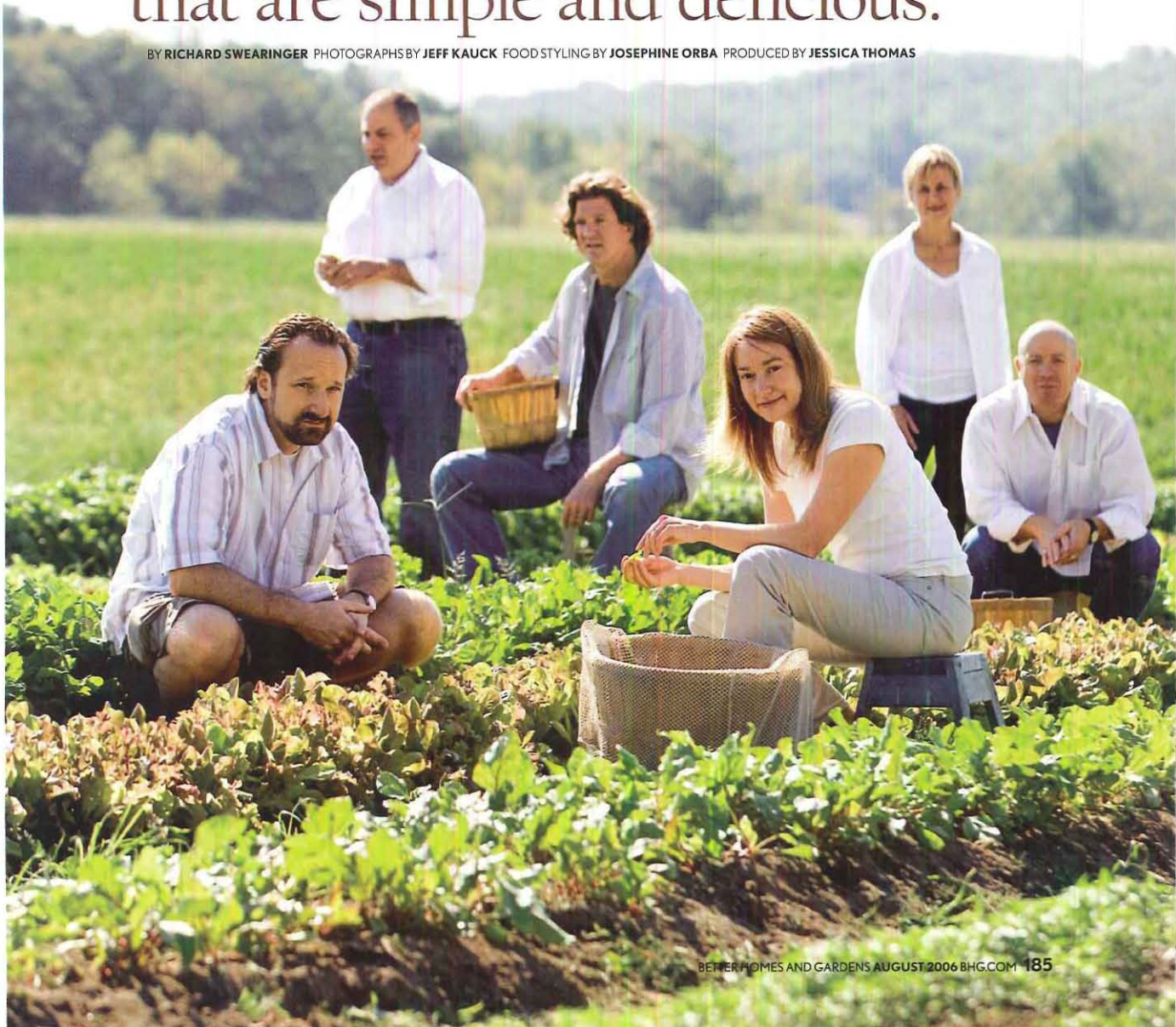


A Harvest of Inspiration

Six renowned chefs gather on an Iowa farm; the result is recipes that are simple and delicious.

BY RICHARD SWEARINGER PHOTOGRAPHS BY JEFF KAUCK FOOD STYLING BY JOSEPHINE ORBA PRODUCED BY JESSICA THOMAS



FOOD PROP STYLING BY ANDREA KUHN

The flavor of a peach tugged directly from the tree makes chef Tricia Cyman's hazel eyes light up. "Perfect! You have to try this," she says, beckoning to four other chefs visiting this farmhouse nestled in central Iowa's rolling hills.

Each takes a bite and passes it along; ideas for fresh peaches—stir-frying, roasting, grilling—darting around. Before reaching a consensus on cobbler versus crisp, talk skips to the potatoes growing a few hundred yards away and how wonderful they'd be with just a little olive oil and salt. Chefs are usually known for complicated recipes, but visiting a farm where freshness prevails turns thoughts to simple recipes and quick preparations.

"These are not fancy ingredients," says Jeff Jackson, chef of the Lodge at Torrey Pines in California. "They require respect and restraint. They're very happy on their own."

Invited to Iowa by hog farmer Paul Willis and cattle rancher Bill Niman to see firsthand how some of the best-tasting meat and produce in the country is grown,

this group of chefs enjoys a day that turns from lecture to love-in. Chefs and farmers stroll through rows of lettuce, hills of potatoes, and pastures filled with sows and piglets.

Jackson and Cyman, visiting Iowa along with chefs Paul Canales of California, Christopher Beischer of New York, and Andrea Reusing of North Carolina, purchase meat for their restaurants from Niman Ranch, Inc. This beef, pork, and lamb producing company recognizes that animals raised on all-natural feed without antibiotics or hormones have a distinct—and they say better—flavor over conventionally raised meat.

"I have had many, many customers tell me this is the best meat they have ever had," says Cyman. "Some have had tears in their eyes."

The group begins their tour with a stop at the third-generation vegetable farm owned by Larry Cleverley, who is friend and business partner of Niman and Willis and grows vegetables without pesticides or other chemicals.

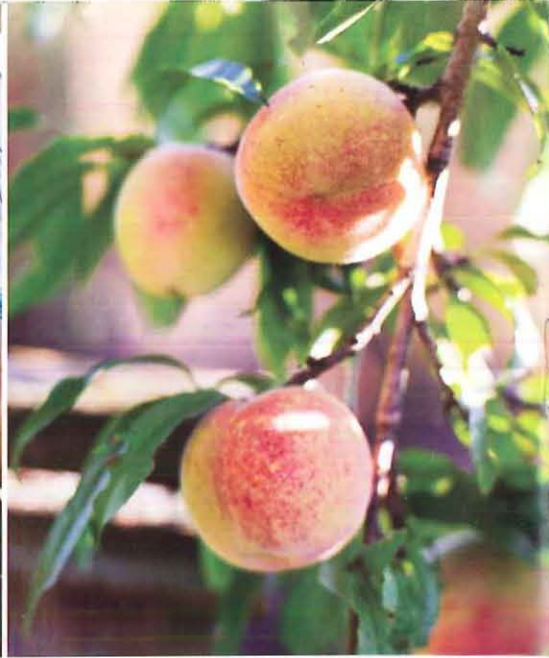
"I like to take that leap of faith and watch Mother Nature produce a miracle," says Cleverley, whose



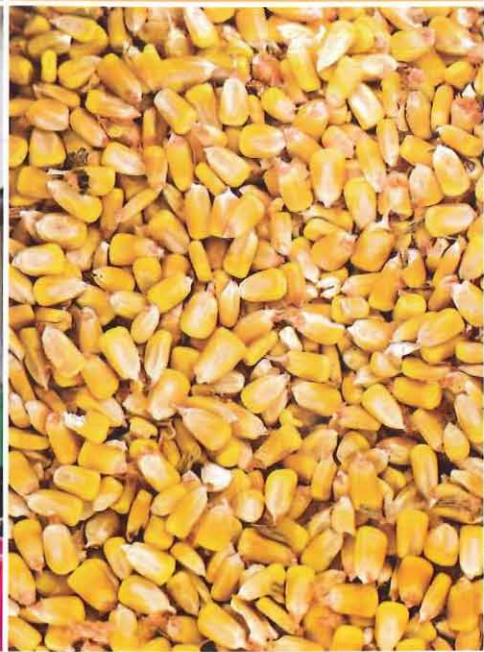
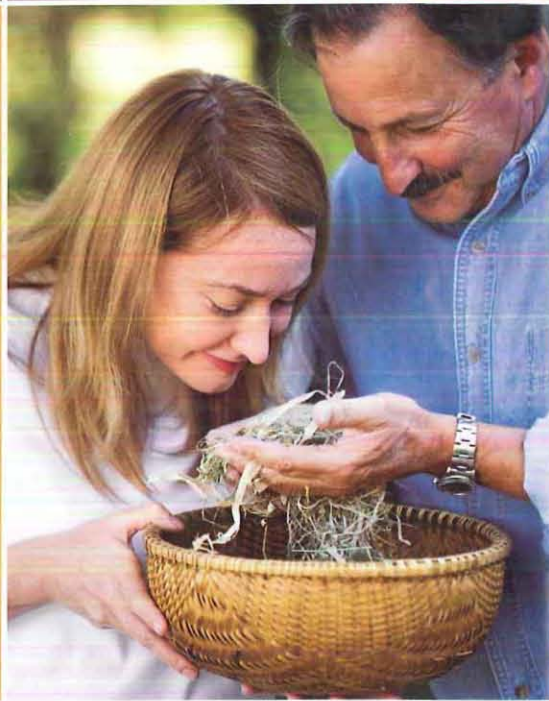
Chefs Jeff Jackson, far left, and Paul Canales, at right, survey a pasture where Paul Willis raises hogs. On Niman Ranch farms, the animals live outdoors, a return to the roots of hog farming and a departure from the practices of most large-scale hog operations where animals are raised in climate-controlled buildings.

PORK CHOPS WITH
GORGONZOLA AND PEARS
RECIPES BEGIN ON PAGE 194





Clockwise from above left: Rows of arugula at the Cleverley Farm. Chef Bruce Sherman, of Chicago, with red potatoes; the peaches outside Larry Cleverley's back door. Bill Niman explains the mixture of grain and other plants he uses for cattle feed to chef Andrea Reusing. At Paul Willis's farm, chefs get a first-hand look at livestock raised for Niman Ranch. Unprocessed grains, such as corn, are fed to hogs on the ranch. Larry Cleverley begins the process of washing lettuce in his farmyard. Tricia Cyman with a basket of the peaches that inspired Peach Crisp (recipe, page 204).



SWEET CORN SOUP
RECIPES BEGIN ON PAGE 194

grandparents bought this Iowa farmland during the 1920s.

The main event is up the road, however, at the 800-acre hog and grain farm of Paul Willis. Willis and Niman are united by a common goal: pork chops with bold meaty flavors and beef roasts that are tender and savory. The producers rely on a combination of age-old techniques and modern science. While feed has no chemical additives and animals receive lots of hands-on attention, there are computers everywhere and plenty of modern labor-saving farm machinery.

"I like raising animals and growing things," says Willis. "It's about what kind of life you want to live, and my goal is quality, not the quantity."

Inspired by their visits to the farms, these chefs created tantalizing recipes with short ingredient lists and simple techniques—the focus on letting the natural flavors of basic ingredients shine through.

Amid rows of lettuce (above) at Cleverly Farms, Larry Cleverley and chefs Jeff Jackson, Andrea Reusing, and Paul Canales discuss the menu for a dinner Niman Ranch holds each year for its pork producers. Niman buys meat from more than 500 farmers across the country.



STEAK WITH SQUASH AND ARUGULA

One of the most important things I do is get people back in touch with where their food comes from.

LARRY CLEVERLEY, FARMER



ROASTED LATE-SUMMER APPLES WITH GINGER ALE ICE
RECIPES BEGIN ON PAGE 194

“When you think about people who invest all this time and hard work, you treat the meat with the respect it deserves,” says Canales, who uses an entire Niman Ranch hog each week at Oliveto, his Italian country restaurant in Oakland, California.

Canales translates that respect into a recipe for pork chops (recipe, page 194) that has just seven ingredients, uses one frying pan, and is done in 30 minutes. A tangy pan sauce made from Gorgonzola cheese and cream, and the flavor of the pork seasoned only with salt and pepper, give this dish the rich flavors of a Tuscan feast.

The quality of Niman’s beef brings out each chef’s instinct to simplify. For her Slow-Roasted Beef Tenderloin, Cyman, chef at Devil’s Thumb Ranch in the Colorado Rockies, believes minimal preparation is best. It takes little time to lay a bed of rosemary, oregano, and thyme beneath a roasting rack, and as the meat cooks, it takes on a beguiling herb taste. 🍷

For an additional recipe, cooking techniques and more go to bhg.com www.bhg.com/harvest

“It strikes me as worthwhile life’s work to create food that’s safe and nutritious.”



Bill Niman and his wife, Nicolette Hahn Niman, pay attention to detail. “I try to see every animal every day,” says Nicolette. “I walk through them or ride through on horseback to look for injuries or illness and just to make sure they are all there.” Bill, a teacher before founding Niman Ranch on 11 acres north of San Francisco in 1970, now has more than 500 independent family farmers raising livestock for him. He’s also an author; *The Niman Ranch Cookbook* is part recipe collection, part chronicle of his transformation from Minneapolis grocer’s son to a leader in agriculture.

Along with the Nimans, thousands of farmers and ranchers are raising livestock on a small scale. Look for their products at farmers’ markets. Or for more information, visit www.nimanranch.com, foodroutes.org, localharvest.org, eatwild.com, and nichepork.org (the National Pork Board’s site).

PORK CHOPS WITH GORGONZOLA AND PEARS

Paul Canales uses an entire Niman Ranch hog each week at Oliveto, his Oakland, California, Italian country restaurant (oliveto.com). He recommends using a mild Gorgonzola.

PREP: 10 MINUTES COOK: 20 MINUTES

- 4 pork rib chops, cut $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 inch thick
- Sea salt, kosher salt, or salt
- 2 Tbsp. olive oil
- 2 medium ripe pears, peeled, cored; each pear cut in 8 wedges
- 2 Tbsp. butter
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup dry white wine or apple juice
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup whipping cream
- 8 oz. creamy Gorgonzola or blue cheese, cut up
- Freshly ground black pepper
- Additional Gorgonzola cheese, cut in chunks (optional)

1. Sprinkle pork chops with salt. In a 12-inch skillet cook pork chops in hot oil over medium heat for 5 minutes. Turn chops and cook 5 minutes more or until browned and juices run clear (160°F). Transfer chops to a serving platter. Drain fat from skillet.
2. In same skillet cook pear wedges in butter over medium-high heat for 5 minutes or until browned, turning once. Add pears to platter.
3. For sauce, add wine and cream to skillet. Bring to boiling; reduce heat. Boil gently, uncovered, 1 to 2 minutes until slightly thickened. Add the 8 ounces Gorgonzola; whisk until cheese is almost melted. Remove from heat. Serve with pork and pears. Sprinkle with pepper; serve with additional cheese. Makes 4 servings.

TEST KITCHEN TIP: Rib chops are notable for flavor and juiciness.
EACH SERVING: 618 cal, 46 g fat (24 g sat fat), 147 mg chol, 1,105 mg sodium, 14 g carbo, 4 g fiber, 34 g pro. Daily Values: 21% vit. A, 6% vit. C, 35% calcium, 4% iron.

SUMMER VEGETABLES AND HERB DRESSING

Simple is delicious, a lesson taught by Chef Chris Beischer, who works at Jo Jo and The Mercer Kitchen in New York. Visit jean-georges.com.

START TO FINISH: 40 MINUTES

- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup seasoned rice vinegar or white wine vinegar
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup extra virgin olive oil
- 3 Tbsp. finely chopped fresh Italian (flat-leaf) parsley, basil, and/or chives
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. sea salt, kosher salt, or salt
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. ground black pepper
- 4 cups fresh vegetables, such as scrubbed baby beets, halved or quartered; trimmed baby carrots with tops; trimmed fresh wax or green beans; and/or trimmed snap pea pods
- 3 cups radishes, halved; sweet peppers, cut into strips; green onions, trimmed and cut into 4-inch lengths; cucumber pieces; avocado slices; and/or small yellow or red tomatoes
- 4 cups mesclun
- Additional fresh Italian parsley or basil leaves and/or chives

1. For Herb Dressing, in screw-top jar combine vinegar, olive oil, finely chopped herbs, salt, and pepper. Cover and shake well; set aside.
 2. In a 12-inch skillet bring 1 inch lightly salted water to boiling. Add beets, carrots, and/or green beans. Return to boiling, reduce heat, and cook 3 to 4 minutes or until vegetables are crisp-tender. Add pea pods, if using, the last 1 minute of cooking. To cool, use a slotted spoon to transfer vegetables to a large bowl filled with ice water.
 3. Drain vegetables. On large platter arrange mesclun and vegetables. Sprinkle with herbs; pass dressing. Makes 8 servings.
- TEST KITCHEN TIP:** Dip vegetables in boiling water to set the color.
EACH SERVING: 163 cal, 14 g fat (2 g sat. fat), 0 mg chol, 333 mg sodium, 10 g carbo, 3 g fiber, 2 g pro. Daily Values: 47% vit. A, 45% vit. C, 5% calcium, 6% iron.