



Nicole Sult, manager of The Flying Pig.
Photograph by Dana Ramos



Baby pigs nursing at Cabbage Hill Farm.
Photograph by Samantha Martens, SamanthaMartensPhotography.com.

A PERFECT PAIRING

Nancy Kohlberg's farm and restaurant feed each other

BY DANA RAMOS

THERE IS A NATURAL SYMBIOSIS between the Flying Pig restaurant and the 170-acre Cabbage Hill Farm – starting with the fact that both are owned by Nancy Kohlberg. Both are also in Mount Kisco with only a few minutes drive between them and the farm supplies most of the fresh food the restaurant serves. Then waste from the restaurant goes back to the farm as compost that nourishes new plants – and so goes the food cycle.

Barney Sponenberg is the affable young greenhouse manager at the farm and, as he put it, “The PR guy and just about anything else that’s needed.” He takes me on a tour of one of the farm’s pride and joy – the greenhouse – that features aquaponic systems. As he explains, “It’s a combination of aquaculture and hydroponics, growing plants without soil. The plants grow in the same water used by the fish.” This creates a relationship between animals and plants that maintains a stable aquatic environment and also allows for year-round planting.

There are also standard planting fields, all organic. “Everything we raise is with no pesticides, no hormones, no antibiotics and the animals are fed and raised naturally,” Sponenberg points out as we watch free-range chickens milling around their coops where they are put in the evening for protection against predators.

Cabbage Hill sends its livestock to nearby slaughterhouses. But in the 1980s, the farm had a slaughterhouse that was designed by Temple Grandin, who became famous for her humane techniques and was the subject of an Emmy Award-winning HBO movie last year.

The farm has become a leader in the local-food and locavore movements by raising fish and vegetables as well as heritage breeds – traditional livestock breeds that were nurtured before industrial agriculture caused a drastic reduction of breed variety. The farm’s mission is described as the dedication to the preservation of endangered animals and the practice of sustainable agriculture.

We climbed into Sponenberg’s truck and drove around the property to get a good look at rare sheep, huge red Devon cattle and a breed of pigs aptly named Large Black Pig that were temporarily turned brown from frolicking in thick mud. Beautiful Shetland ducks with iridescent, glossy black plumage gathered in shade around a lake and adorable lambs were calling to their grazing mothers. Perfectly idyllic.

I spoke by phone to Nancy Kohlberg, wife of the now-retired Jerome Kohlberg of Kohlberg Kravis Roberts & Co. (KKR), the legendary private equity firm. The Kohls are major philanthropists with a wide variety of interests, land preservation and protection being one of them. In fact, 70 acres of Cabbage Hill Farm have been preserved forever by a conservation easement to the Westchester Land Trust.

When I asked Nancy how she evolved the farm and restaurant into such special Westchester venues, she laughed. “Good question—it just sort of happened! When I bought the farm 26 years ago, I just wanted to raise sheep for my weaving. One thing led to another, and we developed our original mission – to help save heritage breeds.”

At the time, Shetland geese were nearly extinct and had almost disappeared in the Shetland Islands.

“We were the first to bring them into the United States. We became involved in a program with other breeders and it was extremely successful.”

Although she modestly refers to herself as an “amateur,” she helped save the Shetland geese, and they are no longer listed as an endangered species due in large part to her efforts – masterful work for someone who started out with more of a hobby in mind.

Over at the Flying Pig, which Nancy bought in 1998, you’ll find a well-lit, Victorian-style building featuring copper-topped tables and a wood and marble bar. The restaurant became a natural extension of the farm, a way

for Kohlberg to help educate people about the food cycle and organic eating.

“We try to use fresh, local and organic ingredients as much as possible,” said Nicole Sult, the restaurant’s manager. “Our chef, Lesley Sutter, is from northern California, where the slow food and locavore movements began with Alice Waters and others like her. Lesley designs the menu around what’s in season.” Right now, that means creative salads and main dishes with vegetables, pork, beef or chicken supplied by Cabbage Hill Farm. I was delighted with the farm-green flavors of the warm goat cheese salad and wild mushroom pizza that I had ordered off the menu.

“Mrs. Kohlberg has final approval on menus and operations. She is very involved,” Sult said.

In addition to supplying food to the Flying Pig, Cabbage Hill also supplies other eating establishments and markets such as Mount Kisco Seafood, Erica’s Kitchen in Bedford Village and the Croton Creek Steakhouse. Cabbage Hill also has a booth at the John Jay Homestead Farm Market in Katonah.

This summer, for the first time, the Flying Pig is offering family-style farm dinners at Cabbage Hill. The fixed price includes a tour, five courses of entirely local and seasonal fare with wine pairings, hors d’oeuvres and live music. What could possibly be a more wonderful way to experience the freshest foods grown right in the backyard? 🐷

The Flying Pig, 251 Lexington Ave. in Mount Kisco, is open Tuesday-Saturday for lunch and dinner and Sunday for brunch. (914) 666-7445

The Cabbage Hill Farm, 205 Crow Hill Road in Mount Kisco, offers tours the first and third Friday of the month. (914) 241-2658

Seating is limited for The Flying Pig’s family-style farm dinners at Cabbage Hill Farm. For dates, reservations and more information, call The Flying Pig.