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FRESH IDEAS

Meet six agricultural revolutionaries
changing the way we grow
our food.



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FOOD FOR THOUGHT

By putting their ideas into practice, these agricultural revolutionaries are getting the rest of us to think a little harder about what's on our plates.

THE RECRUITER

Severine von Tscharner Fleming believes that U.S. agriculture could use some new participants.

THE AVERAGE AMERICAN FARMER IS 57 YEARS OLD, which Severine von Tscharner Fleming points out is “pretty darn close to retirement.” That’s why the 28-year-old has made it her personal mission to bring that number down. As director of a non-profit advocacy organization called The Greenhorns (*thegreenhorns.net*), she works full time out of an office two hours north of New York City to promote and support the next generation of farmers. “Our role is to pollinate, celebrate and educate the growing network of young farmers in this country, and to give aspiring farmers and eaters access to the stories and philosophies that inform this movement,” she says.

During her undergraduate education at the University of California, Berkeley, von Tscharner Fleming spent her summers working on small farms and eventually started a student farm on campus. “I was really impressed with the young farmers I’d known,” she recalls. “I had an instinct that these strong, brave, really motivated people were particularly potent protagonists for a sustainable American landscape.” In 2007, von Tscharner Fleming set out to produce a documentary about what she believed was a powerful emerging movement. That film project, dubbed *The Greenhorns*, quickly turned into her multifaceted non-profit organization, which now produces nationwide educational and social events and runs a mapping project, popular blog and weekly radio show. It has also printed a free resource guidebook for aspiring farmers.

“Farming is a choice to live one’s life in service to the community,” von Tscharner Fleming says. “It’s a chance to be your own boss, to produce real goods in the real world for other real people to eat and enjoy. It is satisfying, it is relevant and it is patriotic.”—Anne Dailey

TUNBORK/AGENCE VU/AURORA PHOTOS



THE RANCHER

Bob Jackson raises his herd of bison to live the way nature intended—and is maximizing productivity in the process.

WITH A DEGREE IN WILDLIFE biology, Bob Jackson worked as a backcountry ranger in Yellowstone National Park for nearly 30 years before becoming a farmer. His experiences there forever altered his views on traditional agriculture, which in turn define Tall Grass Bison (641-874-5794), the Iowa farm on which Jackson and his partner, Susan, raise 400 to 500 bison. The couple markets 21-day, dry-aged, grass-fed beef to a devoted customer base.

Jackson maintains that it's the infrastructure of the herd that counts, and has developed his herd to function as multiple extended family units. Selecting which animals go to market is a careful process. "Those that are easily preyed upon in the wild are those on the outside of the herd," Jackson explains. "When we see that, that's what we take."

This leaves the infrastructure of the herd intact, which reduces

anxiety and contributes to what one might call stronger family ties. Why is this important? Happy bison is tasty bison.

But another reason is something even a factory farm would be concerned with: efficiency. Prairies provide a diverse buffet of edible plants that most grazing animals pass over in what is referred to by farmers as "eating the best and leaving the rest." Jackson's herd moves slowly, as a unit, taking full advantage of the buffet and helping to manage the prairie in the process. The younger animals also mimic the eating patterns of their elders, learning which grasses are edible and when. "Nature's herds ate the landscape the right way on their own," Jackson says.

For a long time, farming has been about manipulating nature to maximize productivity. At Tall Grass Bison, nature is allowed to maximize productivity on its own.—A.D.