

At Boggy Meadow Farm, heritage and spirit

By **T. Susan Chang** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT JUNE 03, 2014

ARTICLE



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Cheeses aging in a cooler at Boggy Meadow Farm.

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WALPOLE, N.H. — If you were to spend a hot summer day in 18th-century New England toiling at haymaking, chances are your reward at day's end would be a long pull of switchel. Once known as “haymaker’s punch,” switchel consists of boiled cider (or “apple molasses”), ginger, water, and a bit of cider vinegar. Thirst-quenching and rich in potassium, it might just as well have been called “haymaker’s Gatorade.”

Those thirsty farmers photographed in 1910 on the farm’s West Field, working land owned by the Cabot family since Colonial times, are on the



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label of Boggy Meadow Farm's "Switchel" Cider Vodka. The dairy-based farm, close to the eastern banks of the Connecticut River (which seasonally floods the fields), has enjoyed 2½ centuries of alluvial fertility, and generations of cows and Cabots.

Today the farm is owned by two Cabot siblings and their spouses, Stephanie Cabot, 50, and her husband, Marcus Lovell Smith, 51, and Christopher Cabot, 48, and his wife, Alison, 47. After the death of Powell and Bernadette Cabot, Stephanie Cabot and Lovell Smith moved to the sprawling property in 2004. In doing so, they joined a long line of family members who added the responsibility of the farm — and its 400 rolling acres, 400 dairy cows, and scattered clusters of white-painted outbuildings (folly, creamery, carriage house, too many barns to count) — to already hectic careers.

Powell Cabot, an investment banker, had been a partner at Oppenheimer & Co. in New York. At Boggy Meadow, he developed a cheesemaking operation intended to bring the farm into the black, making a melting cheese called baby Swiss. Along with neighbor Bob Jasse of Alyson's Apple Orchard and Larry Burdick of L.A. Burdick Handmade Chocolates (now with locations in Boston, Cambridge, and New York), it was the start of a mini food renaissance in sleepy Walpole.

After her father's death, Stephanie Cabot saw just how canny a New England farmer has to be to survive. "There are only 6 working farms in our area when 60 years ago there were fifty," she writes in an e-mail. With this in mind, Lovell Smith, whose previous careers had centered on "fixing small businesses," spent three years working the farm, scrutinizing its dairy business, and expanding the cheese production until he had the operation on sound financial footing.

Boggy Meadow makes three raw-milk cheeses: smoked and unsmoked baby Swiss and semi-aged, nutty Fiddlehead Tomme. The base for all begins in a 12,000-gallon, room-size vat filled with milk from the morning and previous evening. A further alchemy takes place in the processing, aging, and storage.

The present owners, on the hunt to diversify the farm, lighted upon switchel as a product that seemed true to Boggy Meadow's heritage as well as to its local community. "Switchel could only have been made in [Colonial] New England," says Lovell Smith, "because of three factors." They were the availability of ginger from the West Indies, a surplus of apples, and the evaporating technology the Colonists developed for maple syrup, now applied to cider. Using apples from Alyson's, the couple began to experiment.

The original switchel was nonalcoholic, but Cabot and Lovell Smith chose to reimagine their rural drink as a 70-proof vodka, to be enjoyed at leisure. In a glass, boiled cider has the lazy, oily consistency of cane molasses, but the switchel vodka is a cool and clouded amber, hypnotic on the rocks, refreshing, and dangerously drinkable blended with soda. "Wait for five minutes before you have the second drink," warns Cabot. The spirit's potency has a

Stephanie Cabot and Marcus Lovell Smith, two of the owners.

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Boggy Meadow "Switchel" Cider Vodka.

tendency to sneak up on you.

The vodka is served at Seaglass restaurant in Salisbury and the Grog Restaurant in Newburyport, among others. The cheeses are sold at Boggy Meadow and at Dave's Fresh Pasta in Somerville, some Hannaford supermarkets, and more.

It is hard to overplay how much energy the couple have devoted to the farm while maintaining full-time jobs (Cabot as a literary agent at The Gernert Agency in New York; Lovell Smith as CEO of the Cambridge biotech Diagnostics for All) and raising four children.

They never question their decision to take on the farm. "If you've been given a legacy like this," says Cabot, "you have a responsibility to carry it on to the next generation."

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