

Down on the farm: Kids spend summer at Stone Barns day camp

BY SWAPNA VENUGOPAL RAMASWAMY • THE JOURNAL NEWS • AUGUST 4, 2008

POCANTICO HILLS

"Are beets healthy, or do they have a lot of calories and cholesterol in them?" David Kaminsky, 11, demanded before volunteering to prepare an apple and beet salad with his fellow preteen sous chefs.

After Amanda Eckert, a food and nutrition specialist at the Stone Barns Center Farm Camp, assured David, who lives in Briarcliff Manor, about the nutritional value of beets, the group known as Foragers proceeded to zest an orange, juice a lemon and whisk together olive oil, honey and vinegar for the vinaigrette.

"It smells very strong," Miles Gencarelli, 11, of Hastings-on-Hudson declared as he sniffed the dressing.

This was the middle of the day for the campers at the Stone Barns Center for Food and Agriculture, a former dairy farm owned by the Rockefeller family. The group had spent the morning feeding chickens. Some days, it's feeding and washing the pigs.

"I love all of the activities here. I love cooking with the chefs, I love feeding the chickens and [working](#) in the greenhouse," said India June, 11, of West Nyack.

Set among 80 rolling acres of farms, woods and pastures, this idyllic day camp, now in its fourth season, grew from 180 campers in 2005 to 500 this summer.

The Stone Barns Center was established by David Rockefeller as a nonprofit organization in 2004 to advance community-based food production.

"The farm camp gives campers a chance to explore nature in a hands-on way. It's fun and educational and gets them excited about where their food comes from," said Erica Helms, managing director of Stone Barns.

In addition to Westchester and Rockland counties, campers come from Connecticut, New Jersey and New York City, said Helms.

The [opportunity](#) to see a working farm and explore the farm-to-table connection is what draws many parents to Stone Barns.

Jean-Godfrey June, whose daughter has attended the camp for four years, said she believed in the center's mission to grow local organic food. The tasks that children are given at camp also impressed her.

"Kids do really well when they're given responsibility," said June, an editor at Lucky magazine. "The camp gives them something real to do and have a feeling of accomplishment."

In years past, when India would relate her [experiences](#) helping a "confused" chicken and of herding the sheep and washing pigs, her younger brother, Wiley, couldn't wait to enroll at the camp, June said.

This is 6-year-old Wiley's second year and he is fascinated by the pigs.

"It's like a big fire. He can stare at them endlessly," his mother said with a laugh.

After sampling their apple and beet salad, the Foragers moved on to the greenhouse, where their next chore awaited them: transplanting celtuce - a vegetable from the lettuce family.

"Place the first row more to the left and the second row more to the right," Sarah Elisabeth, the greenhouse [manager](#), instructed her farmers. "Because they're going to get pretty big."

The 22,000-square-foot greenhouse bed uses a crop rotation method to preserve the soil and lock in important nutrients.

"It gets their hands in the soil, and they understand where their food is coming from," Elisabeth said. "They are also introduced to different vegetables."

Thomas Breuel, 10, of Briarcliff Manor and Sam Farman, 11, of Irvington, both three-year veterans, love playing farmers and chefs.

Did anything surprise them at this camp?

"I didn't know that growing vegetables was so hard," Thomas said. "And I learned to make zucchini fries. I love them."

"I prefer the pesto recipe," Sam said.



Miles Gencarelli, 11, separates the leaves of a celtsuce, a type of lettuce, seedling before planting at the the Farm Camp at Stone Barns. Campers have the opportunity to see how the Pocantico Hills farm works. (Joe Larese/The Journal News)

MAKE IT YOURSELF

Apple beet salad with citrus vinaigrette

Ingredients:

4-5 large beets

3 small, tart apples

1 recipe for dressing (below)

Note: Beets will stain clothing/ hands. Be careful and use rubber gloves when peeling and cutting.

Clean beets, remove stalks. Place in a pot, cover with cold water. Allow beets to come to a boil and cook about 40 minutes, or until they slide off knife when pierced.

Place in a bowl of ice water. Allow to cool and remove peels using hands. Cut into small cubes and place in a large bowl.

Peel and cut apples into similar- size cubes, add to beet cubes.

Pour on dressing and mix.

Can refrigerate before serving.

Dressing

1 tablespoon orange zest

Juice of 1 orange

Juice of 1 lemon

1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar

2 teaspoons honey

1 tablespoon olive oil

Combine all ingredients, except olive oil in small bowl. Slowly whisk in olive oil in a steady stream until well combined.

Provided by Amanda Eckert, food and nutrition specialist, Stone Barns Center Farm Camp