

Culinary School of the Rockies Raises New Crop of Chefs

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Prestigious school announces Culinary Arts Farm to Table Externship

This week, a new crop of culinary students begins a six-month educational journey learning to guide our nation's restaurant, grocery, retailer and hospitality industries in the timely shift toward growing, eating and purchasing local and sustainable foods. Culinary School of the Rockies (CSR) is pioneering a natural path for future chefs craving an unprecedented farm-to-table education through the launch of its Farm to Table Externship.

Students spend the first nine weeks of the course in the classroom at CSR. Then, on Sept. 8, the off-campus Externship takes them to work on farms and ranches in Colorado's breathtaking North Fork Valley (near Aspen) and in Boulder County. Students will learn firsthand how to source local ingredients from farmers, growers and producers, and the farming experience is topped off by an apprenticeship with acclaimed "locavore" Colorado chefs.

Culinary School of the Rockies began developing the program two years ago as a response to the growing "sustainable" trend -- and the subsequent help-wanted signs in sustainable restaurants. Today, with gas prices soaring past \$4 per gallon, the food industry is becoming even more sensitive to local sourcing.

CSR is acutely aware that culinary education requires chefs to know more than just the "back of the house." Today, chefs are routinely unloading vegetables fresh from the farm -- rinsing off dirt rather than unwrapping cellophane.

"Farm to Table is not a passing fad in the culinary world. It is a lasting cultural shift," said Joan Brett, director and founder of Culinary School of the Rockies. "We want our students to respect and understand the intricacies and challenges of sourcing and serving local, seasonal food. We want them to develop a passion for savoring and serving the freshest and best-tasting ingredients available."

Farm to table is a broad trend that refers to sourcing practices that support natural and organic farming and local farms and producers. The movement started centuries ago but has regained momentum during the past 35 years, when organic grocers and farmers markets began attracting the masses. Nationally renowned chef Alice Waters pioneered this trend in 1971 when she opened her neighborhood bistro, Chez Panisse, in Berkeley, Calif. Many restaurateurs have more recently adopted Waters' practices and ideals.

Notes chef and CSR instructor Michael Scott, "CSR recognized a need for a Farm to Table Externship when we saw what was happening around us: Restaurants that adopted sustainable practices were the restaurants with month-long waiting lists."

The Farm to Table Externship is new to Culinary School of the Rockies, but the program's philosophy is a natural extension of the school's values. Since its founding in 1991, the school has kept a "green commitment" by sourcing local, fresh products and ingredients when available for its programs and by recycling and composting its waste products year-round.

As recently as June 8, The New York Times featured several of CSR's farm and chef partners in an article, "As Skiers Depart Aspen, Chowhounds Take Their Place." Featured farmer Don Lareau, owner of Zephyros Farm, Ryan Hardy, chef at Montagna at The Little Nell in Aspen, and farmer John Cooley of Rivendell Farm are all participating instructors and leaders of CSR's Farm to Table Externship.

Colorado is an up-and-coming culinary Mecca, Brett said. "People don't realize the high quality of ingredients found in Colorado. Succulent wild game and some of the best fruits and vegetables in the country originate here. Students will have the opportunity to get their hands in all of it, and those hands are going to get dirty."

After the three-week farm portion of the externship is complete, students will apprentice for two weeks in award-winning Colorado restaurants with sustainable practices, such as Fruition in Denver, Montagna restaurant in Aspen, and The Kitchen and Frasca Food & Wine in Boulder.

"I started CSR to share my passion for food and cooking and to express my belief that food is about love, relationships, families and communities," Brett said. "The Farm to Table Externship is a natural extension of the core philosophy of our school."

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