



BECCA ROHRER
Class of 2013
Asheville, NC

Becca Rohrer

Growing up in the mountains of Asheville, North Carolina, I learned first-hand about links between the environment, development, and food. I travelled to Cornwall, England to further document how the use of distinctive cultural heritage can build a farm economy that attracts the attention of tourists and rebuilds community relations. Cornwall is a region of unlimited natural beauty. From the rugged coastline to the small, rural villages, I never ceased to be in awe during my travels throughout the landscape.

CONTINUED ►



USING CULTURAL HERITAGE TO REMAKE LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS: A STUDY OF CORNWALL, ENGLAND

Even more fascinating were the Cornish people. Despite a diverse range of backgrounds and livelihoods, they were all united in their immense pride for their land and tradition. One such tradition that caught my interest was Cornish food and farming.

My Burch Fellowship gave me the opportunity to travel to Cornwall in order to research how to promote community heritage and farming through their thriving local food movement. Cornwall is the southwestern-most county in England as well as the poorest county. Until the 17th century Cornwall was actually considered a separate country because of its distinct language, style of dress, and agricultural



practices (Tregidga 2008). After the 17th century, Cornwall assimilated into England and its unique history and identity was greatly lost. Local food movements restore rural areas and enrich poor regions like Cornwall. I wanted to explore the recent revival of this Cornish heritage, particularly in farming.

I designed my research to look at Cornish Yarg cheese, a cheese produced by only one dairy in the entire world. The recipe was lost in the 13th century and has only been recovered in the past couple decades. Lynher Dairies is working to recreate this cheese using all sustainable practices. Spending time at Lynher Dairies was one of my favorite activities while in Cornwall. Lynher Dairies has become renowned around the United Kingdom and was achieving so much success that when I was there they were in the process of cutting back on business in order to maintain their current staff, facility size, and farming ethos. I also have to admit I enjoyed the sterile white boots, lab coat, and hair net I had to wear while I was in the dairy.

Even though Lynher Dairies was a fascinating food producer and supported the Cornish community in many different ways, I realized that the Cornish cheese industry

and dairy producers were flourishing from every end of Cornwall. Whalesborough Farm, Roskillys, Cornish Cheese Co., and Moomaids of Zennor were all gaining national recognition for their milk, ice cream, and cheese. This led me to expand my original research to encompass rural farming, especially dairy farms throughout Cornwall. Most of these farms successful local businesses that embraced the Cornish heritage and pride. The fact that most farmers were from a Cornish background gave them a greater appreciation and understanding for how to farm successfully, run their business, and the importance of giving back to the rural community. The opportunity to meet so many different

farmers and speak with them about their views on food, local cultures, and the future of farming was the best experience of my trip. I would often hike miles of Cornish countryside witnessing views I would never

otherwise have seen just to reach a farm. Those daily trips became some of the best memories I returned home with.

When I arrived in Cornwall it was at the beginning of the Royal Cornwall Show, which is one of the biggest agricultural fairs in the United Kingdom. When I first walked into the food and farming tent, I realized how unique the local food movement was in Cornwall. The tent was packed with hundreds of people, partly due to the fact that the show took place during the worst storm in 150 years. We walked around in our waterproof outfits and sampled the various farms and food producers, and it was clear Cornwall was in the process of creating a nationally and potentially globally recognizable brand.

In the past decade, clotted cream has become almost exclusively associated with Cornwall as well as various chocolates, cheeses, and especially the Cornish pasty. These food items illustrate the success that a rural county has had in promoting their local economy and heritage



through farming. Cornish farms are no longer just milking parlors and grazing fields but are now complete with holiday lets, restaurants, ice cream shops, hiking trails, and gift shops where they would sell their own and other local products. I became extremely interested in this phenomenon and most of the farmers during interviews said it was a way of adding value to their farm. Without adding value, it seemed most farms would have gone under because of the economic food crisis and readily available food at large grocery stores.

My Burch Fellowship gave me the opportunity to immerse myself into a topic about which I am incredibly passionate. Food is becoming increasingly more globalized and many fear that local cultures are being lost because of globalization. Cornwall is directly fighting this idea. The region proves that local food has the ability to unite and strengthen communities. Local food movements are restoring poor rural regions like Cornwall. Centuries-old family farms are failing all over the U.S., but local food movements give hope to our country's health, food security, and economies. Beyond the significance of local food in a global market, I learned the importance of flexibility while traveling. I learned to make decisions as they came. My research plans did not always work out, but this opportunity taught me how to make the most of every experience. Food studies have become an integral part of my daily life, and I plan to passionately pursue this field long after graduation.

