



THE ALLEGED FARM NEWS

5 July 2007

I can think of three reasons to visit southern Washington County: ice cream, barbecue and doughnuts. Of these three doughnuts are the greatest.

Oh, I know, you can find ice cream, barbecue and doughnuts just about anywhere these days. It would surprise me not one jot to come across several places to get them in the suburbs of Tashkent, rural Uruguay or even downtown Duluth. But while ice cream, barbecue and doughnuts may be easily available the world over, good ice cream, barbecue and doughnuts are not.

There's no obvious reason why not. None of them is particularly hard to make. The basic ingredients—milk, eggs, sugar, meat, wood, flour, yeast and fat—are widely available. The cooking techniques involved are simple. You don't need esoteric equipment. You can get gleaming cream makers with built-in compressors and bus-sized, self-propelled smokers and automated, electronically controlled deep-fat fryers, but you don't need them.

You do, however, need patience and an interest in making good food, two things considerably harder to come by than a chrome trimmed, competition-ready barbecue unit. Ice cream, barbecue and doughnuts may be relatively easy to make, but it is a deceptive sort of ease. Anyone who knows more or less how to get around a kitchen can produce some sort of version. The results would at least be instantly identifiable as themselves even if they offered no eating pleasure. And they might turn out well. Even if you do not particularly know what you are doing you can make tasty ice cream, barbecue and doughnuts. You are just unlikely to do it twice in a row, and you almost certainly won't make a superlative version of any of the three by chance.

You learn to do that with practice and care. Subtle differences in timing, temperature or technique effect the outcome significantly, and not necessarily in ways one might predict. The speed at which one churns ice cream, the way one creates a bed of charcoal, the amount of time one lets dough rise will make a noticeable difference to the final product. Discovering just which small adjustments pay off—and which to avoid—requires extensive and attentive experimentation. It's not the sort of thing you undertake unless you really care about the results and can withstand the tedium of making the same dish over and over in order to achieve those results.

Because ice cream, barbecue and doughnuts are easy to make passably well and satisfy that basic American desire for sugar, fat and flesh, lots of places offer them to the eating public. But most of these places care little about the quality. They choose to serve these things because they can sell them, and sell them at a healthy profit, which they achieve by making them quickly and cheaply. With the help of industrial engineering and chemistry, they speed up the manufacturing process and skip or skimp on the more expensive ingredients and make food that is good enough and no better.

You can get plenty of mediocre (or worse) ice cream, barbecue and doughnuts in southern Washington County, food that tastes like it was made nowhere in particular by nobody in particular for no particular reason. Or you can go to the Ice Cream Man, Dr. T's Bare Bones Barbecue and the King's doughnut cart and buy food made by people (by the people selling the food to you) who take justifiable pride in what they serve.

The Ice Cream Man is the largest of these three enterprises, and the most determinedly commercial. It has added sandwiches and soups and pies to its menu, stays open year round now and even offers indoor seating. But that has not detracted from the quality of the ice cream. While the flavors are not always as strong as I would like, the business continues to make small batches using good ingredients and care. The result is an ice cream of notably creamy texture. I recommend the maple walnut hot fudge sundae without nuts (extra nuts, that is, sprinkled on top), though if you have skipped lunch you might want to consider the six scoop banana bucket.

This week's share: Arugula, Green garlic, Lettuce, Mustard, Lettuce, Scallions, Squash, Turnips, Basil, Marjoram

Dr. T's is only open Friday through Sunday during the summer. Fair enough. Dr. T has another job. He is, in fact, a doctor—a doctor who went to medical school in Texas and fell in love with brisket. Several years ago he put a trailer behind his office and started selling barbecue on the weekend. I have no idea what possessed him to do this (he could have kept all his barbecue for himself) and I don't care. I just want more of his brisket sandwiches, ribs, broccoli slaw and baked beans.

The Kings also run their stand in their spare time—if you can call 4 am spare time. Not that they open for business then. That's just when they get up on the weekend to start cooking the doughnuts they sell from an old wagon in the driveway. They sold the family bakery a decade ago, but took up doughnut making again to pay their daughters' college tuitions. Fortunately for us their younger daughter went to Bennington. They are going to be making doughnuts for a long time to pay off that bill. I figure I have already eaten several credits' worth of apple fritters. I am just doing my part to help, a task made easier, I happily confess, by the fact that they are the best doughnuts I have ever had.

If you come to southern Washington County this Sunday you can go to all three of these establishments. And while you are out here, between, say doughnuts and barbecue, you can drop in at the farm. We don't have a lot of deep fried things to offer and I am still perfecting my ice cream making technique, but you could at least take a look around and meet some other folks in the food business not simply for profit (maybe not at all for profit), but also out of a desire to give people good things to eat, such as nice sweet turnips (which are best cut into chunks and sautéed over low heat with salt and pepper until they are soft and well browned) and young squash (good fried with scallions and garlic and topped with chopped basil) and bunches of arugula (to put in a salad with lettuce and a few mustard leaves). I won't claim that any of these vegetables are the equal of a King's apple fritter. But I will vouch for the fact that what motivates us to work to grow them and get them to you is the same thing that keeps our local ice cream, barbecue and doughnut makers going: a belief that food ought to taste good and that it will only when people who care enough take the time to make it.

To get to The Alleged Farm from points south take Route 40 north (it starts at Route 7 in Troy just over the bridge) through Schaghticoke to Meeting House Road (about 17 miles from Route 7 and 5.6 miles from the Schaghticoke Fairgrounds). Turn right on Meeting House and after 1.5 miles take the left fork (straight ahead) onto the dirt road and go over the hill to the next intersection (Cooke Hollow Road). Our farm (dark blue house, farm sign on the front lawn) is on the right. You can come between ten and two and bring a picnic lunch if you want. We will provide, along with tours, pessimism and a few farm tasks for those so inclined, drinks and cookies. And we will be happy to tell you how to get from the farm to the Ice Cream Man, Dr. T's and the King's doughnut cart—as long as you promise to bring us back a fritter.

Please note:

A) If you do not find a newsletter in your bag or need another copy you can download one from the website; they are usually up the day of delivery (of course, this helpful hint won't do you much good if this newsletter is not in your bag).

B) If you know in advance that you are unable to pick up your bag and cannot find anyone else to take it, please let us know so that we do not deliver a share only to have it go to waste.

C) If you wish to change your pickup site (for whatever period of time) please let us know by Wednesday morning so that we can put your share in the proper stack for delivery.

D) If you know of a pet rhino (any age) in need of a new home, I would be happy to have it come and live at the farm.