

BEYOND BLUEBERRIES

Cider, Grain & Community at Finnriver Farm

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To many Port Townsendites, including myself, Finnriver means blueberries. But the farm has been gradually branching out in several new directions. A dinner invitation from friends seemed the perfect opportunity to sample one of them, Finnriver's *Farmstead Sparkling Cider*. When we arrived, our friend's apartment was filled with the smell of Nash Farm's frying bacon. I poured the cider as they shucked the giant horse clams they had dug that morning. As we all enjoyed the cider, which was crisp and not too sweet and quickly polished off by the six of us, I thought (as I often have before), I will never leave the Olympic Peninsula.

The next morning, I knocked quietly on the Kisler's farmhouse door, as instructed by a sign warning of sleeping children. As Crystie fried eggs and talked about upcoming farm events, her enthusiasm was as effervescent as the cider she and Keith brew.

When we first met, I took a writing class Crystie was teaching at Peninsula College. Back then she talked about farming as "something her husband was thinking about doing." Keith is from Eastern Washington; he grew up driving a combine on his family's 1,000 acre wheat farm, and after some time away, farm life called him back. Crystie had not yet heard the call, but today it was clear farming has won her heart. She continues to write and her blog, "The Farm Wife Diaries," is a charming testament to the marriage of her first love and her newfound love of farming.

Speaking of marriage, Keith joined us, and the conversation naturally turned to grains. As an avid baker this was fine with me. We fantasized about a bread and jam event at some time in the future and I volunteered to come out and get some sourdough starters going. This summer they will be offering 18 different grain products at the Port Townsend Farmer's Market, including whole and milled hard red spring and winter wheat, rye, oats, buckwheat, spelt and emmer. Not to worry, this will all be offered on a second table so all the blueberries, strawberries and other fruits and vegetables their customers have grown to love will still be available.

After breakfast, Crystie and I walked the farm and she talked about the intricate part the community has played in making Finnriver possible, from a conservation easement, to a grant that allowed them to purchase grain cleaning equipment, to the great interns on the farm, and especially farm managers Jeff Horwath and Janet Aubin, now in their third year at Finnriver and leading all fruit and vegetable production.

Keith and Crystie have worked to make Finnriver Farm a community destination. They offer a CSA, host a berry picking collective, and in late June they will host a grand opening of their cider tasting room. They are releasing a blueberry sparkling hard cider this summer and are pursuing a custom distilled Asian pear brandy and a blueberry liqueur. They plan to eventually do the distilling themselves as business grows.

Be sure to check their website at finnriverfarm.com or see them every week at the farmer's market. Finnriver products are also available at The Food Co-op.