

# Food, from the ground up

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At Snipes Farm, you could say they walk all the talk about saving energy and living responsibly. They ride the talk, too.

Take the tractor. When the engine on the 1948 cultivator blew, Snipes farmer Brad Berry converted the beast to a battery-operated machine that could be powered by solar energy. He could've lobbied to scrap it and get a new one, but where was the fun (or green living) in that?

The revamped cultivator draws juice from the solar panels fixed to the farm's cider barn. Same for the barn lights, the 1940s-era cider press and the equipment used to pasteurize the juice.

Alternative energy works. You can have a look at the operations up close on Oct. 3, when Snipes hosts Green Living Festival 2009 ([www.farmschoolatsnipes.org](http://www.farmschoolatsnipes.org) or call 215-295-1139). It's being billed as "an all-day celebration of sustainable living, organic farming, alternative energy demonstrations, green building construction, local food, healthy living workshops, vendors and musical entertainment by the bands Natural Breakdown and Hoots and Hellmouth (think upbeat blue grass.)"

The festival also is a showcase for the year-old, nonprofit Farm School at Snipes. For the present generation of Snipes - the 11th generation to farm in Lower Bucks - the school is the family's latest reincarnation. All crop production falls under its auspices. The school's mission is to "model and teach sustainable farming while building community and reconnecting people to the land."

Some of the new programs are directly tied to school classrooms. Morrisville and Bristol Township schools have grants tied to teaching children better nutrition to cure obesity. The farm is just the place to learn nutrition literally from the ground up.

Not everyone is thrilled with the effort, including the parent whose child integrated all the talk about organic produce and recently refused a fast-food drive-through meal. Vegetables? You want vegetables? Do I look like I have time to feed you vegetables?

Brad, of Warrington, is the farm's newest grower, and responsible for bringing forth from the ground enough produce to support the farm's 90-member Community Supported Agriculture program. For a fee, members get 25 weeks of naturally grown vegetables and fruits. The vegetables are all organic.

The Snipes stress that the 28-acre apple orchard is "low spray." Minimal treatment of the 15 varieties of apples (you can pick your own) mean that, like the old tractor, they aren't perfect in appearance. They are "perfectly delicious," says Susan Snipes, who was raised on the farm and teaches at the new school.

I met with her recently, along with George Price, a social worker who coordinates music concerts on the farm. He considers the farm "a little oasis in the megalopolis." It's a place to slow your pace and suck in a little fresh air. You can access the land from West Bridge Street in Morrisville.

Through the farm school programs - classrooms, summer camps, individual tours - kids pick their own fruit and vegetables, they learn how to prepare whole foods like fruit smoothies, sweet potato pancakes, crudites and dip. And they get to muck around in the dirt and make the acquaintance of the farm's most revered workers - the bumblebees and the wriggling earthworms, Susan says.

She can't help but smile when a child screws up his or her face and tries to understand why Susan is so overjoyed to see a worm in the dirt.

You like them? Seriously?

The farm school includes a "worm station," where the icky little things make a home in discards - manure, wood chips - and bring forth a rich black compost. It's in the orchard that Susan teaches the kids to celebrate the bee by staying out of its way so it can do its work unharmed.

Part of the school's work is to help cure what's been referred to as "nature deficit disorder." Kids and grownups cut off from the great big outdoors suffer. Needlessly.

The farm is a place where a child and his grownups can taste a real apple, a real tomato. It's where fun isn't all high adventure, but rather high quality. Like that old tractor, a farm visit is a delight, not because it is flashy or deluxe, but because it's tried and true. It works.

The Snipes are hoping you'll have a look for yourself on Oct. 3.

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