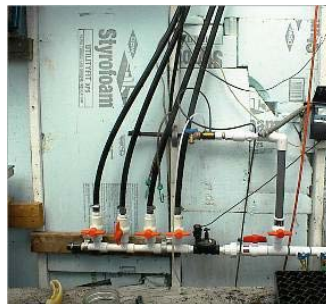
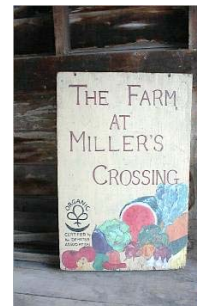


The Farm at Miller's Crossing

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http://www.guidosfreshmarketplace.com/static_pages/farmers.html



Old Fashioned Organic Truck Farming for the 21st Century

81 Roxbury Road, Hudson, New York 12534

Katie Smith and Chris Cashen, owners of The Farm at Miller's Crossing, combine the best of traditional farming with modern innovation to grow quality organic produce and flowering plants. A family home and a teaching farm, Miller's Crossing serves the local community while also supporting global agriculture.

Cows raise their heads from feeding to gaze with placid interest at visitors to The Farm at Miller's Crossing. They are a quiet, ruminative presence amid big, red barns, tractors standing ready for planting season and a long greenhouse, just coming to life after a few months of winter rest. This farm resembles many in agricultural New York; yet, Miller's Crossing stands unique among its peers. Owners Chris Cashen and Katie Smith harmoniously blend organic vegetable, flower and herb growing with making the farm a family home – and a classroom for aspiring farmers, as well!

Chris and Katie's youthfulness belies their already considerable experience in farming. For five years before moving to Miller's Crossing, the couple rented land in Chatham, New York. Toward the end of their tenure on this land, they realized that demand for their vegetables would soon exceed the capabilities of their fields. Katie and Chris were scouting the surrounding farmlands, hoping to find a spot with more acreage when the Miller's Crossing location, which has been in Chris's family since 1948, became available to them. Now, after being joined by daughter Lael, almost three, and son Connelly, one year old, the family makes its home in a converted barn right on the farm property. With 200 acres of land, about 110 of which is cultivated, Chris and Katie look forward to their sixth season operating The Farm at Miller's Crossing.

The cows that serenely greet visitors play an important role in the farm's organic process. Their manure, layered with hay, eventually cooks down into compost used to fertilize 30% of the crops. The other percentage of the land is fertilized through "green manure," cover crops which are plowed into the soil. These methods of feeding the crops are not only necessary to retain organic certification (it is illegal to spread raw manure), they are integral to preserving the sustainability of the land. While the compost cooks, the temperature is high enough for a long enough period of time to kill off weed seeds. Additionally, carbon in the hay stabilizes nitrogen in the manure, preventing harmful run-off into waterways. Eventually, after about 2 ½ years on the farm, the grass-fed, organically and humanely raised cows are sold for

their meat. The local community benefits from the availability of this superior beef, as well as organically raised pork, and the land receives the blessing of gentle, natural fertilizer.

In the solar heated greenhouse, tiny seedlings push their tender, green leaves skyward. Here, flowers, herbs, tomatoes and some lettuces are being started for retail sale. An ingenious irrigation system, which Chris designed and installed himself, automatically mists the seedlings, or provides measured drips to potted flowers. After about four weeks, the fledglings are transplanted to 3 ½ inch pots, which will eventually be sold at farmer's markets in Lenox, Massachusetts or Kinderhook, New York.

Katie and Chris are “truck farmers,” meaning that they transport their products to sale destinations by themselves. On the wholesale level, they bring their vegetables to large hubs, such as the market in Menands, New York, or to individual wholesale customers throughout the region. Truck farming brings its own set of challenges, such as the occasional disappearance of a case or two of vegetables en route. Fuel costs are an ongoing consideration, along with unpredictable variations in weather. Keeping consistent supplies of crops is not always possible. A freak cold spell, unseasonably hot weather or torrential downpours may interrupt anticipated quantities of vegetables. In an attempt to match buyers' needs with the realities of farming, Katie and Chris watch the weather closely and harvest according to nature's moods. These are time-honored, old-fashioned ways of ensuring that there is a product to be sold.

For many years, Chris and Katie have shared their love of sustainable farming and their business experience with apprentice farmers. While they gain valuable help on the farm, they also offer their apprentices solid experience in establishing and running a small-scale agricultural enterprise. Through an exchange program, students arrive at The Farm at Miller's Crossing from Eastern Europe, South Africa or other distant countries. These students are young people who have already completed four-year degrees in horticulture or agriculture; thus, they're motivated learners who are well equipped to ask advanced questions. Intent on making farming their life's work, many have already formulated mission statements. Katie and Chris foster their skills, and give them a sharpened sense of the realities of farming. Their goal is to provide their students with the practical tools they need to make farming a viable living when they return to their homes. This is a true apprenticeship in that Miller's Crossing serves as a model in all respects. Farm finances are made available for study, and the owners will act as consultants for their students for as long as they are needed. Currently, a couple from the Ukraine, Valentyn and Viktoria, are apprentices. They'll be lodged comfortably, benefit from all Chris and Katie have to teach, and brush up on American idioms as well!

Miller's Crossing bolsters and diversifies its apprentices' skills through participating in a loosely organized network of regional farmers who also house apprentices. This organization sets up a calendar of informal talks and presentations which are held in rotation at various farms. Here, a group of about thirty apprentices meet each other, and engage in discussion of the featured topic. Through these meetings, the students network with their peers, and benefit from exposure to practices on an array of disparate farms.

While Chris and Katie supply wholesale and retail markets, they are also a Community Supported Agriculture farm. About 100 local families buy produce shares in The Farm at Miller's Crossing, receiving approximately fifteen pounds of vegetables each week from spring through fall. Cash derived from these advance sales helps finance the season's start-up costs. Approximately 20% of Miller's Crossing business is conducted through the CSA program. To diversity further, U-Pick shares are now offered. The fruits and vegetables available through U-Pick are quite labor intensive to grow and harvest. Members who choose this share pick their own tomatoes, green beans, basil, peas, and raspberries, to name a few. Last year was the first time U-Pick shares were available. As a work in progress, this popular program will continue to expand and adjust as the seasons unfold.

Chris Cashen and Katie Smith are invested completely in their farm and their community, both local and global. As parents, stewards of the land, and educators, they respect the land that has provided for their family for generations, and that also sustains surrounding households and similar communities across the world. Not a solemn responsibility, but a joyful way of life, Chris and Katie embrace the challenge of sustainable farming and prepare for a future filled with the rewards of land well-worked and work well-done.

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