



Dispatch From A Pedal-Powered, Pastoral Pajama Party

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The date of the infamous [Rabbit Roast](#) was changed three times before the end of the summer, and by the time the chosen weekend finally rolled around Hurricane (which one on are we on now?) posed a cloudy threat to the planned skinning/cooking/farming/teaching festival sponsored by The Greenhorns. Severine von Tscharner Fleming, producer of [The Greenhorns](#), a forthcoming documentary about young farmers, is criss-crossing the country collecting footage and rousing interest in farm interns and savvy urbanites alike. Whether you've had soil under your nails for years or you like to wear straw hats while bar hopping in the Village, the mix at Severine's educational/fundraising parties always runs the gamut from hippie to hipster, and once you're out in the field together, examining a root cellar, or checking out the horse-drawn tiller, you realize there's not much of a difference between the two anyway.

Having been to several of the Greenhorns shindigs before, I'd been looking forward to the Rabbit Roast all summer, an event that I would get occasional updates about, each with more promises than the last. "Vegetarian yum-yums", "Bicycle-powered rotisserie!" and "Pig curing workshop" ratcheted up my anticipation. And, of course, there would be rabbit. I imagined a rollicking barn raising party of sorts, plenty of mud slinging, and maybe a dilapidated old farmhouse.

Instead, we met at the Cold Spring train station, just an hour up the Hudson from the city, and were whisked off down the winding roads to the [Glynwood Center](#). The moment our car turned off the main road into the fairytale-like driveway and the lush never-never land leading up to the farm I knew my expectations had been way off. It's not often that a young urbanite like myself gets to spend the weekend amidst foggy emerald hills in old stone buildings taking walks amidst the goldenrod and eating wine grapes from the vine.

At first there were only fifteen of us. We dodged the drizzle and pitched our tents, then gathered on the terrace where Judy LaBelle, Executive Director of the Glynwood Center, welcomed us. "How many of you are farmers or gardeners?" she asked with the warmth of a grade school teacher. Three people raised their hands. One guy was growing tomatoes in his backyard, someone else had a patch of herbs on her roof. Almost all of us hailed from Brooklyn.

"How many of you are interested in becoming farmers and gardeners?" Judy continued. I was one of a few more who raised my hand quietly, and she latched right on. With land in the Hudson Valley going

for the asking price of \$10,000 an acre young farmers who want to get started have an uphill battle ahead of them—not to mention start-up costs. One of Glynwood's big projects is working with area land trusts that have acreage which could be rehabilitated for agrarian use. There's about 2,000 acres in the Hudson Valley that is currently protected by land trusts—it will never be developed—and about half of that is perfectly farmable.

Now, we need some farmers. The average farmer in America is nearing the age of 60, a statistic that seems to hit me over the head daily. I looked around at our modest crew of girls and boys clad in skinny jeans and vintage shirts. If Judy questioned why we were there for the weekend, she never revealed her doubts.

The afternoon started with a tour of the Glynwood CSA vegetable garden, an operation which provides 50 families with boxes of produce grown on just 1.5 acres of land. There's an old horse named Maggie who walks the till around, and the heating system in the nearby greenhouse has recently been retrofitted to function without its old fuel-eating heater. We oohed and ahhed at the cool of the ancient root cellar and petted the horses that board in the surrounding field.

By and by we gathered around for the moment of truth: Severine took the stage with the rabbit she had so carefully brought along in a hay-lined basket. While stroking the animal, more than one story about a childhood pet floated through the audience. But Sev was all business. How can young farmers make a financially viable living? Well, they can come up with a "sexy new product" that does not "step on the shoelaces of older farmers." When she ran into Dan Barber of [Blue Hill](#) in the halls of Slow Food Nation she asked if he might consider buying rabbit for his menu. Absolutely—he'd need at least 18 a week.

Later, when she e-mailed to follow up on the prospects of her company, Yummy Bunny, he confirmed the quoted amount, and then asked if she needed start-up capital. Stroking the bunny who grazed freely on the grass, Severine explained that Barber's offer showed he was not only seeking a quality product for himself and his restaurant, but his commitment to the conditions of the place and the person who would be providing the commodity. The next phase of her business plan is still being worked out with a fashion designer in Europe who wants to make leather gloves from the rabbits' hides. "You know, to sell at Bergdorf's. \$300 a pair is a lot better than \$5.99 a pound."

By now our crowd of fifteen had swelled to forty-five. We were NYU food studies students, newly minted lawyers, random friends, food non-profiters, urban gardeners, policy pushers, bloggers, writers, advocates and activists. Severine explained what would happen next. First she would stun the bunny with a hammer between the eyes, then slit its throat, then hang it up...The tension mounted with her rambling digressions in between steps, and slowly the process moved from G-rated conversation to R-rated demonstration.

By dinnertime the promised bike-powered rotisserie had not yet arrived from Brooklyn. The rabbit fur was splayed on the roof of Sev's red (veggie-powered) Mercedes station wagon. We crowded into the dining room at the Glynwood's Main House where volunteers had prepared a meal made of entirely local produce, most of which was grown by young farmers. Between bites of celery root and carrot soup someone seated across from me posed the question "What's the definition of young farmer?" Is there an age cut off?

"I think it has more to do with a state of mind," said his neighbor. On the back porch we tapped into the keg, serving up heady beer in mason jars. Drizzle came and went, and the crowd began to get giddy. The next morning there would be yoga at 7:30, a workshop on beekeeping, a walk through the herb garden to gather flowers for making tinctures, a lesson in fermentation. Tom Mylan was

scheduled to give a workshop on curing pig, and it was rumored, sometime past midnight, that the Reverend Billy was on his way to give ceremonial closing remarks. By the time I left, mid-Sunday, the rabbit rotisserie had not yet crossed the stage, but I boarded the train with the confidence that making burping bottles of home brewed kimchi is about to be en vogue in Village kitchens.

“This is only a taste of the rock show it’s going to be!” cried Severine, who dreams big. Next year she imagines the Rabbit Roast will draw thousands. These parties for young farmers need to happen in every city and town across the country—and she believes they will. Speaking of rock shows, the **Ginger Ninjas** made it just in time for dinner. The bike powered, bike touring, forward-thinking rock/folk band swung by for a surprise pit stop to tickle our ears beneath a near-full moon. “This is what it’s going to be like,” said Severine. “The bands are going to have to leave the cities to come to us because we’ll be farming the land.”