

Chefs, farmers join forces

By Jenn Garbee, Los Angeles Times

It's ironic, in a rosemary-infused sort of way, that in today's farm-to-table restaurant era few chef-and-farmer relationships have evolved into the true collaborations those farm-specific menus often suggest. Their lives tend to exist in parallel worlds, firmly rooted together but never quite merging.

Like many farmers, Bill and Barbara Spencer of Windrose Farm have long focused their energy on the growing needs of their produce, such as Ashmead's Kernel and Hudson Golden Gem apples, on their 70-acre farm just outside Paso Robles. Their chef customers, including David Sundeen Jr., 36, and his wife, Susan Dumeyer, 40, have made all of the apple-inspired culinary decisions.

But what if, for an entire year, those chefs were farmers? Not as pickers, though Sundeen and Dumeyer did plenty of apple hauling during those 12-hour workdays on Windrose Farm. Nor as chefs-in-residence, even if the couple's cooking leans toward apple cobbler-type fare. But as the farm's new managers.

"Bill and Barbara were at a point they needed help tightening their focus," recalls Dumeyer of their somewhat fortuitous arrival at the farm last January. "There are so many parallels, business-wise, between a farm and restaurant operations that often people on both sides don't see."

The chefs knew the Spencers from their former restaurant days when Dumeyer worked the pastry line at Grace and Sundeen was sous-chef at Govind Armstrong's former West Hollywood restaurant Table 8 (and later executive chef at Bouchon in Santa Barbara).

When Barbara Spencer bumped into the couple at the farmers

market, she invited them up for a dinner. "We got to talking about the farm, but things really evolved over several months ... we called it dating," jokes Barbara.

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