



## A Rare Farm-to-Table Dinner

North Fork food and wine growers put together their own farm-to-table celebration.

By Roger Morris



What if you and a few friends planned a dinner party which would take farm-to-table cuisine to a personal level and away from its normal restaurant setting? For example, one Saturday morning, each couple sets out to gather one locally produced item, such as wine, vegetables and fruits, cheeses, meats and chocolates, and then everyone assembles that evening at someone's home to prepare dinner from the day's bounty?

Recently, I found myself at Lieb Cellars in Mattituck on Long Island's North Fork helping prepare for such an event. But our meal will be an even more-special farm-to-table dinner because all the participants are also the people who grew and produced the food. Our dinner planner is Russell Hearn, who began his winemaking career in Australia and who worked elsewhere on the East Coast before settling on North Fork. Providing the oysters is Josh Clauss, a member of Cornell University's bay scallop restoration project, but who also keeps his hands wet by growing commercial oysters. Dr. Michael Catapano and his wife, nurse and fitness teacher Karen Catapano, raise goats whose milk is turned into prize-winning cheeses. Accountant Tom Geppell, his wife Carol Festa, and their two children raise chickens and sheep and will provide lamb shanks for tonight's affair. Finally, our fresh produce has been grown by Eberhard Muller and Paulette Satur, known to New Yorkers in the 1990s as star chef and super wine broker respectively. In recent years, their neighbors know them as superb vegetable farmers who supply both local markets and Whole Foods.

With our cast in place, I jump into Hearn's Audi SUV —sorry, no dilapidated pickup truck here on North Fork — to begin our afternoon food-foraging tour among Hearn's friends and neighbors.

### Goat Milk?



Our first stop is Catapano Dairy Farm, where Karen and Michael Catapano raise over 100 goats, each mature female capable of producing about a gallon of milk daily. This milk is mostly turned into cheese by Michael, but also into cosmetics by Karen.

**Chèvre Talking**



Hearn is shopping for cheeses that Eberhard Muller will turn into a dressing for a grilled romaine salad. Karen Catapano runs down the list of possibilities — standard soft chèvre, feta, a Romano-style blend of goat and sheep milk, perhaps even yogurt.

**Harvest Moon Oysters**



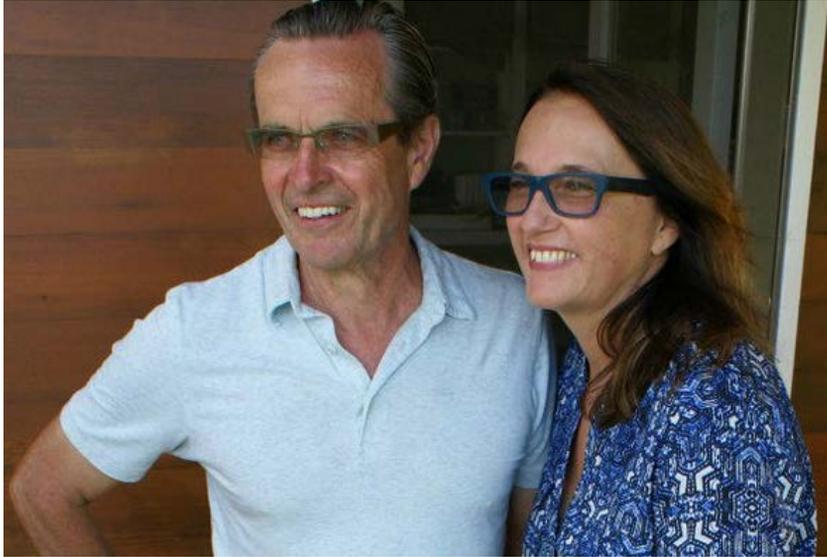
Next, we are off to the New Suffolk docks on the Great Peconic Bay where Hearn greets Josh Clauss, who has just returned from his oyster beds — “I can’t give you the location” — with what will be the evening’s first course. “All East Coast oysters are the same variety,” Clauss notes, “just grown in different places.”

**All Hands on Sheep**



The name “8 Hands Farm” refers to owners Carol Festa and Tom Geppell and their two children. And the eight hands are never idle, raising sheep for meat and chickens for eggs. Tonight’s main course will be their lamb shanks, which Hearn and co-chef for the day, tasting room director Alicia Ekeler, already have simmering on the stove back at Lieb Cellars.

### From Manhattan to Cutchogue



When Paulette Satur quit selling wines and Eberhard Muller hung up his toque, they founded Satur Farms in Cutchogue, today farming over 200 acres of vegetables on the North Fork and another 200 in Florida. Eberhard has just come in from the fields to do dinner prep work with the Catapano cheeses. “I am too direct and too honest to be in marketing,” he laughs.

### Steaming SHanks



Back at the Lieb estate, Ekeler gives a visual progress report on the braised lamb shanks, which she has been cooking in a mirepoix. A CIA graduate, she is also preparing a side salad of farro and grilled corn as well as a gremolata. Sound good? [We'll get a recipe for you.](#)

### The Table Is Set



On the Lieb estate lawn, finishing touches have been put on the table that will seat a dozen guests, who will be arriving a few minutes. Wines for the evening are ready to be poured — a sparkling pinot blanc, a still pinot blanc and a cabernet franc — all made by Hearn from Lieb.

### Shucking Developments



Clauss is first to arrive, and he has brought with him his shucking knife and glove. His Great Peconic Bay oysters are being served as a walk-around appetizer and will be garnished with a [citrus relish reduction](#) that Clauss says is his adaptation of a Bobby Flay recipe.

**The Party is On**



Next to arrive are, from left, Tom Geppell and Carol Festa from 8 Hands Farm, Paulette Satur and Eberhard Muller from Satur Farm and the Karen and Michael Catapano from Catapano Dairy. As it is a weekday evening, everyone has arrived around 6 p.m. for the first course of Claus's oysters.

**Veggies on the Grill**



Meanwhile, Hearn starts grilling the vegetables and fruits — corn for the [faro salad](#) plus strips of red bell pepper and zucchini to go with the lamb shanks and grilled peaches with goat-cheese yogurt for dessert. As he and Ekler have marinated the shanks earlier in the day with a Lieb cab franc, he sticks with that wine to serve with the main course.

Romaines of the Day



Hearn turns over the grill to Muller, who has brought along his homemade dressing of Catapano cheeses that he has whipped up to drizzle over [grilled mini romaines](#). “It’s my take on the classic Caesar,” he says. In order to keep the romaine intact while grilling, Muller leaves the small stalks attached as he slices each head in half.

**Our Dinner with Russell**



Soon everyone is seated as the sun begins dropping to treetop level. Hearn takes a chair at one end of the table, and Richard Bailey, CEO of Premium Beverage Group, the owner of Lieb Cellars, welcomes guests at the other end. While some of the farmers and fishermen already know each other, it’s been mostly a “hello” or a passing nod. Soon, though, everyone is comparing notes about farming and marketing, fishing and sailing — and providing local gossip and humorous anecdotes. Already, everyone is saying, “We have to do dinners like this more often!”