

MAIL TRIBUNE
FARM TO FORK
September 17, 2010

The restaurant winemaker dinner has fostered introductions between many local vintners and their customers.

Taking that concept further, a group of local chefs and food advocates are introducing local diners to their area farmers and specialty food producers. The hallmark of this movement is forging the restaurant for the farm, hence the name Farm to Fork.
Word of Mouth

Dining out with

the Mail Tribune

Featuring locally grown, raised and

produced foods with local wines,

Farm to Fork dinners are held at area

farms and wineries. View upcoming

dates and purchase tickets

at www.farmtoforkevents.com

or call 503-473-3952.

Chefs Matthew Domingo and Kristen Lyon with farm promoters Lori Campbell and Sascha Meier kicked off the series in early June at Jacksonville's Salant Family Ranch. Subsequent events hosted hundreds of guests at Medford and Ashland farms before arriving last week at Campbell's Blackberry Lane farm in Grants Pass.

There, I finally claimed a seat at Farm to Fork's table for an al fresco feast featuring Willow-Witt Ranch free-range pork and Caprice Vineyards wines. Cost was \$60 per person for five courses and three glasses of wine. Additional donations benefit the nonprofit Rogue Valley Farm to School and Molalla-based Friends of Family Farmers. Ticket prices do not cover tips for volunteer service staff.

Both seasoned chefs, Domingo and Lyon plan the menu based on what's freshest that week. Farm to Fork also is highly sensitive to dietary needs, accommodating vegetarian, gluten-free and even nightshade-free diets at the height of tomato season.

Because tomatoes were featured in the starter, salad and main courses at last week's event, they were gathered from a number of local farms, including Ashland's Happy Dirt Veggie Patch and Rogue River's Runnymede Farm. But first, guests enjoyed

appetizers of pork belly with melon and blackberries with goat cheese, along with Caprice 2008 Sonata Viognier.

The pork belly's thick layers of fat melted on the tongue, cleansed with a bit of acid from the melon. Crackers from Ashland's SunStone Artisan Bakery were the perfect vehicle for chevre and ripe berries, accented with a bit of fresh herbs. The servers graciously returned with appetizer trays even after guests had taken a farm tour and seats for dinner.

Served family-style on large platters, courses still were artfully plated in distinct portions. The arrangement, however, did make it difficult to scoop up silky tomato confit with the starter course of summer-squash gratin.

I only wished servers had filled our bread basket before clearing the platter so I could have sopped up more delicious sauce. Instead, I finished off Caprice's superior 2007 Cabernet Sauvignon, fruitier than most cabs I've tried.

More SunStone bread contributed heft as croutons in the heirloom tomato salad. As one would expect, tomatoes — in numerous shapes, hues and textures — were the star of this dish, but Barking Moon Farm lettuces of impeccable freshness were no less impressive. Fresh mozzarella and Copper Hill olive oil added richness.

Tomatoes were smoked for a salsa complementing the main course of pork two ways: seared loin and braised shoulder. I appreciated the larger ratio of fork-tender shoulder to loin although both were beautifully cooked.

Likewise, young green beans and fingerling potatoes couldn't have been executed better. The salsa's sweet corn subdued the tang of smoky tomatoes while fresh black-eyed peas brought that essential and often-overlooked bitter note to the plate. Also bearing a bitter edge, Caprice 2007 Claret was nice but not as enjoyable as the cab.

Served with French-pressed Noble coffee, the dessert's simple presentation belied intense flavors. Old Stage Farm peaches were poached in spiced, white wine, drizzled with the reduced syrup and dolloped with whipped cream. Blackberries and green grapes were no mere garnishes, serving to balance out the cream.

The dinner was Farm to Fork's largest yet, but the season is far from over. Upcoming dates are Saturdays, Sept. 25, Oct. 2, Oct. 23 and Nov. 6.

The first, at Medford's EdenVale Winery, is a benefit vegetarian feast for Sanctuary One. October's events are respectively at Eagle Point's Agate Ridge Vineyard and Weisinger's Winery in Ashland. The finale, a three-course dinner for the reduced price of \$35 will be held at Applegate's Blue Fox Farm.

Purchase tickets online at www.farmtoforkevents.com or call 503-473-3952. Check the website this winter for next year's lineup, all at different farms, starting in late spring or early summer.

— Sarah Lemon