



Cape Experience

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Locally grown

New book examines Cape Cod farms

By Johanna Crosby

Harwich author/photographer Stephanie Foster was afraid she wouldn't find enough farms to fill her new book. But she unearthed a bumper crop of them, both big and small, tucked in pockets all around this narrow peninsula. She profiles 28 of them in her 144-page illustrated book "Farms of Cape Cod" (Schiffer Publishing, Ltd.

\$24.99) Foster celebrates the farming lifestyle on Cape Cod in interviews with local farmers and page after page of her color photography.

"It's a precious thing to farm. It's like keeping a part of our history," says Foster, who dedicated her book to Jean Iversen, owner of the Kelly Farm in Brewster for the past 30 years and a pioneer in organic farming on Cape Cod.

The Cape used to have hundreds of farms stretching back many years. But times changed. As the region developed into a popular summer resort, precious farmland began disappearing.

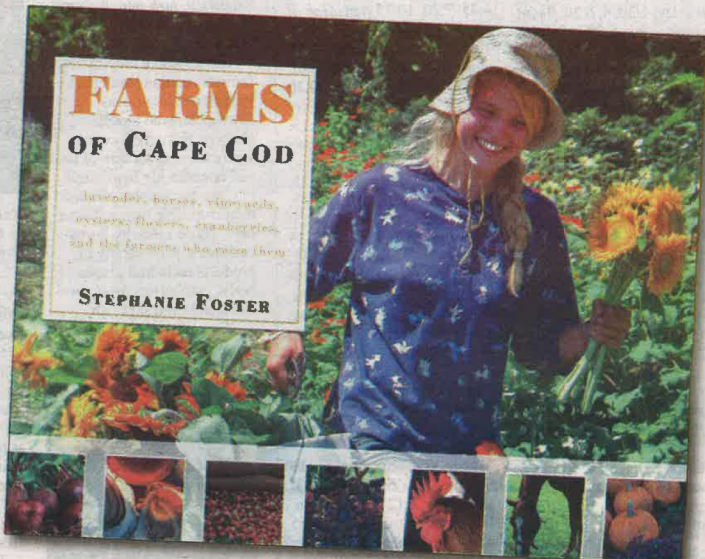
Molly, the sheep was expecting breakfast rather than a portrait for a book at Not Enough Acres in Dennis where she lives.

But the good news is that over the last decade there has been a significant increase in the number of farms across the state, notes Dianne Langeland, co-publisher of "Edible Cape Cod," in the foreword of Foster's book. Ten years ago there was only one farmers market on the Cape. Farmers markets, farm stands and Consumer Supported Agriculture subscriptions are now flourishing in almost every village.

The public is becoming more aware about the availability of fresh, locally grown organic food, explained Foster. "It's their way to go back to the earth. They know where the food comes from."

A master gardener and longtime gardening writer, Foster has an insider's perspective on the Cape's tightly knit farming community. Over the years she's become well acquainted with area farmers by selling her homegrown flowers at local farmers markets.

"There are so many different kinds of farms that people don't know about that dot the countryside," she says. "The



Foster has been taking photographs of the harvest at the Cape Cod Lavender Farm for years and chose it as the location for her book signing on Wednesday, July 10.

Photos by Stephanie Foster

If you go...

Author/photographer Stephanie Foster will sign copies of "Farms of Cape Cod" at the Cape Cod Lavender Farm, off Route 124 in Harwich, on Wednesday, July 10 from 1 to 5 p.m., and at the Orleans Farmers Market on Saturdays from 8 a.m. to noon. Photographs from the book are available at Addison Art Gallery in Orleans.



Above: The autumn harvest is captured in "Gourds," at the Tony Andrews Farm in Falmouth. Foster followed the seasons from early spring peas to cranberries in fall.

Left: The book explores the Cape's agricultural diversity, from vineyards, horses, flowers, lavender, cranberries, holly, livestock and produce, to the East Dennis Oyster Farm, photographed here.

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diversity is amazing. These farms are charming and the people are serious about farming.”

Some Cape farms have been handed down through the generations like Crow Farm on Route 6A in Sandwich, now into its fourth generation, and Kane Farm in Truro.

There's also a crop of new farmers running small backyard farms, like Lucas Dinwiddle, who tends Halcyon Farm in Brewster where he rents an acre of land and operates his farm stand.

Cape farmers have created their own little niches, Foster says. These specialty farms cultivate a wide variety of products including grapes, herbs, cranberries, trees, livestock and even shellfish.

“Every farm is unique in its own way,” Foster says. “They follow their passions. There



Author Stephanie Foster farms flowers and sells bouquets at the Orleans Farmers' Market on Saturdays. Photos by Stephanie Foster

are people who grow purple string beans and Asian vegetables.”

One of those unusual farms is the 20-acre Cape Cod Lavender Farm in Harwich started by Cynthia Sutphin in 1995 so she could be a stay-at-home mother. Over the years the farm has become a destination spot.

“Through real grit she made it work,” Foster says. “It's so beautiful.”

The oldest and biggest farm in the area is the Cape Cod Organic Farm in Barnstable Village, originally the Barnstable County Farm. At 30 acres it's the largest tract of cultivated land on the Cape.

What all Cape farmers, both big and small, have in common is their dependence on the weather and work that is labor intensive.

“It's a hard life,” Foster says. “They do it because they

love the land. It's very satisfying.”

Foster, who grows a variety of flowers on her Harwich property to sell as bouquets or mixed arrangements, can relate to the spirit and energy behind farming.

“I'm chained to my flower beds from March to the end of October,” she says.

Her daily ritual consists of tending to the flowers that are growing wildly around her house.

“I'm devoted to this,” she explains. “I love putting my hands in the soil. Seeing things grow is renewal.”

The other payoff is taking her flowers to the Orleans Farmers Market every Saturday.

“I love selling my flowers at the market to people who appreciate them,” she says.

But the reality is that people can barely make a living at farming on the Cape, Foster says. Many farmers sell at several farmers markets or at their own farm stand or take part in CSA's which allow customers to buy a portion of fresh produce each week. This concept allows the farmer to get money upfront while the customer reaps the harvest, so to speak, Foster says.

Some farmers like Ron and Roxanna Smolowitz, who own Coonamesett Farm in Falmouth, hold down outside jobs to support their farm.

Foster encourages Cape Codders and visitors to buy food directly from local growers not only to support the farmers but for also for another simple reason. “The food tastes better,” she says.



“Lavender Fields Forever” was taken at a fragrant moment at dawn at the Cape Cod Lavender Farm.