the forest floor. The taste of new and urgent growth, of earthly essence, and of the renewal that emerges from darkness — it was the flavor of rain.

I have never tried to recreate that dish at home: the feeling perhaps too precious to be potentially bastardized by replication. And, even if I could find a giant fresh American boletus, our closest version of a porcini, in a market here, I would not eat it raw, and nor should you. (Experts here advise never to eat wild mushrooms raw as they have toxic elements that are only neutralized by cooking.)



**Lindsay Gott is a local foodie and irrepressible entrepreneur. Her latest venture is a gift basket business featuring Gorge products exclusively: [Basquette.com](http://Basquette.com). She also blogs at: [amoozboosh.com](http://amoozboosh.com).**



Compelled by fall closing in on what felt like a short summer, I threw my romantic fantasies to the wind recently when I put together this ode to my ultimate “gout de terroir” mushroom salad in Alba. While I do not always eat organic, the sponge-like nature of mushrooms makes them an obvious candidate for organic, in my view. For a quality, versatile mushroom with a nice earthy flavor, my go-to are cremini mushrooms from Hood River Organic. Since they are grown locally, you can get them super fresh, too (at Rosauers).

To deliver both an earthy and ethereal quality to your next dinner, dig out your mandolin and slice a bowlful of creminis from top to toe, no larger than 1/8” thick. (Keeping your focus will keep your fingers!) If you find they have a bit of dirt on them, simply brush it off gently with a damp towel (do not wash them).

Then just before serving, toss them with a handful of Italian parsley leaves, then dress them generously in a mix of cold-pressed extra-virgin olive oil (available at Arome in downtown Hood River) and lemon juice (about 1 part juice to 3 parts oil). Add sea salt, freshly ground pepper and finely grated lemon zest to taste. Fresh chopped tarragon would also be a nice addition here.

**Buon appetito!**





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# Q&a

## erik stenberg the Huck Truck

Erik Stenberg, chef and co-owner of the Huck Truck in Bingen, Wash., has been working in kitchens since his teenage years in Hood River. A long and winding road took him through culinary school at Johnson and Wales University, across the Atlantic to many European kitchens, through various restaurants in the U.S. — including Hawaii — and eventually back to the Columbia River Gorge. Before his return, he spent five years in Santa Barbara, Calif., where he took a break from restaurants and spent time in some really creative environments. He has experience growing produce on organic vegetable farms and keeps up a decent sized kitchen garden at home. Erik's specialty is spontaneity, and his menus seem to write themselves. Mushroom foraging and surfing ocean waves are his favorite things to do, apart from spending time with his wife and co-owner, Jessie, and their two kids, Oliver and Noa.

**You have an amazing culinary background, including studying in Europe. Where were you and what were some of your favorite entrees?**

I spent time in England, Wales and Italy. Creamy polenta and salsiccia in northern Italy always resonated with me. I've served polenta ever since, and it's on the menu at the Huck Truck today.

**We've heard you worked in the kitchens of some celebrities while living in California.**

I've cooked for Sting, Julia Louis-Dreyfus, Kevin Costner, Ram Dass, Dan Ellsberg and some other "famous" people.

**You grew up in Hood River in a big family. How many brothers and sisters did you have? What were family meals like — did you have to arm wrestle for the last chicken leg?**

My sister and seven brothers and I grew up in the Heights in Hood River. Mom's fried chicken with mashed potatoes, gravy, and home canned green beans is still my favorite meal at her house. We didn't arm wrestle, but we did actually leg wrestle!

**Did you help cook at home?**

I don't remember cooking too much with my mom, but she would get a bin of apples every year to process, as well as canning green beans, peaches, etc. I can remember the canning pot going day and night at the end of each summer.

**What brought you back to Hood River with the idea to start your own business?**

Mushrooms brought me back to Hood River, and the rain that brings them, and the watershed up here that is drastically different from the desert in Southern California where we were living. We started our own business so we can be creative and work for ourselves, and also to have an outlet for some of the wild food that we forage and the garden food that we grow.

**How did you come up with the name for the Huck Truck?**

We originally named our business The Little Huckleberry Food Truck, after the Little Huckleberry Mountain trail in the Gifford Pinchot National Forest. It's a place we like to hang out and maybe pick a mushroom or two.

Before we opened, the name had naturally shortened to the Huck Truck. It's a nod to the adrenaline-fueled sports culture here in the Gorge — kayaking, mountain biking, snowboarding.

**What is the inspiration for the food you serve?**

The inspiration for our food is to serve simple, everyday lunches. We cook from scratch and aim to offer clean food that all types of people can enjoy. We also cater office lunches, private parties, and special events like weddings.

**Can you share a fall recipe with readers?**

We have tons of green beans peaking right now and chanterelles are also starting to pop, so at home we've been mixing those up.

### Erik's Green Beans and Mushrooms

First, blanch a pound of green beans in salted water (cook them for 60 seconds in the boiling water and then drop them into an ice bath).

Clean up half a pound of chanterelles and tear them or cut them into pieces.

Drop butter into a hot pan until you get the "happy bubble" (don't burn the butter), and sauté the chanterelles for two minutes or so.

Add the green beans for another minute, squeeze lemon juice on top, season with salt and pepper, and microplane manchego or parmesan on top.





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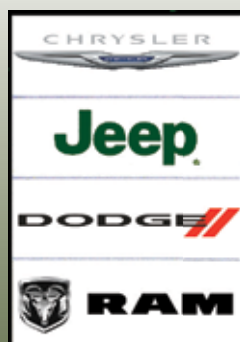
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