



Movable Feast

Locavores discover that yoga deepens the experience of farm-to-table dining.

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By **Kelle Walsh**

A few miles from California's cliff-hugging coastal Highway 1, past a tidal estuary and beyond a grove of towering eucalyptus trees, Gospel Flat Farm comes into view. Its roadside produce stand brims with lettuce, radishes, beets, and kale, and a cheerful sign announces, surprisingly, "Open 24 Hours." I'm here in the morning, under a bright and cloudless sky, but I'm tickled to imagine a midnight customer stocking up on salad greens at this tiny country outpost 30 miles north of San Francisco.

I've made the trek today along with 14 other city dwellers to participate in a new take on local farm-to-table dining. At this event, and at others like it held on a growing number of small farms across the country, yoga will lend a soulful aspect to the rich

experience of eating a meal in the place where its ingredients were grown and harvested. A natural complement to the locavore movement, yoga expands our awareness of the subtle energies around us, deepening our connection to all that a farm-based feast offers—delicious food, a sense of place, and a powerful feeling of gratitude.

“Cultivating the land, creating a meal for people, practicing yoga—all embody the same lessons with different paths,” says organizer Ben Crosky, founder of Wildsoul, a Bay Area company dedicated to creating yoga events in inspiring locales. Each action, he explains, starts with a singular focus—a seed, a recipe, an intention for practice—that is tended and nourished until it grows into something else: a crop that will feed a community, a meal that will be enjoyed with others, an experience of inner peace that allows for greater union with the world around us.

“In a world in which we often only see part of the story—we eat in a restaurant, buy groceries in a store, practice yoga in a studio—we become disconnected,” Crosky adds. “When we move in ways that create more connection and understanding, we can become more fully present in living.”

It’s a poetic notion that resonates with me as I scan the vista of plants rising from the dark, rich earth; inhale the yeasty aroma of bread baking in the farm’s outdoor oven, and listen to the low murmur of 200 clucking hens nearby. Raising my arms skyward, the tightness unwinding from my back, I’m ripe for lofty notions and local sustenance. We all are. It’s why we came—to experience a greater sense of connection to the rhythms and energies that sustain us.

Prana in Action

“The ancient yogis often looked to nature as a guide for practice. They understood that underneath all natural processes was a guiding intelligence, prana,” explains ParaYoga instructor Katie Silcox, who will be the guest teacher at today’s event. “Out here on the farm, we get a chance to see this natural intelligence in real time.”

Mickey Murch, the buoyant farmer whose family owns this incredible piece of land, is raising his own young family here. A passionate advocate of organic farming, he tells us a bit about crop rotation for pest management and soil nutrition. He introduces two piglets who play a vital role as “stomachs” on the farm, eating anything given them and providing necessary fertilizer. “Nothing is wasted,” says Murch happily.

An hour later, mildly intoxicated by the abundant fresh air and humbled by the new knowledge of just how much work farming really is (I vow to never complain about \$7 eggs at the farmers’ market again), our stomachs are beginning to growl. As we make our hungry way to the onsite art gallery that today serves as our yoga studio, I know I’m not alone in wondering if I’ll be able to make it through an hourlong class.

But the organizers have planned a short mindfulness exercise to help bridge the gap. A snack tray appears—dates stuffed with walnuts. Like everyone else, I take just one, but I’m doubtful this morsel is going to hold me over.

As instructed, I hold the date in my palm, noting its diminutive weight, and bring it close to my nose to smell. Restraining myself from popping the whole thing into my mouth, I take a careful bite and chew slowly. And then I take another, savoring the flavors and textures. Either I’m slightly delirious from hunger or I have discovered one of the best-kept food secrets ever: A walnut-stuffed date tastes like chocolate chip cookie dough! And then, oddly, with one tiny bite left, I realize I am completely satisfied.

Silcox designed the day’s yoga practice to stoke our internal fire—all the better to digest the meal awaiting us, she says. Through modified Sun Salutations, long-held twists, and deep and dynamic squats, we actively cultivate prana in our legs and hips and breathe it into our bellies. “As yogis, we take this dough, this body, with all its intrinsic and explicit memories, and we bake it through the fire of practice,” Silcox says.

When we finally sit down at long tables set with a charming array of mismatched dishes and decorated with vases of leaves and flowers from the fields, we're undeniably hungry. But we're not in a rush; instead, I see peaceful contentment on the faces around me. "All the energies come together," says chef Kristin Cole, who's seen it many times before. "After everyone has spent time together steeped in this slow-paced farm life, after doing yoga, we come to the table in community with this incredible energy."

Worth the Wait

We pass platters mounded with [colorful salad](#), bowls filled with sautéed greens, ramekins of delectable garlic aioli, and baskets of warm bread. The appearance of a [gorgeous frittata](#), made from eggs collected just a few hours earlier, elicits cries of appreciation around the table.

"I try to do as little as possible so that the vegetables and other ingredients are the stars of the show," says Cole. "The seasonality is the most important. I'm working with the farmer to get a sense of what the offerings will be that day."

We hold heavy dishes for one another, spoon servings onto one another's plates, and make sure our neighbors have enough of everything. We laugh at how hungry we are and remark how food never tasted so good. And we eat slowly, lingering over every luscious bite.

By the time dessert arrives, a delicious offering of Cara Cara oranges and beets topped with honey ricotta and thyme, I'm deeply sated—by the food, yes, but also by good company, by yoga, and by the sights, sounds, and textures of the farm. And I realize, bowing my head in silent grace, how grateful I am for it all.

"One of the biggest compliments I receive is when people say they feel so nourished after eating these meals," says Cole. "It's such a gift, but it's not just from me; it's from the farm and from the people who produce this food."

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