

Matt McIntosh gets his hands dirty in
the Slow Food movement

For the Love of Food

I love to get my hands dirty. But I truly admire the farmer who is always getting dirty to provide the Lowcountry with fruits and vegetables that appeal to the eye and please the palate.

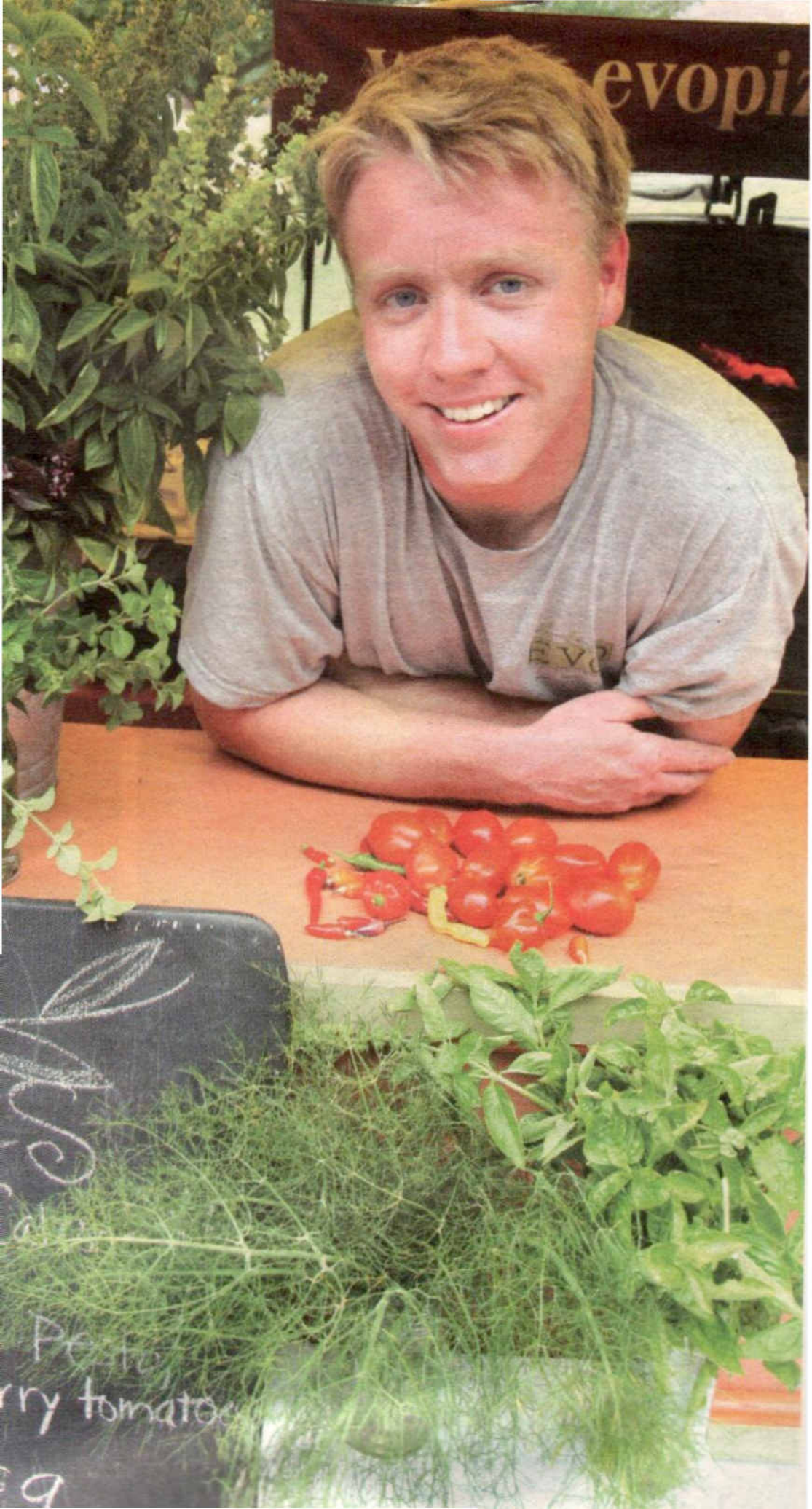
Have you been greeted by Star, the Border Collie who helps protect George and Celeste Albers' Green Grocer Farm, nestled on Wadmalaw Island? When was the last time you took a day trip with your family and friends to a "you-pick" farm like Maple Ridge Farm, run by Fritz Aichele in Canadys, to see who could pick the most blackberries, blueberries, or strawberries? Have you taken the journey to Edisto Island and visited the beautiful Botany Bay Plantation, farmed by Bruce Rawl, to taste some of his delicious Black Russian or Striped Zebra heirloom tomatoes, to name a few?

I support and follow the Slow Food movement, which sprouted in Italy when locals banded together to preserve their unique culinary traditions. Sustainability, biodiversity, knowing where our foods come from, and choosing local and seasonal foods to bring friends and family together in the kitchen and at the table are the major tenets of the Slow Food movement. The goal is to educate our community in matters of taste and food origins, to show through small tastings, food demonstrations, and seasonal meetings how simple it is to enjoy these products found in the Lowcountry that are divine and just plain better than the highly processed, homogenized, tasteless foods found in grocery stores. As a founding member of Slow Food Charleston, it is my passion to practice these principles in my own personal culinary choices and in my profession on a daily basis.

The coming of the local farmers' markets gives me a time to reflect and anticipate. Eating seasonally means I can look forward to fresh produce like beautiful spring onions, varieties of carrots, potatoes, and squash in the early spring. As the summer heat scorches, I can cool down with a refreshing, juicy Carolina peach or a crimson, ripe tomato. The abundance of fresh, local shrimp available now and through the early winter whets my appetite as I decide how to prepare this tasty seafood. I recommend to anyone who has the opportunity to go out on a local shrimp boat. It is a humbling experience and puts a new perspective on the hard work and tradition that is part of our local shrimping industry. Eating locally means my money supports farmers and fishermen whom I admire and appreciate for bringing their bounty to our area. I do not question or doubt where my dollars are going after I witness one day of their grueling but passionate work.

Food creates a simple connection that unites us, whether at the table of a favorite local restaurant or at a backyard picnic. I encourage people to choose quality over quantity, to put a name and face with the foods we eat, and to reestablish a working relationship with our local farms. When we support these local, small-scale producers, we are bringing the beauty, taste, freshness, and TLC of the small farm into our homes and onto our forks.

Matt McIntosh is a convivium leader of Slow Food Charleston and co-owns EVO (Extra Virgin Oven) Pizza, a mobile catering service specializing in authentic, wood-fired pizzas. For more information on the Slow Food movement, log onto www.slowfoodusa.org and search for local convivia for Slow Food Charleston contact information.



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