

Riding and Eating in the Berkshires

*Does This Food  
Make Me Look Fast?*



It's one of the ironies of motorcycling — you sit there on the bike, the motor doing all of the hard work, and you get hungry. Really hungry. It's understandable on a bicycle, your legs pumping like Lance Armstrong and your furiously beating heart making you regret that last piece of pie. But on a motorcycle, what's the excuse for daydreaming of burgers and fries? Even more ironic is the fact that when you finally sit down to chow, there's a good chance that your food has traveled farther than you. The beef is from Australia, the lettuce from South America, and the potato from Idaho. OK, maybe you traveled farther than the potato.

Text and Photography: John M. Flores

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🕒 *Saving the planet one delicious lamb meatball at a time.*

📍 *Red Lion Inn's Head Chef, Brian Alberg rides past the Guthrie Center.*



🕒 It doesn't get much greener than this -- part of the day's harvest at Farm Girl Farm.



🕒 An entrée at Route 7 Grill -- proof that organic food isn't just granola and tofu.

🕒 Dairy sheep at the Old Chatham Shepherding Company eat organically too.



**H**ow'd we get to this point — where our food iron-butts its way to our plates? How'd we become a fast food nation? It wasn't always like this, and we're in the Berkshires to see if there is a way to slow down our food.

### Chasing Down Slow Food

Meet Brian Alberg, head chef of the Red Lion Inn in Stockbridge, MA, and part of a grassroots food movement. Whatever you call it — Farm-to-Table, slow food, locavore — the basics are the same; it's a return to locally produced foods. Proponents argue that locally produced foods are a more sustainable model for the environment, support local economies, and taste better to boot. Last night's four-course dinner at the Red Lion Inn, for example, was from their Sustainable Foods Menu, with all ingredients — even the beer — coming from less than a tank of gas away. In addition to supporting locally-grown foods, Brian rides, and that's how he became part of this story. Brian is going to show us where portions of last night's dinner came from and give us a tour of sweet Berkshire backroads along the way. Kickstands up, we leave the Red Lion Inn — the sounds of V-twins (American and Italian) mixing nicely. We're in rural farmland and enjoying the scenery.

First stop of the day is the Old Chatham Shepherding Company, the source of last night's wonderful Camembert and the largest sheep dairy farm in the country. There's a tidy Shaker barn on the site that the newer barns mimic right down to the clean lines and red paint. I'm no expert, but the sheep inside their clean, open pens look happy, particularly the one that Brian pats on the snout. Outside, the organically managed fields and pastures complete the picturesque scene, a contemporary interpretation of the country's rural past.



📍 *Contemplating the view from atop Mount Greylock...and getting hungry...again.*

Brian grew up in the area and rides to work regularly. We zigzag our way back south along roads that demonstrate his local knowledge. He gives customized motorcycle tours from the Red Lion Inn — a unique and fun way to experience the Berkshires.

Next stop is Farm Girl Farm, supplier of last night's bok choy. Located in Great Barrington, the Farm is CSA, or Community Supported Agriculture, where members purchase a share of the annual harvest for some money and some sweat-equity. It's a modest setup — a small field, a small shed, a transistor radio, and the innards of an old washing machine that's been turned into a large salad spinner. Members are working the fields and washing greens when we stop by, the day's bounty ready for the short journey to local dinner plates.

All this talk of food is making me hungry. Luckily, the Barrington Brewery is just down the road and that's where

we stop for lunch. The hops plants climbing the building give a hint of what's going on inside — a brew kettle occupies a loft space above the bar while solar panels provide hot water to the restaurant and the brewing process. The Grass-Fed Burger (antibiotic- and hormone-free) seems appropriate considering the day's discussion. It's good too.

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Likewise with food -  
it's not just about Vitamin C and Vitamin D.  
For bikers and locavores alike,  
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Whenever we stop, Brian discretely checks his BlackBerry® since he's coordinating deliveries with the local food suppliers. It would be much easier for him to work with a large food supplier that sources food from around the globe, but Brian chooses not to. For him, it just makes sense — for the environment, for the local economy, and ultimately

for the food. Lots of the local chefs ride motorcycles, claims Brian. Coincidence, or could there be a connection between cooking and riding?

After lunch, we stop at what looks like a white New England church — except for the peace symbol in the belfry window. This former church is now "The Guthrie Center at the Old Trinity Church," a non-denominational interfaith center with live folk concerts and hootenannies. Arlo Guthrie, son of folk-music legend Woody Guthrie, bought the joint after he made it famous in the song Alice's Restaurant. The restaurant, or at least the

building that once housed the restaurant, is just a couple of doors down from the Red Lion Inn. There must be something in the water here, because in addition to the renowned music of nearby Tanglewood, the great theater of Shakespeare & Company and the international dance festival of Jacob's Pillow, all call the Berkshires home.



📍 *The round barn is one of the highlights of Hancock Shaker Village. Sheep are nonplussed.*

Brian bids farewell after a quick coffee in Lenox, just before it starts to rain. Before he goes, I ask him, "Riding or cooking — if you had to give up one, which would it be?" He thinks for a while, noting that both place him in the present with other aspects of life melting away. Very Zen. Ultimately, he says he would reluctantly give up riding and keep cooking. After last night's dinner, I'd have to concur.

I seek shelter in the Norman Rockwell Museum in Stockbridge, and am treated to another cultural aspect of the Berkshire experience: art. The museum is homage to a man that captured slices of Americana in a way that no

one had ever before...or since. Many of Rockwell's most memorable works can be found there.

Day one ends fittingly at the Route 7 Grill in nearby Great Barrington. The place has the polished, finished feel of an Applebee's® or Chili's, except for one major difference — most of its meats

*Riding or cooking - if you had to give up one, which would it be?*

and vegetables come from local farmers. If any place proves that the Farm-to-Table movement is not just some vegetarian hippie movement, this is it. The ribs and sweet-potato fries are good and filling, and a fitting end to a day's ride.

### **Looking Back, Looking Down, Looking Ahead**

The next day starts at Hancock Shaker Village, a preserved piece of our history. I'm drawn instantly to the simple, economic forms that characterize Shaker architecture and furniture — it's like modern architecture before there was

modern architecture. People in the fields tend to the numerous herb and vegetable gardens as sheep graze by the distinctive round barn. This is a museum — a memory of distant times — but is what I see here any different than what I saw at the Old Chatham Shepherding Company or at Farm Girl Farm? No, not really.

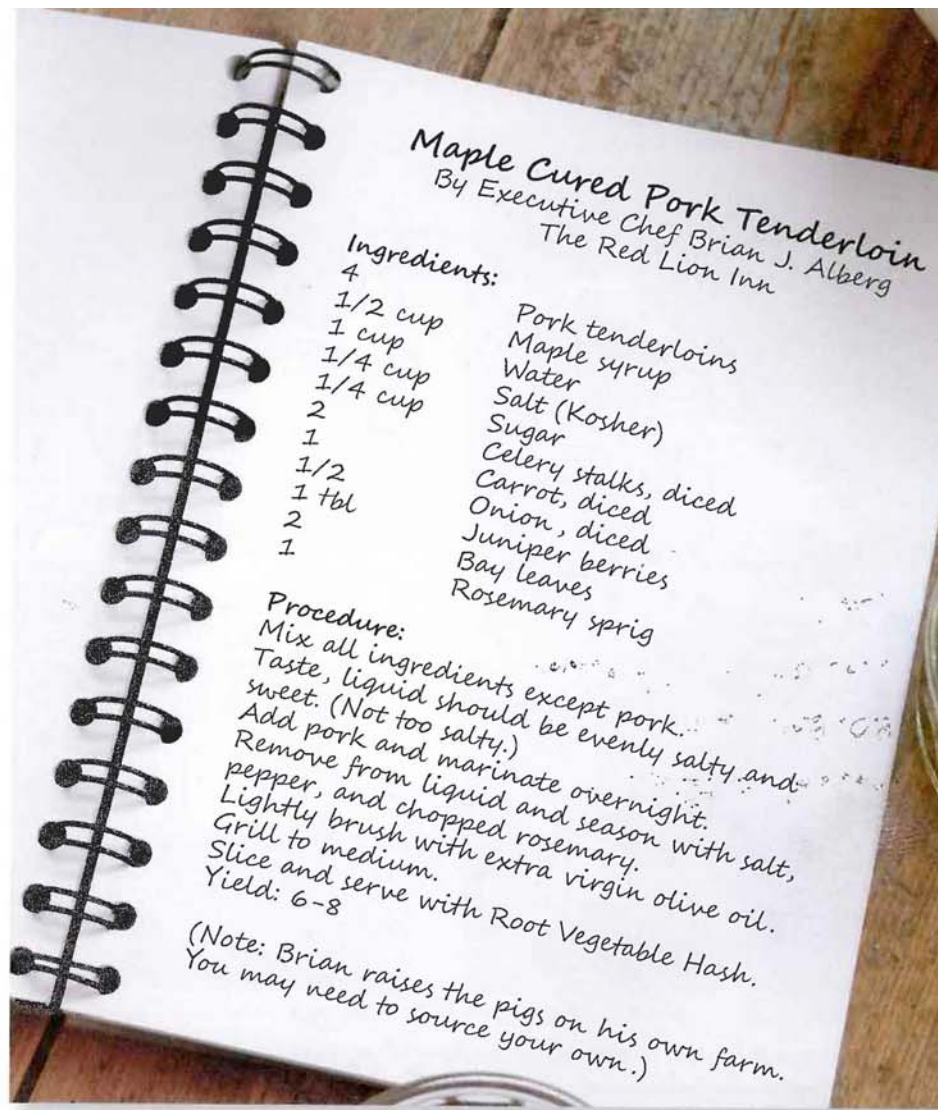
Is the Farm-to-Table movement a step back to our agrarian past, to slower food? Perhaps.

A little farther north are two more gems of the Berkshires: The Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute (The Clark) in Williamstown and the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (Mass MoCA) in nearby North Adams. The Clark specializes in Impressionist and European Art, with Renoir, Degas, Gauguin, Sargent, and Cassatt all well represented. Mass MoCA, as the name suggests, is more contemporary in its focus. Both are world-class museums and worth a stop.

### *Is the Farm-to-Table movement a step back to our agrarian past, to slower food?*

From the Clark, it's a short hop to Mount Greylock, the highest mountain in Massachusetts. The road's recently been resurfaced, and the trip to the top is a series of tight turns connected by short straights as the temperature drops with increased altitude. From up on high, the land is a rolling patchwork of greens, lush and inviting. This is the Berkshires. Within the folds of these rolling Appalachian hills lie a handful of small towns that can trace their roots back to the birth of this nation. Where other towns have faded or lost their luster, they continue to thrive, re-imagined and re-invented with the changing times. The Farm-to-Table movement is just another chapter of re-invention.

It's well past lunchtime and I'm hungry again. I could ride back down for a nice lunch in one of the neighboring towns, but the view up here compels me to linger, longer. I decide,

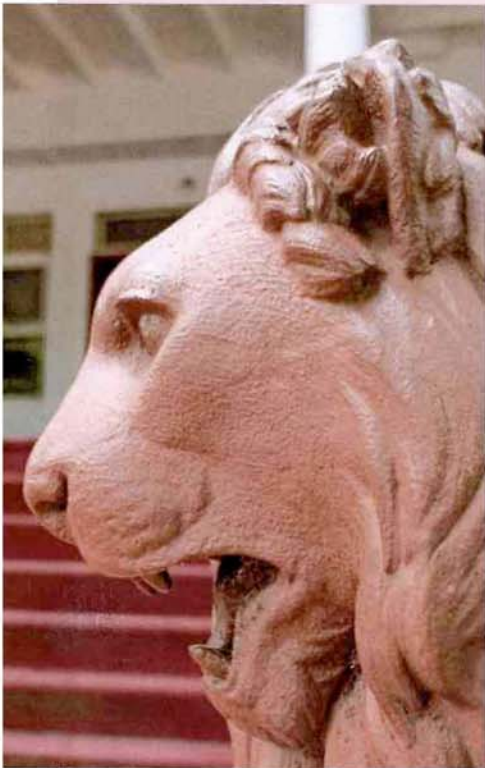


Another delectable plate from the Red Lion Inn's Sustainable Foods Menu.



**Red Lion Inn**

30 Main St, Stockbridge MA 01262  
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The Red Lion Inn provided accommodations for this trip, as well as an area tour courtesy of Executive Chef, Brian J. Alberg. The Inn has been a focal point of Stockbridge Village life since the late 1700s. Burned to the ground in an 1897-fire, it was quickly rebuilt. It now features rooms where country charm merges effortlessly with modern conveniences. The long, spacious hallways are filled with mementos of times past and warm summer evenings can be spent on the grand porch. Guests can also enjoy the outdoor heated pool and hot tub, a fitness room, and spa services — as well as, of course, fine dining.

**U Grass-fed burger at Barrington Brewery fills my tank.**



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ironically, to grab a quick sandwich at the concession stand. The ingredients have probably traveled farther than I to get here, but for now I don't care. My lessons for this trip have been learned. With riding, it's not just connecting Point A with Point B. Likewise with food — it's not just about Vitamin C and Vitamin D. For bikers and locavores alike, it's the journey that's important.

