

JAMIE DEMENT



Jamie DeMent - farmer, home cook, restaurateur, entrepreneur, teacher and local food advocate - has devoted her life to cultivating and championing sustainable foodways. Together, she and partner Richard Holcomb, own a diverse, 55-acre organic family farm, in Hillsborough, NC – Coon Rock Farm. The couple also own the award-winning 4-star restaurant, Piedmont, in downtown Durham, NC, as well as 2 online farmers markets which service the region and the nation – Bella Bean Organics and Heirloom Provisions.

Raised in Eastern North Carolina, DeMent was devastated as she watched the family farms of her youth disappear, and industrialized farming take over. Since, her mission has been to revive that way of life, and the joy and simplicity of eating healthy, locally grown food. For the past decade, her days have been spent planting, harvesting, cooking, teaching and marketing products from the farm to consumers at farmers markets, universities, and through their CSA-program, and home delivery services, as well as to consumers through their own restaurant.

Jamie DeMent offers a distinctive voice in today's farm-to-table movement, so dominated by chefs. Her wealth of knowledge about farming and home cooking, and vivacious and colorful personality, make her as one of the most refreshing voices in today's Southern farm-to-fork movement. DeMent teaches seasonal cooking classes regularly throughout the Southeast, and is a guest lecturer at UNC and Duke University. Her passion is contagious, and her tricks for turning the season's bounty into a home cooked feast are nothing short of deliciously satisfying.

It's no wonder Jamie DeMent has caught the attention of The New York Times, Bon Appetit, Southern Living, NPR, PBS, The Local Palate and many more.



bellabeanorganics We've taken over the #cowboycauldron... Grilling @coonrockfarm's #pasturedpork



Jamiedement Rainbow #heirloomtomatoes #secondcourse #farmerbrockinthekitchen #farmfresh #freshmozzarella #freshpicked #whatwillieatwhentomatoseasonends



Jamiedement Happy Bastille Day! First haricot vert harvest of the season!

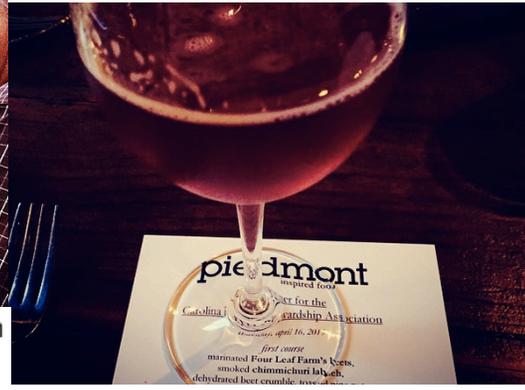


bellabeanorganics The epitome of Spring? Fresh, bright, #herbaceous #saladressings... Soon to be whisked



bellabeanorganics We're on! Cooking an early spring, #Easter feast

bellabeanorganics @fullsteambrewery Batch 1000 Wheatwine paired with the second course. #NCbeer #drinklocal #eatlocal @carolinafarms



JamieDeMent



Jamie DeMent



JamieDeMentNC



Thanksgiving Delivery from Bella Bean Organics



Here's how I make my Grandma's Sweet Potato Biscuits

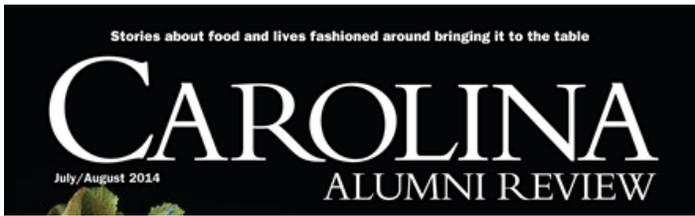


Teaching at Charleston Wine + Food



Our Pastured Pigs & Their Collards





bon appétit

The New York Times Magazine



The News & Observer

The Herald-Sun



Southern Living

The New York Times Magazine

Fresh Direction: A Farm-to-Table Restaurant



On a March morning at Coon Rock Farm — 55 acres of just about everything you can grow and raise — in Hillsborough, N.C., Jamie DeMent is showing me a fallen tree that’s being milled into tabletops for the farm’s biggest project to date: Eno Restaurant and market.

Who knew the farm-to-table loop would become so compressed or so literal? But it was only a matter of time before the farmers’ market evolved into the farmers’ restaurant.

Eno, which is scheduled to open early this summer in downtown Durham, will serve dishes made from Coon Rock’s meat, vegetables, eggs and milk (including from a cow named Eudora — as in Welty). Toward the end of the meal, diners will be handed a dessert menu and a market menu. Liked the pork chop and Russian kale? Take some [HOME](#) and cook them your way. As DeMent envisions it, “You’ll be able to get a little brown bag if you thought that was the greatest pork chop you’ve ever had in your life, which it will be.”

The restaurant’s market area will also sell house-made charcuterie, cheeses and prepared food. Subscribers to Coon Rock’s community-supported agriculture program, or C.S.A., can pick up their weekly allotment there, too. If all goes according to plan, Eno will be like a farm stand with a wine list.



In five years, DeMent and her partner, Richard Holcomb, have traded the world of C.E.O.'s for the world of C.S.A.'s. Holcomb, who grew up on a farm, built several successful software companies. (His father has gone from thinking he's insane to building a house on the farm.) DeMent, who worked for a congressman on Capitol Hill and in museum fundraising in North Carolina, says she "led a very prissy existence, in very high heels and very tight skirts." Today their sustainable farm operates at a befittingly high level, generating enough heritage-breed meat and heirloom vegetables for 300 C.S.A. members and four farmers' markets in the Raleigh-Durham area, as well as the Raleigh restaurant Zely & Ritz, which Holcomb owns with its chef, Sarig Agasi (who is also a partner in Eno).

"It's more cool in a lot of ways than it is doing a big deal in Tokyo," Holcomb says. "You can see the impact you're having."

The farm was able to get up to scale quickly — building costly infrastructure and doubling production each season — thanks to Holcomb's financial stability. And it has built a community of loyal buyers in no small part because of DeMent's outgoing, how-y'all personality. Together, the couple's understanding of marketing and business helped them see new opportunities for 21st-century agriculture.

Holcomb bought the run-down farmhouse in 2004 as a weekend place for his children, who weren't benefiting from life in an 8,000-square-foot house in Country Club Hills. ("The only thing they did was fight, play video games or watch TV," he recalls.) Within weeks the kids asked to move to the wood-heated house, which was the size of the master bedroom at [HOME](#). Holcomb used the land to grow vegetables and raise pigs for Zely & Ritz, and soon diners were asking where they could buy the pork and greens. (Holcomb and DeMent met when he overheard her talking about how good the restaurant's greens were. "Those are *my* greens," he said, introducing himself.)

The couple decided it was time to create an even more interactive experience than having Zely & Ritz's bartender hand over 100 C.S.A. boxes a week. A restaurant on the farm was out. So, Eno. "I wanted you to sit down and feel very, very connected to the region and the food," DeMent says of the restaurant, which has been delayed by the usual permit [SNAGS](#). "I want it to be obvious. That's why the tabletops will be made from wood from the farm and the waitstaff's going to work on the farm" one day a month. "It's all a way to make people more connected to their food. I think that's one of the biggest problems in civilization right now — no one is connected to their food anymore. If it comes from a window or in a bag, it's *not* food."

The couple hired the chef Marco Shaw from Portland, Ore., where he owned the farm-to-table restaurant Fife. The classically **TRAINED** chef was looking for more diversity, in both a city and its restaurant community, and Durham's revitalized downtown and the region's vibrant food and farming scene inspired him. Although Shaw knows what it really means to cook seasonally, supplying a restaurant from just one farm will be a challenge. He says that Coon Rock will be able to provide 60 percent of what Eno needs the first year, the goal being 100 percent.

"It's a whole different mind-set to realize that there will be some days when you don't have salad greens," says the dreadlocked chef over a lunch of country-ham sandwiches with mustard-green slaw, sitting on the couch at Coon Rock. "You have to figure out how to make salad from turnip greens — and then sell it. When there's no celery, how are you going to make stock? How are you going to make sauce when you don't have onions?" There's also the question of scaling up production on the farm: "With a 75-seat restaurant open six nights a week, just on dinner, I'll go through 35 chickens," he says. "Lunch? That's potentially 80 chickens a week."

"I need to order chicks!" Holcomb says.

Holcomb and DeMent know that running a farm-to-table restaurant is about more than flipping through seed catalogs to pick out pretty squash. Their desire to feed people and their business backgrounds might have helped them to hit on a new model.

I ask which is harder, farming or opening a restaurant.

"Farming!" Shaw says.

"Opening a restaurant!" DeMent says. "Chasing pigs isn't *that* hard, Marco.

CHRISTINE MUHLKE APRIL 21, 2010 - The New York Times Magazine

bon appétit

COOKING TIPS

Sautéed Greens

Sautéed Greens

Ingredients

- 1 1 pound Swiss chard or other greens, such as kale
- 2 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 3 3 minced garlic cloves
- 4 1/4 cup finely chopped onion
- 5 Fresh lemon juice

Preparation

- 1 Rinse greens. Drain and cut leaves and stems into 1/4"-1/2" strips and pieces.
- 2 In a large skillet, heat extra-virgin olive oil over medium heat. Add stems, garlic cloves, and onion and sauté until onion softens. Add the leaves and cook, stirring occasionally, until tender, about 5 minutes. Finish with a squeeze of fresh lemon juice.

Recipe by Jamie DeMent

Photograph by Tom Schierlitz



Southern Living

The

DAILY SOUTH

Your Hub for Southern Culture

Coon Rock Farm's Lil' Piggies – Hillsborough, NC



"Pigs will eat ANYTHING," said my host Jamie DeMent (a little proudly) about her Farmers' hybrid hogs at the 55-acre [Coon Rock Farm](#), a sustainable family farm that provides food to several restaurants in North Carolina's Research Triangle area.

First, you need to know that Jamie is a captivating storyteller. She peppers her narratives with one-liners that could easily be screenprinted on shirts and sold to college students at neighboring UNC-Chapel Hill. So, I was intently listening to her talk about how they let the pigs root around in the garden before planting any crops (effectively tilling the land), and sort of forgot that I was standing in the middle of a pigsty. All of a sudden I felt something trying to gnaw through my cowboy boots. I let out a (admittedly girlish) shriek and looked down to find a pair of snouts trying to get at *my* lil' piggies. I guess they really will eat anything.

April 25, 2008 | By [Jennifer V. Cole](#) Southern Living Magazine

Stories about food and lives fashioned around bringing it to the table

CAROLINA

July/August 2014

ALUMNI REVIEW



Green Acres

On the strength of a pickup line, an adventurous couple and an army of Morehead-Cain Scholars, Coon Rock Farm has evolved from a plaything into a growing concern that stretches into markets far beyond its Piedmont fields and pastures.

by Emily Palmer '14



Rural roots: Jamie DeMent '01 and Richard Melcomb at Coon Rock Farm.

PHOTOS BY CAROL FORSLER FOR JULY 2014



The farm is named for a large rock in the Eno River, situated along a former Native American trading path. Cookbooks and dishes — and fresh-baked chicken pot pies — are handy in the 1,100-square-foot, roughly 140-year-old farmhouse.



Inside an 1870s farmhouse in Hillsborough, Jamie DeMent '01 is preparing chicken pot pies. It's only 9 a.m., but the broth is already bubbling in a pot on the stove.

It was nothing like this when she was leading "a fabulous, glamorous life" working for a congressman on Capitol Hill. Now, she has to be ready when field hands come in for lunch.

It was nothing like this in the 6,000-square-foot house in Country Club Hills in Raleigh, before DeMent and her partner and his four children started visiting the farm, when it was just a getaway, just a "plaything."

After she came back to North Carolina to raise money for the state Museum of Natural Sciences, after she met Richard Holcomb at a cocktail party, after she absorbed his pickup line ...

"He told me he was going to kill chickens the next day. And I thought, 'Dear God, you're going to do what?' And a month later, I came out here to help him kill chickens. And it all evolved from there."

Now, when she tells her Morehead-Cain alumni gathering at UNC, "I'm a farmer," her modesty is unsustainable. "They said, 'Jamie, you're not just a farmer. Tell us what you really do.'"

A better question is what does she not do.

The couple runs four businesses. Only one of them is a farm. DeMent and Holcomb manage two online farming businesses and own Piedmont, a restaurant in Durham.

This is not the life that the Southern history and African-American studies double major imagined for herself. She loved her time in Washington. "But while I was having fun, it wasn't fulfilling me," DeMent said. "Something was calling me back to North Carolina."

One bathroom for six

On a farm day, she says, "sometimes you're up to your elbows in pig manure and thinking, 'Dear God, how did I get here?'"

The 1,100-square-foot house — built on a foundation of halved pine trees — sits on 55 acres along the Eno River. Coon Rock Farm, named for a large rock situated along a former Native American trading path, spreads over three satellite properties the couple rents for additional land where

The idyll of escaping the harried working world for quaint farm life is a myth. 'It's a high-stress, high-drama, high-everything world.'

Jamie DeMent '01

DeMent, Holcomb, his kids, a steady supply of interns who are Morehead-Cain Scholars and a livestock manager raise everything from heritage-breed turkeys to dairy cows and Tunis sheep and grow a cornucopia of vegetables.

Holcomb had a previous life working with software startups. He won awards for entrepreneurship and served on the corporate boards of several private technology companies. In 2004, he bought Coon Rock and went back to the farm work he'd done in his childhood.

DeMent was raised in eastern North Carolina, where she had watched industrialized farming swallow family farms.

At first, she said, "we would come out here and play as farmers." Meanwhile, on the weekdays "we were spending ungodly amounts of money every week going to Whole Foods and trying to make healthy living decisions and healthy eating decisions."

But when the children — now age 19 to 23 — begged to live on the farm full time, DeMent said, the family was confronted with the question: "If we can't do it, then who can? Why not go that step further and do it? Why not grow the food and show people that you really can do it?"

So they loaded up and moved.

"Six people, one bathroom. That was the hardest adjustment for me." She still hadn't given up her desk job at the museum. "And one day I got to work, and I sat at my desk, and I said, 'I don't have to be here. This is not where I want to be.' And at that point it was whole hog, excuse the pun."

That was six years ago. "That whole first season is kind of a blur of chasing baby lambs," said DeMent, who still interviews Morehead-Cain candidates and gave the keynote address at the program's 2012 alumni forum. And the idyll of escaping the harried working world for quaint farm life is, she said, a myth. "It's a high-stress, high-drama, high-everything world."

"Even days that you think are planned,

and you wake up in the morning and say, 'Today I'm going to meet with a writer and then I'm going to make a chicken pot pie, and then I'm going to go and look at a building, and then I'm going to feed animals, and then I'm going to cook dinner for everyone.' No. You might make it through the interview before the pigs get out or before something floods. Every day is unpredictable."

Like the time the farmhands were sitting around the dining room table at one of the family-style meals she hosts several



times a week, when a milk cow and her calf escaped toward the highway overpass. Everyone ran to catch them.

"And as soon as we came up, she got that look in her eye like, 'I'm going to head toward Highway 40.'" Corralling the cows back down the driveway involved a lot of arm-waving and yelling.

Or the time DeMent was on the farm by herself and, looking out the window, discovered three pigs in the bed of broccoli.

"I could see the entire broccoli crop disappearing in seconds. And the only thing I could do was just run straight into the garden, but just one person can't herd them, so I stood with the pigs for three hours until Richard got home with the children to help move the pigs."

"And there's stories like that on an everyday basis."

Kale, cows and lambs

Walking around the farm, livestock manager Brock Phillips '09, another Morehead-Cain Scholar, said he'd been an intern who couldn't leave.

"I met a girl and then met a farm and



PHOTOS BY GABRIEL FOMBERG FOR A&E TV 184X



"I met a girl and then met a farm and then stuck around," says Brock Phillips '09, livestock manager, here with Mary Beth Miller '10, who worked on the farm and now serves its food at Durham's Piedmont restaurant. Below, Tunis sheep and Berkshire Cross pigs.



then stuck around," he said over the clucking of turkeys.

Reddish-brown Bourbon Reds and black-and-white checkered Narragansett turkeys prance around the pen. The cacophony drowns out all noise except the howling wind. The head tom is nothing but a flare of feathers. He seems to be putting on a show for his visitors. Phillips laughs. "He's just strutting around and saying, 'These are my girls.'"

Back in the winter, with the farm between seasons, much of the land lay fallow with carefully tilled rows of earth. Phillips filled in the blanks, explaining what lay in the ground earlier and what would be there this season.

"In the far end, kale, cabbage, collards, carrots, beets, some radishes," he said, pointing to the patch of land between the turkeys and pigs. "And then do tomatoes and peppers in here as well."

On a farm, everything has a purpose. The hogs helped clear out unwanted sweet potatoes after the end of harvest. "They rooted up the rest of them," he said. "They got the potatoes that we missed, mixed the straw mulch that we had into the ground, had a blast, knocked down the weeds."

But if Phillips speaks methodically about most of the animals, he can't help but get personal about the dairy cows.

"Oh, thanks, Ray," he calls to one calf, who has just peed on the rolled out hay bale. Ray is short for Reynolds Price. Most of the dairy cows are named after Southern authors. The farm has seen the likes of Maggie (aka Margaret Mitchell), William Faulkner, Truman Capote and Thomas Wolfe. Eudora Welty's calf, Harper Lee, learned to suckle in the farmhouse kitchen.

"That's Jamie's way of remembering them and making them a part of the family," Phillips said, distinguishing them from the animals that will be processed for meat.

Several lambs had just been born early that morning. Their soft brown coats, white-topped heads and wobbly legs are endearing. But Phillips warns not to get drawn in. They can be difficult to raise. Take, for instance, the mother who refused to nurse her baby last year. The baby was kept in the bathtub and nursed from a bottle. She tried to nurse from Jack, the farm dog.

Then there is the stark reality of farm life: "It's so good," Phillips said of the lamb meat. "It actually makes raising sheep worth

PHOTOS BY CHRIS FOWLER '08 AND '11 MA



Piedmont chef Ben Adams '04 weighs in on what's grown, and how, at Coon Rock. Below: One of his salads includes the farm's beets and greens.



it, with all the trouble they can cause.”

With the next steps in the food chain to worry about now, DeMent and Holcomb have shifted to the bigger picture. “When it was just us, you were paying very close attention,” DeMent said. “And so you knew when that first carrot shoot came up . . . And now, I don’t ever see a carrot shoot come up. Somebody else is watching it after I say, “Make sure 4,000 carrot seeds are planted.””

That somebody else is Phillips and the other field hands. The Coon Rock workforce is made up of a number of Carolina graduates. DeMent likes to joke that the farm takes more Morehead-Cain Scholars as interns than Bain & Co. and J.P. Morgan combined.

The farm hires up to 10 interns in the summer. “They are young people from all around the country who want to save the world, one organic turnip at a time,” DeMent said.

“We get a chance to work on our own, learn on our own and play on our own out here,” Phillips said. The interns have suggested additions such as beekeeping and cut flowers. DeMent gives interns the space to experiment so that they can figure out farming for themselves. Some succeed; some fail.

“I have a ton of banana trees and no bananas,” she said. “So that’s a giant failure.”

She doesn’t regret planting them, though. “Living this lifestyle and doing what we do, if you can’t take a minute and say, ‘Dammit, I’m going to grow a banana,’ then it’s not fun, it’s not worth it.”

Putting it on the table

Even before DeMent and Holcomb packed their bags for the farm, they already were providing the produce for their first restaurant, Zely & Ritz, in Raleigh.

Then they took on a restaurant in downtown Durham, Piedmont. DeMent calls it “New American, but fitting it into a niche is weird.” She says it’s “ingredient-driven” because it’s based on “whatever’s coming out of the garden, whatever animals are being processed.” In 2013, the restaurant was a finalist for an award given by The Nature Conservancy recognizing local, green restaurants, and it has been nominated for an Award of Excellence by *Wine Spectator*.

Once in the restaurant, you might get into a conversation about the okra with

waitress Mary Beth Miller '10. The menu entry is named for her — Miller oversaw the growing of it when she worked at Coon Rock.

It’s part of DeMent’s mission to integrate the restaurant with the rest of the community.

For the moment, the pan-seared scallops with crispy pig ears is DeMent’s favorite dish. “It’s a little bit sweet, a little bit earthy, a little bit oceany — a mash of flavors that explodes in your mouth. It’s so incredibly good.”

The plate is turned into a canvas, with rays of calligraphic squid ink streaming from a bed of roasted cauliflower and scallops bathed in a baby fennel vinaigrette.

The farm’s relationship with Piedmont benefits both. If the farm ends up with a bumper crop of eggplants one season, Chef Ben Adams '04, also a Morehead-Cain alumnus, can add a few eggplant-themed items to the menu. Adams gets a copy of the seed catalogue as soon as DeMent and Holcomb do. “The chef can say, ‘I really love purple bok choy, and I want it grown this way, and I want it picked this big, and I want to be able to serve it whole,’” DeMent said.

If you have trouble deciding between starters, you may find the entrée options even more challenging: Maple Leaf Farm’s crispy duck leg served alongside Melina’s ricotta gnocchi, Uncle Henry Farms’ collards, braised cipollini and roasted Cottle Farms’ turnips, roasted Springer Mountain Farms’ chicken with roasted cauliflower, Carolina Gold rice, benne salas, braised pine nuts and Marbella jus, pan-seared Carolina striped bass alongside Robuchon potato puree, fennel-parsley slaw and Root Down Farm’s carrots.

For dessert, there’s sticky date cake with salted caramel ice cream topped with dulce de leche and caramelized white chocolate. Just don’t get attached: The menu changes with the seasons.

The broader market

Back in the farmhouse, DeMent said that while Coon Rock participates in the traditional farmers market scene — the couple helped establish Moore Square Farmers Market in Raleigh — it thrives on faraway markets.

“That’s what, at the end of the day, I think separates us from other farmers in



On a farm day, DeMent says, "sometimes you're up to your elbows in pig manure and thinking, 'Dear God, how did I get here?'"

the area," she said. "A lot of farmers are great at growing things. They can grow the most beautiful carrots you've ever seen your whole life, and they have no idea how to sell it. Other than standing at a farmers market and staring at people as they walk by, they don't know how to sell it."

The couple's foray into the online marketplace began two years ago, when they bought Bella Bean Organics (bellabeanorganics.com), which DeMent described as an "online farmers market." Buyers select produce, and it's delivered to their doors monthly. Bella Bean works with some 50 farms in North Carolina and South Carolina through a Durham company, Eastern Carolina Organics, to offer more than 1,000 products. Orders received on Friday are delivered early the following week. DeMent envisions customers being able to replace weekly grocery shopping with the online service.

It wasn't long before Bella Bean had

customers far outside the delivery zone.

"People across the country would place orders," DeMent said. "If you're in the middle-of-nowhere, Idaho, and you find this beautiful handmade pasta, you place an order for \$300 worth. And we had to write back and say, 'Actually, we don't drive to Idaho.' And in every single case, people said, 'Well, mail it to me. I'll pay the shipping.'"

At first, they declined, arguing that it was against their model of selling and eating local produce. "But at the end of the day, if you live in a food desert and you can't get quality, sustainable products, I want you to have access to it," she said.

So, this June they are turning problem into opportunity with a second online business, Heirloom Provisions (heirloomprovisions.com), which ships nationwide.

Bella Bean and Heirloom operate out of a warehouse in Durham, where about 20 people pack and deliver orders. The man-

ager is Ann Soltan '13 — you guessed it — a Morehead-Cain.

"Richard and I have personally spent years finding foods that we're comfortable eating and comfortable feeding to our family and our friends. These are foods that we believe in and we love. And my bottom line on it all is: 'Would I eat it, and would I feed it to my family?' And if the answer is, 'Yes,' then I will very likely sell your product."

So, amid the aromas of chicken pot pies and a corner wood stove in a 19th-century farmhouse, the farms-to-market ideal continually redefines itself, pushed by seasoned entrepreneurs and students who probably never thought they'd become immersed in Jamie DeMent's dream. ■

Emily Palmer '14 has been an editorial intern with the Review for three years, graduating with honors in May. She will enter the master's of science in journalism program at Columbia University this fall.

PRESS LINKS:

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