

# Michigan Chefs Serve Up Farm to Fork Fare

BY DIANNA STAMPFLER

**L**ong before chain restaurants inundated our lifestyles, chefs from around the globe relied on their local farmers to supply fresh produce, meats, cheeses, breads and other edibles to develop their menus. Thankfully, this philosophy of sourcing locally has become more common for restaurants seeking to offer an authentic culinary experience.

When you live in a state such as Michigan—the second most agriculturally diverse in the country—it's a bit easier to tap into the resources of the local farming network. As a consumer, I realize there are so many benefits to eating local—it is a healthier product and ultimately puts more money into the regional economy. I, for one, am happy to pay a little more for a meal (or a beverage) that I know was made close to home because simply put, it's worth it in so many ways!

In my travels around the state, I'm always seeking out those establishments that recognize, support and celebrate the local food movement. Here, the chefs make a point to get to know their growers and their customers and in doing so, reinforce their passion for serving up the finest farm to fork fare. Let me introduce you to a few of my favorites from Southwest Michigan!



**CHEF ROBB HAMMOND**  
**FOOD DANCE, KALAMAZOO**

Food Dance has embraced the local movement since before it was “trendy” to do so (and certainly before it had an official title). First opened in 1994, Food Dance is one of the original Michigan farm-to-fork restaurants dedicated to using locally-produced ingredients.

When asked how his relationship with local growers and farmers impacted his menu preparation, chef Hammond says “Simply speaking...it is our menu. If the area is producing it, we are trying to use it in every aspect of cooking – not just highlighting a single vegetable, but incorporating them into stocks, soups and salads – for breakfast, lunch and dinner.”

One of chef's favorite fall ingredients is apple cider. “It's the most versatile ingredient,” he says. “It can be used as a reduction or glaze, raw in a vinaigrette and don't ever forget to use it as a brine when working with pork!”

Over the years, chef Hammond admits the culinary scene has changed. “For a while there, we made a sharp turn away from simple preparation and sourcing, to heavy use of advanced techniques,” he says. “In the last five years, however, it has trended back toward what we have always done here at Food Dance. The welcome addition of butchery making a strong comeback is the most exciting aspect, as both a chef and a consumer.”

Chef Hammond is a proud member of The Butcher's Guild, a national group which shares a common philosophy to meat-loving culinary enthusiasts dedicated to sourcing and serving quality, butchered cuts of meat.

“I have a passion for breaking an animal down from whole to plate,” chef Hammond says. “For the last eight years, I have worked exclusively with humanely and sustainably-raised meat. The move was driven by the plethora of great farms that surround us here in West Michigan.”

Earlier this spring, Food Dance decided to kick their love of local up a notch and announced an initiative to further support locally-produced foods that will make their way onto Food Dance's menu. The first of these partnerships is the purchase and development of a small-scale 20-40 acre farm, in the Kalamazoo area.

“Ideally, we're looking for a farmer or land owner who wants to see their land continue to be farmed or returned to agriculture,” says Julie Stanley, Food Dance owner. “This could be an active farm or fallow fields that can be returned to active use.”

Education will be a key component of the venture, with plans for an Edible Schoolyard program to teach kids about farming and where food comes from. There will also be adult agriculture and cooking classes, as well as a CSA (crop sharing) program for local residents to benefit from the bounty.

“We want to stress how locally-produced foods help to sustain our community. Not only is it important, but it's fascinating to see the food cycle – from seeds to a completely-prepared meal,” Stanley says. “It's important to us to not only know where our food comes from, but who's producing it and what their practices are. We visit the local farms we buy from and get to know the farmers. After all, they are our secret ingredient.”

Food Dance's popular “Farm to Fork Dinner Series” kicks off its fall 2012 season in August. Among this year's offerings: Vegetables – Aug. 16; Green Gardens – Aug. 30; Heirloom Tomatoes – Sept. 13; and a Fall Foraging – Oct. 18. A series of hands-on classes are also offered, year round, including these upcoming sessions: Sausage Making – Sept. 26; Roasting & Frying – Oct. 30; Pies, Pies & More Pies – Nov. 6-7; and Sautéing & Poaching – Nov. 13.

For more information: [www.FoodDance.net](http://www.FoodDance.net).



**CHEF MATTHEW MILLAR**  
**RESERVE WINE & FOOD,**  
**GRAND RAPIDS**

Executive chef Matthew Millar has been with Reserve since its opening in September 2010. A nearly 30-year veteran of the restaurant industry (21 years as a chef), he's honed his skills at several West Michigan restaurants. He became enthralled with regional farmers and artisans during his years as owner and chef of the former Journeyman Café in Fennville.

“My love for the foods and farmers of West Michigan grew exponentially after opening my own place,” chef Millar wrote in a blog post in 2001. “The first time we ran out of eggs and had to run to the local



grocery store to replenish, it was crystal clear that we'd never go back to mainstream suppliers. That food just wasn't good enough anymore."

Cooking with locally-raised and seasonally-sourced foods remains part of Millar's philosophy and is a major draw for patrons at Reserve. He's developed a sense of place that extends from the farm or field, into the kitchen and the combination creates a vibrant West Michigan culinary culture.

With Michigan's seasonal agricultural diversity, Chef Millar is able to design menus that are innovative, creative and colorful in multiple ways. He prides himself on using what is available in the here and now—which is why if it's out of season, you won't find it on the menu.

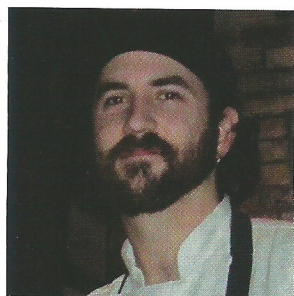
"I'm really inspired by growing seasons and natural abundance we have here in Michigan," Chef Millar once said. "Seasonality is important to me. I have such love for Michigan foods, especially the stuff from right here in West Michigan."

In the fall season, Chef Millar says its local produce like squash and cabbage that draws his attention. "West Michigan is a huge grower of cabbage, but so few people realize it," he said recently. "When you pick a cabbage right from the farm and prepare it for a meal that same day, it is so much different than your store bought variety. It's spicy; it's crisp."

Earlier this year, Chef Millar was one of only three Michigan chefs to make the 20-person semifinalist list for the Top 5 Finalists for the 2012 James Beard Foundation "Best Chef: Great Lakes Region" Award. Established in 1990, the Beard Awards are the most prestigious honors given to professionals in the food and beverages industry in North America – often called the "Oscars of Food."

Located in the heart of downtown Grand Rapids, Reserve Wine & Food offers a world-class menu fully embracing the West Michigan farm-to-table philosophy, paired with over 100 wines available by the glass and 200 wines by the bottle, in an elegant yet casual fine dining setting. In 2011, Reserve was named a winner of OpenTable's Diner's Choice Awards for Top Wine Lists in the United States – one of only two restaurants in Michigan to make the list.

For more information: [www.ReserveGR.com](http://www.ReserveGR.com)



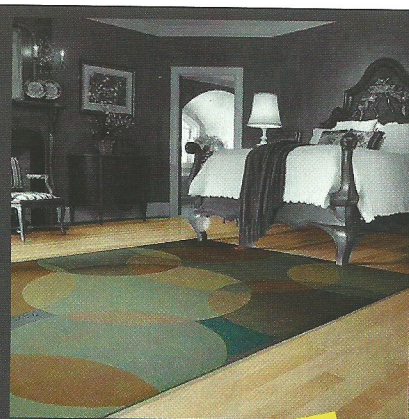
#### **CHEF MATTHEW PIETSCH – SALT OF THE EARTH, FENNIVILLE**

A protégé of 'Iron Chef' Michael Symon, Salt of the Earth's Executive Chef Matthew Pietsch has been with the restaurant since its opening in 2009 and has directed the farm-to-table concept since day one. Developing strong relationships with local farmers and producers, Pietsch's food focus begins with sourcing the highest quality ingredients and to process these ingredients as simply as possible.

"Being an ingredient-driven restaurant, we live and die by our producers," says Chef Pietsch, who takes pride in the number of regional growers and producers who provide him with the freshest ingredients. "They are why we're here and allow us to present our guests with the best ingredients available to us as a restaurant."

"Relationship," says chef Pietsch, is the key word to how they operate at Salt of the Earth. "When we find new famers or growers, we don't look for a business opportunity, we look for a relationship. We strive to work with our growers for the long term, as opposed to a few tomatoes here and there, or a batch of chickens every six months. We feel that builds more of a partnership than just a buyer and a seller. Our menus are a direct derivative of what's available from our growers, so it's everything."

Thankfully for chef Pietsch and his local-focused counterparts, the culinary scene here in Michigan and the Midwest is changing – for the better. "Our guests are much more conscious of the seasonality of our food as well as the option for local sourcing," he says. "It's something that is our cornerstone, so obviously we see the impact a lot stronger. I feel more now than ever folks are more aware of where their food comes from, and why. One of the largest changes from the consumer is the demand for dietary adjustments and options. We weren't as conscious of the need for gluten free, dairy free, and meat free options previously, and now it's a must."



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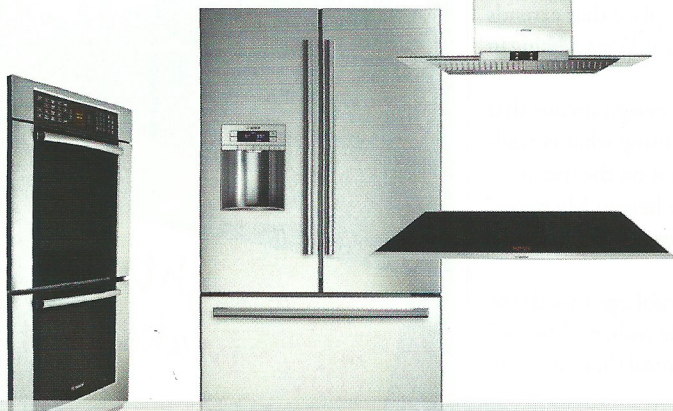
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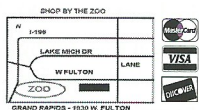
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As with many chefs, the fall season is a favorite time to get creative in the kitchen with the local bounty.

"Although we receive and process whole hogs all year long, the fall season allows us to work with our heritage Berkshire hogs in a different light," Pietsch says. "We process 35 percent more pork in the fall than we do the rest of the year. This is generally when we're processing for charcuterie for the following season. Pork always lends itself to heartier preparations and flavors that we work with in the later part of the growing season."

A West Michigan native, chef Pietsch has been in the hospitality industry since 1997. A graduate of Grand Rapids Community College's culinary arts program, he was inspired by an apprenticeship with the US National Pastry Team in 2004 and worked throughout West Michigan for several years as an Executive Pastry Chef. Later he relocated to Dearborn where he operated the famed Opus One kitchen, and managed Opus One's corporate foodservice for Ford Advertising.

Salt of the Earth is touted as a "rustic American eatery," tucked away in a historic building in quaint downtown Fennville – in the heart of the Southwest Michigan's thriving agricultural region. Celebrating its third anniversary in September, Salt of the Earth offers a seasonal menu of made-from-scratch entrees, shared plates, wood-fired-oven pizzas and creative desserts, alongside an impressive selection of Michigan wines, crafts beers and spirits. This restaurant is also a popular venue for local and regional musical artists, with live house concerts held weekly – creating a satisfying environment for all the senses.

For more information: [www.SaltOfTheEarthFennville.com](http://www.SaltOfTheEarthFennville.com).



## NHBC The Poet Stout Braised Pork Shoulder Recipe

Courtesy Salt of the Earth

- 1 Boston butt or pork shoulder roast (6-8 lb.)
- 3 carrots, diced
- 3 stalks celery, diced
- 3 large yellow onions, diced
- 2 turnips (optional), diced
- 1 rutabaga (optional), diced
- 2 quarts chicken or pork stock
- 2 bottles The Poet Stout
- canola or peanut oil, as needed
- salt and pepper, as needed



### PREPARATION:

Place a heavy bottomed braising pan, or dutch oven on medium to high heat. Allow to heat up.

Season pork roast well, cut roast into smaller portion sizes if desired. Season on all sides and dredge in flour to coat. Add enough oil to braising pan to coat the bottom. Gently place roast into pan and sear well on all sides. Be sure not to burn the flour on roast. Remove roast from pan and set aside.

Ensure that all vegetables are cut into consistent sizes. For a whole roast, cut the vegetables slightly larger. For smaller cuts, cut the vegetables slightly smaller. Introduce vegetables into hot braising pan and sauté lightly until some of the moisture of the vegetables has evaporated and a bit of color is seen on the veggies. Place roast in braising pan over

*continued on next page...*



the vegetables. Add the chicken stock and the stout to cover roast. Place braising pan over heat and bring up to simmer. Cover with foil or lid and place into 350 F degree oven. Roast will take up to 3-4 hours to cook through. Smaller cuts will take less time 1.5 – 2 hours. To test doneness, insert fork into pork shoulder and twist. The pork should fall apart with the fork.

Ideally, allow pork to cool in braising liquid. If serving immediately, remove pork from pan and strain the liquid into a medium sauce pot. Reduce sauce until slightly thickened. Season well with salt and pepper, and a bit more of The Poet Stout if necessary. Serve pork roast with reduced sauce and braising vegetables if desired

## Lamb Chops With Farro Goat Cheese Risotto and Minted Red Onion Gremolata

*Recipe Courtesy Food Dance \* Serves 2*

- lamb chops 3 rib bones per person  
(easiest preparation is grilling 2 bone sections)
- 2 teaspoons each, salt and pepper
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 tablespoon chopped thyme

### RISOTTO

- ½ cup farro
- 2 cups water
- 2 ½ cups chicken stock
- ¼ cup fresh goat cheese
- 1 cup baby spinach

### MINT GREMOLATA

- 1 medium onion
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 2 teaspoons honey
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 bunch mint
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- zest of one lemon



Soak farro in water overnight in the refrigerator. Drain farro in sink and transfer to small sauce pan with 1 cup of chicken stock and a pinch of salt. Bring to a boil for 1 minute then reduce to simmer uncovered for 1 hour, continue to add stock to pan just enough to keep farro covered. Stir periodically, taste doneness of farro after 45 minutes. Should be al dente but starting to soften. Stop adding stock at this point and simmer till stock barely covers the bottom of pan.

Prepare grill for high heat, rub chops with salt, pepper, thyme and oil, and let rest at room temp for 20 minute.

Slice onion in ¼ inch rings and sauté on low heat with butter, honey and salt till soft, do not brown the onion. In the meantime bring 2 quarts of salted water to a boil and blanch mint leaves for 30 seconds then shock in ice bath. Squeeze out mint in a tea towel to dry as much as possible. Add onion and mint to a food processor and drizzle in oil, do not puree for longer than 20 seconds. Move to a bowl and stir in lemon zest.

Rub off excess thyme from chops and grill till medium rare to medium about 135 degrees.

To finish farro turn heat to high and add spinach and stir till wilted then add goat cheese and taste for seasoning. Plate farro, after the chops have rested for five minutes split them in between bones and crisscross over farro, spoon over Gremolata.

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