



Books and Culture

JERRY WEINBERGER

Food Politics, Food Pleasures

Finger Lakes Feast: 110 Delicious Recipes from New York's Hotspot for Wholesome Local Foods, by Kate Harvey and Karl Zinsmeister (McBooks Press, 208 pp., \$22.95)

That conservatives can care about fine local food is borne out by the charming and well-photographed cookbook *Finger Lakes Feast*, by Karl Zinsmeister, vice president for publications at the Philanthropy Roundtable. Zinsmeister's son, Noah, a libertarian undergraduate at Columbia, did the photography and his daughter, the musician and blogger Kate Harvey, did most of the work in the kitchen. You can bet your socks that the food police see people like these as Tea Party bigots to be avoided at all costs. But the sentiment isn't returned: the Zinsmeisters-Harvey cookbook team had no problem collaborating with the countercultural Moosewood Restaurant in Ithaca, still run by "a collective," and with Stony Brook Whole Hearted Foods, producers of cooking oils from the seeds of local squash and dedicated to "regional sustainability" and "zero waste process."

The book celebrates the local and natural foods and wines of New York's Finger Lakes region, but it has no moral or political axe to grind. We're reminded that nearly all nutrients are chemicals, that many naturally occurring compounds, such as molds and aflatoxins, are dangerous, and that while the book was being written in 2011, "more people were killed by bean sprouts from an organic farm in Germany (42 deaths after an E. coli

outbreak) than by any man-made food additives or fertilizers.” Manure can be hazardous, and natural or organic foods are about eight times more likely to be recalled than conventionally produced foods. The authors bite the cost bullet straight-on: local, natural, and organic foods can be prohibitively expensive. It’s good to eat local and natural, but we shouldn’t make doing so into a “substitute religion.” Amen, brother.

Finger Lakes Feast is also a book about a family at the table. Many of the recipes are adaptations of dishes from Finger Lakes restaurants, but others are just old family favorites, and the book is ordered roughly around the meal: first breakfast and then dinner (we’re on our own for lunch). Dinner starts with soups and appetizers, moves to mains, looks askance to salads and sides, and ends with sweets. Along the way, we learn about local products such as buckwheat, various fruit and nut butters, killer bee honey (yes, killer bee honey), the many wines of the region and where to find them, and charming lessons about the culinary legacy of the Chautauqua movement: “Chautauqua Graham Bread,” for instance, based on the principles of Sylvester Graham, one of America’s first diet-food cranks. And we get some advice about how to raise chickens on our own (no roosters, please), even in the city. This may sound silly and over the top, but take it seriously: I’ve eaten eggs just an hour out of the hen, and I can attest that there’s nothing like them to be found in any store—even the most local and most organic.

The recipes are mostly wonderful: fresh, simple, and not overly difficult. My favorites are Butternut Squash & Chevre Pudding, a rich concoction that tastes like a vegetable foie gras, and Halibut in Pea Sauce, which speaks for itself. Cooking your way through this wonderful book will be a daily delight. A few quibbles: some recipes call for canned legumes, a timesaver to be sure, but better to make your own (quick and easy with a pressure cooker). The canned ones are good, but they make it hard to control the salt in a dish, so if you do use them, it’s essential to rinse off the salty goo that often accompanies them. For all the focus on local artisanal products, the authors make no mention of craft beer. The Finger Lakes have a thriving craft-beer culture (as I write this, the Ithaca Beer Company is holding a tasting event at the Ithaca Wegman’s). Finally, I wonder how many readers will recognize the vegetable pictured but not identified on the section page for Salads & Side Dishes? I pass the test: they’re garlic scapes.

Jerry Weinberger is a University Distinguished Professor of political science at Michigan State University. He is currently working on a book about American food.