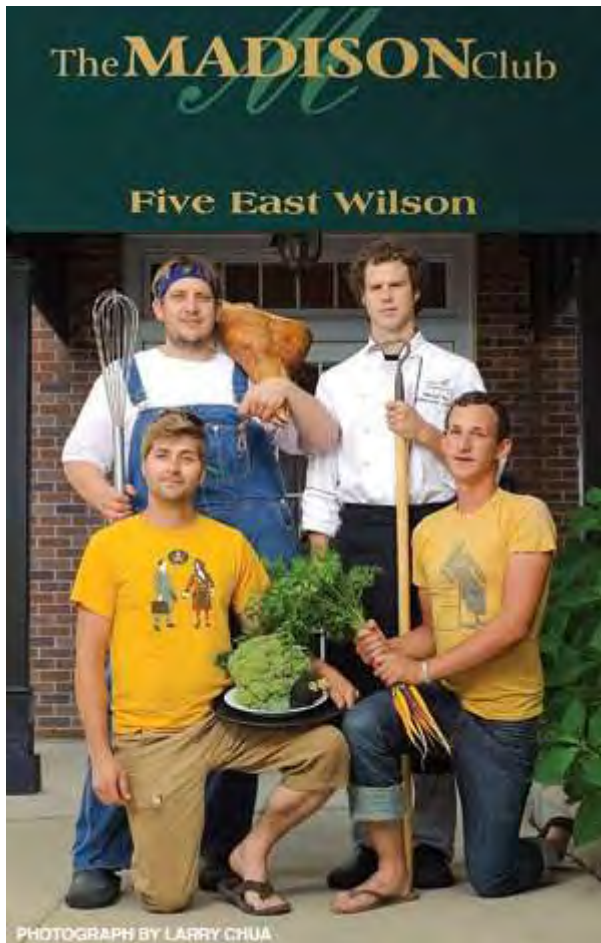


# Join the Club

BY NANCY CHRISTY AND NEIL HEINEN



**W**e may be going out on a bit of a limb here, but we're guessing when you

think of the **Madison Club** you probably don't think of 224 chickens, fifteen Indian Runner ducks, twelve Muscovy ducks, thirty geese, seven Hungarian pigs, twenty-five lambs and ten South African boar goats. If you do you're likely thinking about a different Madison Club than the stately and venerable institution on the doorstep of Monona Terrace.

Furthermore, if your impression goes from stately to stuffy we'd like to persuade you otherwise. Think sustainable. That's right, in a food movement where local sourcing has become as fashionable as it is right, the last place you'd think to look for efforts that push the envelope is the Madison Club. Executive chef **Dan Fox** (photo, top right) exemplifies some of the most exciting examples of truly sustainable food sourcing and cooking going on anywhere.

Fox and chef de cuisine **Jason Veal** (photo, top left) are growing the menagerie listed above, plus a major portion of the kitchen's produce, on their own farm. Actually, **By George Farm** is part of **John and Dorothy Priske's Fountain Prairie Farm**, the Fall River provider of grass-fed beef to local restaurants from **L'Etoile** to the **Nitty Gritty**. The Madison Club serves Priske's beef, too, and when Fox and Veal's business partners **Jonathan Steiger** (photo, bottom left) and **Tyson Fehrman** (photo, bottom right) asked if perhaps Fox knew of a Madison Club member who might donate an acre of land for a farm on which to grow products for the restaurant, the Priskes stepped up.

Steiger and Fehrman put up a hoop house, bought seeds and some small equipment and started with ten CSA shares sold to Club members. The livestock followed and Fox found himself on both ends of the farm-to-table trip. And thoughtfully so. Fox, the Club's executive chef and assistant general manager for the last couple of years, has given all of this a lot of thought. He's young, has both passion and entrepreneurial zeal, and wants to learn and push the boundaries.

"I have fantastic people working with me," he says, and his plans to open "many" restaurants someday seem grounded in valuing new collaborations and respecting skills of his various partners. Fox's willingness to embrace these new partnerships and care for the well being of all involved is what is moving this concept of sustainability forward.

Happily, he is not alone. Fox is one of a growing number of professionals who realizes that we have to move away from cheap commodity food production to pay farmers fairly. In this case that starts with the farmer and chef understanding and respecting each other's business and then maximizing that relationship.

"We have to be creative on our side," says Fox, "and the farmer has to be creative."

When cooks are connected to farms they find ways to turn food waste into feed for the animals and mulch for the garden. Fox sends all of his scraps back to the By George Farm, and now his next-door neighbor, the kitchen of the downtown **Hilton**, is considering doing the same. Professional expertise in the kitchen also leads to a more interesting and diverse menu. One example: using every part of a well-raised lamb rather than serving only the chops. Extending the harvest is another. With cucumbers available they put up 260 gallons of dill pickles. The future of sustainable farming is going to include preserving and canning, which will require new relationships between chefs and state agriculture and local health department folks. But equally important is the difficult balance between local sourcing and food costs. And that is where Fox is providing an impressive example by using his expertise and creativity to control those costs while avoiding exorbitant price markups for his customers.

"Food costs used to start when it came in the door," says Fox. "Now it starts with seed." Fox, his farm and kitchen deserve watching. And you can do it at [bygeorgefarm.blogspot.com](http://bygeorgefarm.blogspot.com).

*Nancy Christy is the former owner of the Wilson Street Grill. She now runs the consulting firm Meaningful People, Places and Food. Neil Heinen is, among other things, her hungry husband. Comments? Questions? Please write to [genuinearticles@madisonmagazine.com](mailto:genuinearticles@madisonmagazine.com).*