



Gardener. Chef. Mother. Health enthusiast. Nutritionist. Protector.

These are probably not the words you think of when you think of Christie Brinkley, but they are by far the words that describe her best. After a few weeks of conflicting schedules, I was almost ready to give up trying to interview her on what has become a topic in line with so many “top global issues” when, as fate would have it, we were going to be at the same luncheon. The Boulevard magazine was co-sponsoring the April 14 NOFA-NY (Northeast Organic Farmers Association www.nofany.org) luncheon at Guastavino's, at which Christie was a guest speaker. Christie is a close personal friend of NOFA president Scott Chaskey, who introduced her to organic farming.

As I ate lunch and listened to Christie and the other guests speak, I realized that like so many other important issues, this one has gone largely ignored or has not been accepted as well, for the wrong reasons.

As the luncheon wound down, I patiently waited as a crowd of people gathered to take photos and say hi to one of the world's most famous supermodels. I was getting nervous, hoping that we would have enough time. Suddenly, I felt a hand grab my arm and Christie said, “Okay everyone, I have to do my interview with Jason now.” Definitely one of the highlights in my life!

“I’ve been a vegetarian since I was about 12 or 13 years old and I’ve always been interested in healthy and nutritious foods,” says Christie. “I’ve raised my kids as vegetarians but my son eats white meat because of how active he is, I felt that I had to give him that little extra. Because of this I’ve been very aware of the difference between organic foods and foods covered in pesticides, fertilizers, herbicides and DDTs, and every kind of toxin that’s harmful. As a mother I take my responsibility very seriously in making sure that my children are safe today, while I have an eye on the future so they inherit a healthy planet and I think that good organic farming ensures both those things at once.”

What exactly are organic farming and organic foods? Is it a trendy thing? Is it a marketing scheme? Is it food that caters to vegetarians? One thing I found about organic farming and organic foods was the misconception surrounding what organic means. Once you understand the difference you can easily

understand the passion that drives Christie.

Let’s dispel the myths first. Organic farming simply refers to a natural method of food production, or, in the case of animals, the way the animals are raised and fed, without ingesting everyday chemicals and pesticides found in most foods today. That’s it. It’s that simple. You don’t have to be a vegetarian, you don’t have to eat only whole wheat. Technically, you could eat a McDonald’s hamburger providing that McDonald’s raised and fed cattle a certain way and offered organic foods.

For a firsthand experience, I met with Phil Barbato, owner of Biophilia Organic Farm in Jamesport who graciously welcomed me and took me on a tour of his small 14-acre farm. I don’t know if I was expecting to see James and his Giant Peach, a 12-ton tomato or Phil’s secret underground greenery, but it was just a small red barn with solar panels, a small greenhouse and some fields. So what’s the difference? No chemicals. While it was early in the season, you could see the vegetables just starting to grow. Whether it was one of his three types of garlic, blue potatoes, blueberries, strawberries, tomatoes and yes, even Christmas trees, there wasn’t anything out of the ordinary about Phil’s farm. “You rotate your crops,” Phil said. “They are actually finding out that the yield is the same with organic farming vs. commercial farming.”

Phil gave me a great analogy, which I told him I had to pass along. “If you ever look at a bodybuilder who takes steroids, they look great, but they aren’t healthy.” It’s the same with organic and commercial farming. As we walked along, Phil showed me where he was growing grapes. “They said you can’t grow organic grapes here. I don’t know, mine taste just fine to me.”

“It’s all about getting the information out there,” says Christie. Every time people take a bite of food, it has a chain reaction. “What kind of soil is my food growing in? That soil becomes the food; the food becomes us. We have all heard that you are what you eat and it’s true! Putting toxic chemicals on plants is like opening our mouths and pouring toxic chemicals in our mouths.”

“We really do need a conscious awakening of the health of our planet and the health of the inhabitants of the planet. There are signs of suffering everywhere. We really are in an emergency,” says Christie. “As we face all the effects of global climate change, global warming, I think we really need to wake up to what we can do as individuals. Supporting organic farming is something



we can all do. People think that it is overpriced and expensive. At a local farm stand the prices aren't that different but your health [and] your family's health effects are very different. The effects of pollution are very different."

If you look at the overall global problems from pollution, food, and diseases, they all fall in line with one another. As Christie says, "Beyond us are the effects on our environment." Just watch something as simple as watering your plants and see where the water goes. Ultimately that water seeps into Long Island's aquifers, lakes, rivers and/or the ocean. "Scientists are now finding dead zones and that gives me shivers," says Christie. Like global warming, people are accepting this and feeling despair, yet they miss the realization that they can do something to change this.

But is it really more expensive? That depends on where you shop. Some upscale stores simply have higher-priced products and market themselves as such. However, as Christie explains, "If you look at the big picture, what is more important - the cost of an organic tomato today [or] the cost of a child dealing with cancer? If you don't factor in the cost that these pesticides and synthetic fertilizers are costing us in cancers and diabetes and central nervous systems disorders, that's a fake cost factor. We should demand that they factor that in when were talking about the cost of something"

Schools are taking notice of healthier foods as well. With the recent beef scare, some schools have outlawed

beef altogether while some schools have made the switch to organic beef. "I also work closely with [The New York Coalition for] Healthy School Food, [an organization] started by Chevy Chase and his wife Jayni." Healthy School Food (www.healthyschoolfood.org) is an organization that works to promote optional plant-based entrees, healthy snack foods, farm-to-school programs and nutrition education to encourage healthier food choices. Christie recently painted and donated autographed T-shirts (available at www.charitybuzz.com) on which she used an anonymous quote that was very fitting: "The sky is held up by the trees; if the forest goes, the roof of the world will collapse and man and nature will perish together".

Long Island's vast East End farms have all but disappeared. Christie refers to Long Island as the "used to be" place, as in "'Oh, that used to be a beautiful field of flowers,' or 'That used to be a farm! We can't sustain that; at some point we have to say enough is enough.'"

If you haven't joined or aren't planning on joining a local environmental group, you can take your family to one of the many community farms and grow your own vegetables. Once you get your hands in the dirt, you will not only see what you are doing for your environment, but what you are doing for your family as well.

Being responsible with food has not only helped Christie and her family's health, but it has also brought them closer together. Her 12-year-old son Jack has become quite the

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avid chef. "He's fearless in the kitchen," his proud mother says. "He whipped up pasta primavera with vegetables the other day, and it was so tasty and wonderful. He watches the Food Channel all day." Gardening with her children has led to some of the best conversations she has ever had. "You're allowed to become quiet in the garden, you're almost in a zen. Thoughts just flow freely and it becomes just magical. Once you harvest that and take it into the kitchen and work something out with it, it's just wonderful." ●



Photo by Jason Feinberg



CHRISTIE'S SUMMERTIME RECIPE

Take some freshly cut organic arugula, place on plate

Take a zucchini blossom, put a little bit of egg white on it with a little bit of whole wheat flour or Panko (Japanese bread crumbs)

Stuff some mozzarella inside of it

Put it in a pan with a little olive oil and a little garlic

Fry it until it melts; put it on top of the arugula while it's still warm.

Take fresh tomatoes (you can use the canned crushed tomatoes also), heat up the tomatoes just a little, then sprinkle some herbs over the top.

It's soooo good!



