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## A Moo Moo Here, A Blue Ribbon There

**BYLINE:** By ALICE GABRIEL**SECTION:** Section WE; Column 0; Metropolitan Desk; WESTCHESTER FROM THE FARM; Pg. 10**LENGTH:** 1116 words

ON a recent August morning, Tara Bergstrom, 14, gingerly stepped around the walk-in chicken coop at her home in Katonah, introducing a visitor to her flock of Comets and Rhode Island Reds. "This is Daisy, this is Star, this is Buttercup," she said, picking up Buttercup and stroking her rust-colored feathers. "This is Fern, and this is Fawn -- they're like best friends."

The hens fluttered to the far side of the pen; a few darted into the henhouse. To an unpracticed eye, they all looked alike, but Ms. Bergstrom, who is an active 4-H member with designs on winning a ribbon at the Yorktown Grange Fair this week, was drawing fine distinctions. "Those are the two reds, Chicken Little and Angel," she said as she followed her little brood. "And last, there's Clover."

It is the sweet-natured Buttercup, her favorite, that Ms. Bergstrom will be entering in the 86th annual Yorktown fair, a four-day festival with its roots firmly planted in local agriculture. Westchester County will never be mistaken for the farm belt, but from Sept. 9 through 12, the fairgrounds in Yorktown Heights will be home to livestock exhibits, prize-winning gladiolas, a tractor parade -- and a lot of food.

This year's theme -- "Locally Grown!" -- speaks to the revived interest in backyard agricultural enterprise and small-scale farming. In the grange tradition, townspeople with a competitive streak can vie for ribbons with homegrown fruits and vegetables, as well as flowers, baked goods, needlework, photography, livestock and poultry. Local commercial farms -- including Stuart's Farm, in Granite Springs, which claims to be the oldest working farm in the county -- will mount exuberant tableaux of apples, pumpkins, cornstalks and chrysanthemums.

With its manure-scented animal barns, the fair will give suburbanites a chance to get a grip on where their eggs and bacon come from. Crowds drawn to the spectacle of bleating goats and shining jars of jelly -- and of course the fairway's whirling rides and clouds of cotton candy -- have in recent years averaged a whopping 25,000 visitors. "A lot of them don't know the difference between a sheep and a goat, a hen and a rooster, that cows were anything but black and white," said Nicole Fervan, this year's grange master and director of the fair. Those who are confused will get a good shot at sorting it out: nine farms will be trucking in dairy cows, beef cows, sheep, goats, pigs, rabbits, chickens, ducks and turkeys, and all will be carefully labeled.

The fair promises to be an eater's paradise, with hamburgers, hot dogs, clams, shrimp, lobster, corn on the cob, Philly cheese steaks, pulled pork, meatball sandwiches, pizza, breakfast sandwiches, and wedges stuffed with sausage and peppers. "And of course ice cream," said Eileen Seaboldt, who is in charge of food vendors. "The Mister Softee truck comes in on Thursday and doesn't pull out until Sunday night. I get my fill -- I'm a vanilla person myself."

For fairgoers with any room left in their stomachs, chocolate-cream-pie- and watermelon-eating contests will be open to all on Saturday and Sunday afternoons. And local chefs have been lined up to give cooking demonstrations using local ingredients. Donna Massaro, the owner of the new Freight House Cafe, in Mahopac, will be making coleslaw with cabbage and carrots from **Ryder Farm**, in Brewster. ("The mayonnaise," she said a bit apologetically, "will be Hellman's.")

In the category of look-but-don't-touch, there will be lavish displays of homemade goodies entered in the baking competition. Food categories, each of which invites entries from three age groups, include jams, jellies, canned fruits, chocolates (filled, covered and clustered), molded chocolate, lollipops, fudge, hard candies, coffeecakes, cakes made with fruit, bundt cakes, all-chocolate cake, cupcakes, brownies, regular cookies, bar cookies, pies (both fruit and cream), yeast breads, rolls, biscuits, nut breads, muffins and cheesecake.

For judges, who are required to eat their way through it all, a strong constitution and a very sweet tooth are prerequisites. When told of the sheer number of baked goods bound for the fair, Jonathan Pratt, the owner and chef at Peter Pratt's Inn, in Yorktown Heights, and Umami Cafe, in Croton on Hudson, who has volunteered to be a judge, said: "Oh, my gosh, I better go on a diet. I've been riding my bike and playing racquetball to get in tasting shape."

In what might be called a battle of the spatulas, Ann Sickles and Tama Goodstein, best friends since high school, will go head-to-head once again for the honor of best cookie in show. The rivalry, which has gone on for years, is friendly; in fact, the two bake side by side in Ms. Sickles's kitchen. (Bob Sickles, who first prodded his wife to enter the contest, obligingly lines two plates with doilies and delivers the cookies to the fairground.)

The very first year she entered, Ms. Goodstein won the top prize, Best of Section, for her oatmeal chocolate chip cookies. "I was pretty happy when I won that big white ribbon," she said. "I still have it on the refrigerator."

"She's such a bragger," said Ms. Sickles when told of Ms. Goodstein's claim. "She only won it once."

Both women have been frustrated in recent years by the ascendancy of a baker named Carol Schultz, whose cookies have consistently won blue ribbons. "We've never laid eyes on her," Ms. Goodstein said. "We laugh, 'Who is this Carol Schultz? We've got to get rid of her so we can always come in first.'"

Judges scrutinize produce, too, picking winners in more than 40 categories of fruits, vegetables and herbs. He who wins the most blue ribbons also wins the coveted Chester Hyatt Memorial Trophy, named for the dairy farmer who is credited with starting the Grange Fair in 1923 when he urged his fellow farmers to submit samples of their potatoes to determine who had the best crop.

Holding to tradition, much of the produce will be auctioned off on Sunday afternoon to raise seed money for the 2011 fair. "There's not much in Westchester that says 'farm' anymore," said Damien Maass, who as auctioneer has been driving up the bids for pumpkins and zucchini for the past 15 years, "so this kind of brings you back in time a little bit. It's in a tent, with familiar faces -- it takes on a nice small-town feeling that's been lost."

The 86th Annual Yorktown Grange Fair, Sept. 9 through 12, at the Yorktown Grange Fairgrounds, 99 Moseman Road, Yorktown Heights. Fair hours: Thursday, 6 to 10 p.m.; Friday and Saturday, 10 a.m. to 11 p.m.; Sunday, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. For more information, including a complete schedule of events and admission prices: yorktowngrangefair.org.

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OVEN WARS: Tama Goodstein, left, and Ann Sickles, in Ms. Sickles's kitchen, compete each year in the fair's cookie competition.

LITTLE CHICKENS: Buttercup, center, with Tara Bergstrom. (PHOTOGRAPHS BY TOM WHITE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES)

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