



Photos by Michelle Le/The Almanac

**Laura Stec**, in photo at left, discusses the variety of organic produce offered at Full Circle Farm in Sunnyvale with the farm's education manager, Dan Hafeman. Ms. Stec is the guest chef for Shine On Harvest Moon, a full-course benefit dinner hosted at the farm. She will be using the farm's organic heirloom tomatoes, shown in top photo, and fresh string beans, above.

## EATING FOR A HEALTHIER PLANET

Local chef writes book about food choices, shopping practices that can affect global warming

By **Renee Batti**  
Almanac News Editor

Most people have heard the saying, "You are what you eat." Author and chef Laura Stec of Portola Valley probably wouldn't argue with that concept, but she wants you to think even more expansively — to think about how what you eat affects the health of the entire planet.

Ms. Stec, who believes environmental activism can begin at the dinner table, has written a book with atmospheric scientist Eugene Cordero to increase awareness about the connection between our food choices and the environment. "Cool Cuisine: Taking the Bite Out of

Global Warming," includes hard facts and passionately held opinions, food and food-shopping tips, and a range of recipes and ideas to help the reader shift to a more environmentally friendly way of eating.

Although she describes herself as a "chef who enjoys looking at facts," she was grateful for the expertise of her co-author, an associate professor in the Department of Meteorology at San Jose State University. "Having a scientist as a collaborator was a huge plus," she notes, because he ensured that the level of scrutiny given to all information she wanted to include in the book was similar to standards required in scientific research.

The co-authors have been on the lecture circuit since the book was published last October, and will give a talk on Sept. 22 in Portola Valley as part of that community's Green Speakers Series.

### Longtime concern

Ms. Stec, a longtime staff member at the Palo Alto-based environmental group Acterra, has long been concerned about how the food industry in this country, and an increasing number of other areas in the world, has evolved. In 1989, she founded EcoEaters, a group that she says was one of the first in the country focusing on educating people about the connection between

food and the environment.

Trained at the Culinary Institute of America, she honed her chef's skills at a number of restaurants, including Flea Street Cafe in Menlo Park, before launching her own business, Laura Stec — Innovative Cuisine, offering her services as a personal chef, caterer, food coach and chef instructor.

She also is the culinary health instructor for Kaiser Permanente Medical Centers, and a former teacher in the Peaceable Plates School Lunch Program.

The idea to write a book was the result of "an NPR moment," she says, referring to the public radio network. She had just listened to a radio segment about food in a climatically warming world, and thought she could advance the national discussion about the topic through a book, she explains.

In the book, the authors ask readers to examine their own eating and shopping practices, and explain why those practices

might be a strain on the planet. For example, readers are asked how far they travel to buy food, and how they get there. Do they buy only what they need, or do they have to throw some out? How much processed food do they buy? And how much meat?

According to the book, it takes 10 times the fossil fuels to produce a calorie from beef than a calorie from grain protein. Also, processed and prepared food "typically require more energy to make than what we get back when we eat it."

Recipes include everything from "Winter Emmer Risotto with Roasted Root Vegetables and Rosemary" and "Lettuce Cups with Grass-Fed Meat (or Braised Tempeh) and Peanut Sauce," to "Dark Chocolate Chili" and "Dijon Green Beans with Roasted Candied Shallots."

One important message in the book and carried on the lecture circuit is that the "busi-

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ness model of efficiency doesn't fit food," Ms. Stec says. "Food is perishable, and we want our food fresh." Agribusiness doesn't deliver, she says, whereas locally grown food — found in farmers' markets and some small produce stores — provides much more flavorful food at far less cost to the environment.

### Spiritual connection

She says her two basic goals in writing the book were to appeal to people who were not already converted to the cause, and to appeal to "people who don't read a lot."

Also, she says, "my hope was to reach out to the more religious of our community" — a hope that reflects the reverence she displays for the natural workings of soil, water, sun, and other elements that provide sustenance to living creatures.

Describing herself as a spiritual person, she says she is "unconcerned whether a person is a believer or not. ... You can call it God or nature — it's the larger force controlling (things). It's something that is larger than ourselves.

"Whatever it is, our ultimate communion with it is through its food and through its water."

She is fascinated by "how nature does its thing .. how it handles its day-to-day business." Writing the book, she adds, inspired in her "even more awe" for the way in which "this planet is so wired for cooperation, for synchronization."

In the book and through her presentations, she says, she tries "to answer the questions: What does it mean to be fed? What does eating actually do for us?"

"For many, it's a matter of our stomach, and the quantity of food we can put in it." But, she adds, food is "not only about our



Photo by Christine Krieg

**Laura Stec** teaches a cooking lesson in a private home.

stomachs, but about our heads and hearts, too."

As a professional chef, she says she generally keeps cooking at home simple — a quickly prepared vegetable and grain, for example. But, she adds, she is a great fan of "the art of the dinner party," and entertains often.

"Food is the vehicle that brings us together," she says. "Why is there always leftover food at real dinner parties? It's because people are fed by so many things in addition to food — the conversation of other people, music..."

Ms. Stec says it's important for people to "deepen their relation-

ship with food, and that's what the book tries to do."

For more information about the book and ideas about environmentally responsible food choices, visit [globalwarmingdiet.org](http://globalwarmingdiet.org).

### ■ INFORMATION

Laura Stec and atmospheric scientist Eugene Cordero will present a talk at 7 p.m. Tuesday, Sept. 22, in the Community Hall of the Portola Valley Town Center, 765 Portola Road in Portola Valley. The program is part of the Green Speakers Series.

## A new restaurant for Allied Arts Guild

A new restaurant, Cafe Primavera, will open Friday, Sept. 4, at Allied Arts Guild, 75 Arbor Road in Menlo Park. It replaces the Red Currant, a Mediterranean bistro, which closed Aug. 31 after nearly two years at the location.

Red Currant owners Nir and Ayellet Perry chose not to renew their lease, according to Jackie Holmkvist, president of the Allied Arts Guild Auxiliary, which owns and operates the historic complex.

Cafe Primavera's owner, Joanna Biondi, is well known in the Los Gatos, Saratoga and Willow Glen areas, with 32 years of experience in the catering business. She has two restaurants named Cafe Primavera in San Jose — one at

One Almaden and the other at the Tech Museum of Innovation — as well as a catering company.

Weddings and special events are an important part of Cafe Primavera's business, says Ms. Biondi. Working with her on the new cafe will be executive chef Greg Russi of Menlo Park and event director Erika Garcia-Traverso.

The luncheon menu will include seasonal soups, salads, sandwiches, and daily specials. Chiogga beet salad with blue cheese and oranges; spinach salad with candied pecans and strawberries; and caprese salad, featuring heirloom tomatoes and mozzarella cheese, are popular choices.

The sandwich selection includes

a BYOB (build your own burger), chicken club, ribeye cheesesteak, and a "grown-up grilled cheese sandwich." Roasted vegetable cannelloni is featured on the menu, along with daily specials.

Prices range from \$6 for soups, \$10 for a burger, and \$10 to \$12 for salads. The house-made desserts will be \$6 to \$8.

Cafe Primavera will be open Monday through Saturday. A continental breakfast will be available from 10 to 11:30 a.m., lunch from 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., and a light menu and afternoon tea until 5 p.m.

Reservations are not required, but are appreciated. For more information, call 321-8810.