



# LAMBSTOCK

CHEFS AND INDUSTRY INSIDERS MAKE AN ANNUAL PILGRIMAGE TO A VIRGINIA FARM TO KICK BACK, COOK, IMBIBE, AND UNWIND

BY LYNN SELDON

PHOTOS BY JASON TESAURO AND JES GEARING



# WHEN

CRAIG “THE SHEPHERD” ROGERS POSTED THE 2013 DATES FOR HIS FOURTH HELPING OF Lambstock at Border Springs Farm, he added, “ALL industry insiders are invited. If you do not know what industry, then this is not meant for you.”

Industry insiders don't necessarily have to be Facebook friends with The Shepherd to head to the southwest Virginia mountains come August, but they most definitely need to know the man and his lamb.

Border Springs Farm and Rogers are beloved for providing chefs with some of the finest Katahdin lamb available anywhere. Think Bryan Voltaggio (Volt, Family Meal, Range, and more). Ask Sean Brock (Charleston's McCrady's and Husk in Charleston and Nashville). Order the lamb tamale from Chris Hastings at Birmingham's Hot and Hot Fish Club.

Border Springs lamb fans also know to find Rogers roasting a lamb on a spit in the iconic Culinary Village at the Charleston Wine + Food Festival (just follow the smell and look for chefs licking their fingers). In addition, Shepherd groupies can now get their fix at DC's Union Market or Philly's Reading Terminal Market, where Border Springs Farm has outposts selling various cuts of lamb—as well as creatively prepared entrées like the lamb sausage sandwich or the Sloppy Shepherd, a much-improved Sloppy Joe made with lamb.

However, along with his well-travelled and -served lamb, Rogers is now known for starting a chef-focused Woodstock-like event called Lambstock back in 2010. It's become a four-day party celebrating lamb and other foods, chefs and others in the industry, drink of all sorts, music, and more.

“Lambstock started when I was introduced to Craig and his lamb during the first year of Volt's opening,” recalls Voltaggio. “That was right after *Top Chef* and I was one of the first chefs to use his product in a big way.”

Calling them educational “field trips,” Voltaggio was well known for visiting farmers with his staff. When planning one such outing to his new lamb farmer, Voltaggio planned to bring all of his growing staff and asked if they could camp right in The Shepherd's pasture. Rogers offered to roast a lamb on a spit if Voltaggio provided the beer and hungry folks.

“From there, Craig thought to invite friends and soon Lambstock was born,” recalls Voltaggio. That first year, those invited “friends” of Rogers quickly mushroomed and came from all points south, as well as San Francisco, Manhattan, and more. This all took place—and still does—in a sprawling sheep pasture down a hilly country road in the Old Dominion.

Though it's definitely expanded over the years, and there have been as many as 200 folks (mostly chefs) at the farm on some days, Lambstock still has an intimate feel. Rogers achieves that with a cadre of volunteers (and ATVs) managed by friends Connie and Brian Littell.

Typically, there are pockets of people clustered in and around the covered cooking and serving pavilion (new in 2012), manning other varied cooking stations, standing over two busy barbecue pits (think lamb and much more), pouring from kegs of fresh beer and many bottles of wine, enjoy-

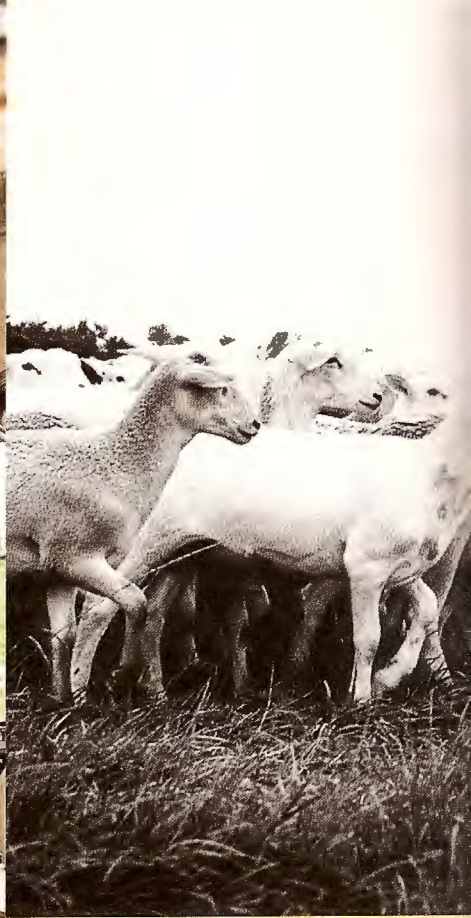


**“IT’S MY FAVORITE TIME TO HANG OUT WITH MY FARMER FRIENDS AND CHEFS. CRAIG IS INCREDIBLY GENEROUS TO INVITE OUR WHOLE COMMUNITY DOWN TO HIS AMAZING LAMB FARM TO CAMP, LISTEN TO GREAT MUSIC, AND EAT OURSELVES SILLY. WE SIT AROUND THE FIRE, SHARE STORIES, AND ARE MESMERIZED WATCHING THE NIGHTLY WHOLE LAMB ROASTING AND ROTATING ON THE SPIT.”**

**—SEAN BROCK, CHARLESTON’S MCCRADY’S AND HUSK IN CHARLESTON AND NASHVILLE**

**ABOVE:** CHEF JASON ALLEY OF COMFORT AND PASTURE RESTAURANTS SHOWS OFF SUMMER BASIL, SEASONAL SUDS FROM DURHAM’S FULLSTEAM BREWERY.

**(OPPOSITE PAGE):** WHOLE LAMB PROVIDED BY CRAIG ROGERS, COOKED FOR FOUR HOURS ON A SPIT, WITH EGGPLANTS ROASTING BELOW USED FOR BABA GHANOUSH.



**“TO ME, LAMBSTOCK IS AN EVENT WE ALL LOOK FORWARD TO BECAUSE WE CAN ALL COME TOGETHER AND HAVE AN AMAZING TIME FREE OF ANY CHEF EGOS AND WORKPLACE STRESS. I’VE MET SOME GREAT PEOPLE—NOT JUST CHEFS, BUT FROM ALL WORKS OF LIFE. WE GET TOGETHER, SHARE SOME AMAZING STORIES AND EVEN BETTER FOOD.”**

**—BOB COOK, CHEF DE CUISINE AT CYPRESS IN CHARLESTON**

ing creative cocktails at impromptu bars, listening to music, and spending time out in the hilly fields—where Craig and his crew host simulated sheep dog trials with their border collies (picture Babe, the movie, without the pig).

Because more restaurants are apt to be closed on Sundays and Mondays, they tend to be the busiest days for Lambstock, which officially starts on Saturday and ends Tuesday. For all four days, however, The Shepherd serves as the mayor of a town of generally law-abiding chefs and other industry insiders—except there really aren’t any laws beyond sharing a love of friends, food, drink, and music and leaving egos up at the farm’s fence line.

There’s certainly no posted schedule for any of the four days, but Sunday and Monday have specifically developed a rhythm everyone seems to enjoy: lots of cooking, drinking, and eating from mid-morning until early morning; latish breakfasts; lingering lunches; seemingly constant tasting and snacking until early evening; long and creative dinners, with chefs cooking for chefs; and music, singing, and dancing until well past midnight—with most heading back to their tents or hammocks and a few crashing in a smattering of small campers and larger RVs.

The farm awakens gradually each morning, and it’s likely the bleats of sheep and barks of dogs will arrive well before the groggy grunts of Lambstock libation lovers. However, on either Sunday or Monday morning—or maybe even both days—everyone will awaken to the smell of posole. That

would be the tasty work of Anthony Lamas of Louisville’s Sevice.

Dubbed the “hangover cure” and now officially the breakfast of Lambstock champions, Lamas’s gussied-up posole highlights Border Springs lamb shoulder and lamb chorizo. “I have to do it every year,” says Lamas, who has arisen early the last two years and counting to prepare his very popular posole.

Like many chefs and other tastemakers, Lamas refers to Lambstock as “life-changing,” while fans of his posole say the same about his hangover cure. “Anthony Lamas’s posole was one of the greatest breakfasts I’ve ever had in my life,” says Erin Breeding of The Breedings, a Nashville-based brother-and-sister band whose most recent album, *Fayette*, is out this summer. “Spicy broth should be a hangover necessity!” she adds in her oh-so-Southern accent.

Of course, the music is definitely a highlight as well. Last year, The Breedings returned to entertain the crowd during the day and late into the night several times.

“Lambstock is really a one-of-a-kind event,” says Erin. “The Breedings learned quickly that chefs work hard and play harder. The sense of community and camaraderie is immediate when you arrive.”

The Shepherd had added a small stage for the music and there were also jam sessions where chefs might join in. One of those chefs was DC-area restaurant legend Robert Wiedmaier, who rode into the Shenandoah Valley with David Guas (Arlington’s Bayou Bakery) on motorcycles to attend Guas’s first Lambstock. “Last year, one of my best memories was definitely standing around the fire, playing the



**“[THIS YEAR] I’M PLANNING ON ROASTING A WHOLE LAMB WITH LOTS OF SAUCES [AND] I’M THINKING ABOUT DOING MOROCCAN-STYLE SPICY SAUSAGE WITH LENTILS AND ROOT VEGETABLES TO REALLY HARNESS THE EARTHY FLAVORS.”**

**—ROBERT WIEDMAIER, BRASSERIE BECK, MARCEL’S, AND MUSSEL BAR & GRILLE**

harmonica, and enjoying grilled lamb chops,” recalls Wiedmaier.

“This year, I’m coming back with my chefs from Brasserie Beck, Marcel’s, and Mussel Bar & Grille,” Wiedmaier says with a smile. “I’ll probably ride my 2003 classic yellow Heritage Softail Harley, but I’ll have to caravan with my truck to bring everything down. I’m also bringing a few bands with me from the DC area, like Sean Chyun & The Deceivers and The Town Criers.”

Of course, along with food and music, there are also lots of adult beverages at Lambstock—that sometimes lead to child-like behavior that’s best left at the farm. Wine, beer, and spirits are all paired with food—or not.

“We love Lambstock because it gives us an informal way to meet some of the hottest up-and-coming young chefs in the US,” says Annette Boyd, director of the Virginia Wine Board Marketing Office. “It’s also a lot of fun to participate and it’s a very unique event.” In 2012, the Virginia wine folks brought an RV and offered healthy tastings of award-winning wines. “We’ll be back,” says Boyd.

So will Sean Lilly Wilson, founder and chief executive optimist at Durham’s Fullsteam Brewery. “Fullsteam provided beer for the first-ever Lambstock in August of 2010, a week after we launched our brewery and tavern. I drove up [in] my 1967 Dodge A100—the farthest my ‘Mullet’ truck has ever gone—and set up a table with our new beers, including Summer Basil farmhouse ale, Hogwash hickory-smoked porter, and our Carver sweet potato beer.

“I didn’t know what we were getting into. All I know is that [Raleigh] chef

(CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT OPPOSITE PAGE): CHEF CRAIG DIEHL FROM CYPRESS IN CHARLESTON, SC BUTCHERS LAMB; LOCAL JAMS AND GOODIES FROM CUBAN/CAJUN CHEF DAVID GUAS OF BAYOU BAKERY IN ARLINGTON, VA; BORDER SPRING FARM’S CRAIG ROGERS BLOWS HIS WHISTLE, DEMONSTRATING WITH HIS FLOCK THE SHEPHERD’S CRAFT; MUSICIAN LES MOORE ENTERTAINS THE CULINARY CROWD; ADI NOE OF POLISHED PIG MEDIA CRADLES A WEEKS-OLD KID BORN ON THE FARM; MERLOT GRAPES AND WINE TASTINGS COMPLIMENTS OF VIRGINIA WINE; CHEFS DAVID GUAS AND ROBERT WIEDMAIER SPORT THEIR LAMBSTOCK GEAR; GINA “MIXTRESS DC” CHERSEVANI, OWNER/MIXOLOGIST OF BUFFALO & BERGEN, ABOUT TO FIRE UP A FROM-SCRATCH CONCOCTION FOR AFTERNOON SIPPIN’.

Ashley Christensen recommended that I get involved. And when Ashley suggests something, you do it. I’ve never looked back.”

Various spirits also helped with the camaraderie. Derek Brown, owner of The Passenger, Columbia Room, and Mockingbird Hill, DC-area bars, says, “One of the cool things that happen are the collaborations that come out of it. You can’t do that until you break bread and have some drinks. It’s a great and eclectic group of chefs and spirits in general.” Brown’s double meaning for “spirits” is certainly on exhibit at Lambstock 24/4.

Perhaps, Jay Pierce, executive chef at Lucky 32 Southern Kitchen in Greensboro and Cary, North Carolina, says it best: “It’s like the summer camp that all of us nerds never got to go to. Sure there are shenanigans, but it ends up being the food version of *Dazed and Confused*.”