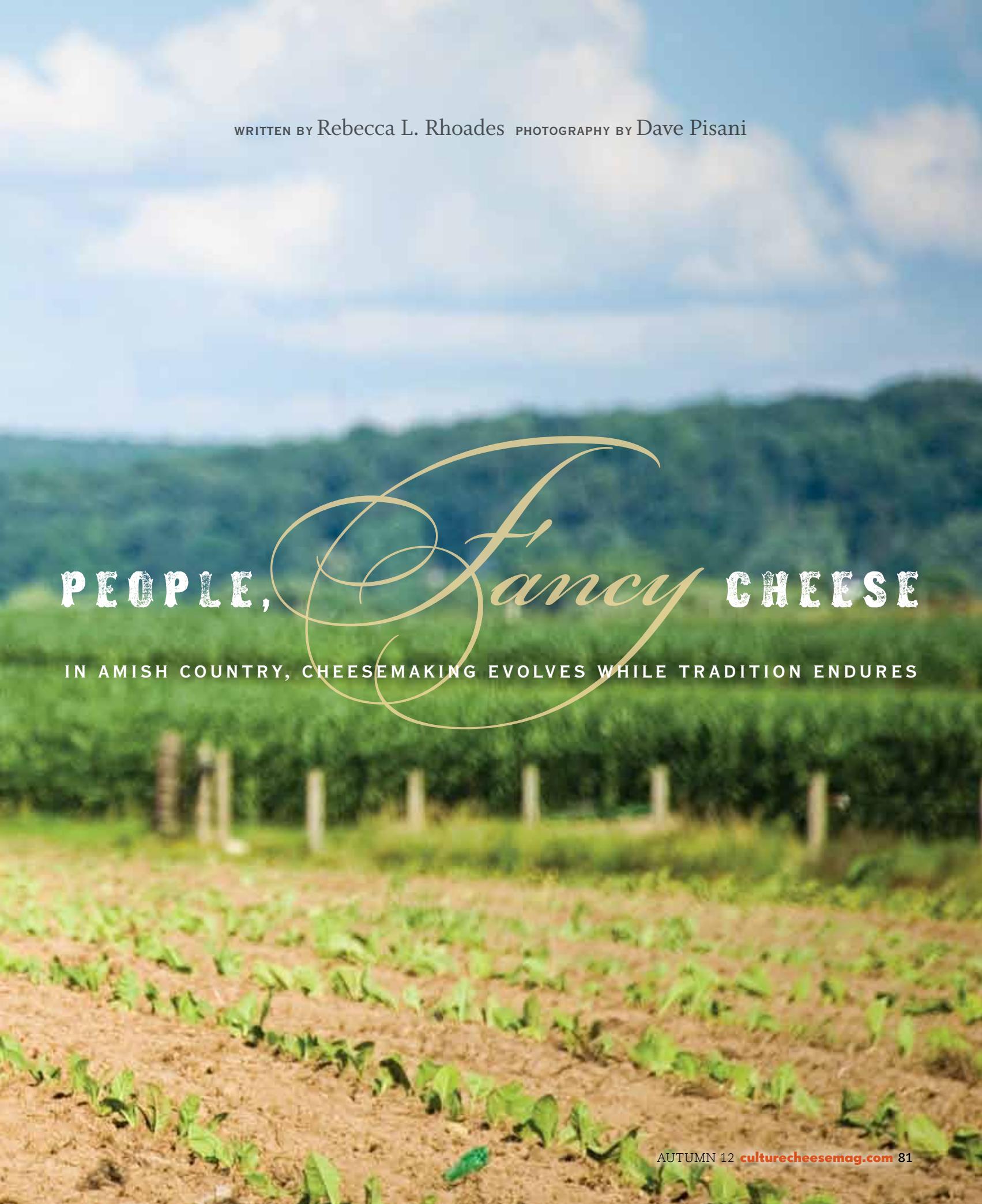


A color photograph capturing a traditional Amish scene. In the foreground, a large white horse and a smaller brown horse are harnessed to a wooden cart. An Amish man with a long white beard and a wide-brimmed straw hat sits behind the cart, holding the reins. To his right, another Amish person, a young boy, stands in a field holding a bunch of green plants. The background features rolling green hills under a bright blue sky.

PLAIN

WRITTEN BY Rebecca L. Rhoades PHOTOGRAPHY BY Dave Pisani



PEOPLE,*Fancy* CHEESE

IN AMISH COUNTRY, CHEESEMAKING EVOLVES WHILE TRADITION ENDURES

IT'S A TYPICAL

late-summer morning in
Pennsylvania's Lancaster County.

The night's heavy rains have stopped, and as the warm sun rises, the fields shimmer with a soft haze as the rays slowly evaporate the wetness. Everywhere I look, men, young and old alike, are working the fields. Teams of draft horses pull heavy plows, strewing chunks of dirt and grass behind them. The smell of fresh wet earth permeates the air. An elderly woman in a long dark dress and white organdy *kopp* (head covering) appears from behind a small white farmhouse pushing a reel mower; a single brown cow stands watch in her yard. Laundry lines rise in concurrence with the sun. Simple smocks, in dark shades of purple, blue, and burgundy, and graduated rows of black pants with suspenders wave in the breeze. It's a postcard-perfect scene of rural life in Pennsylvania Dutch Country.



But I'm not here to survey the landscape. I'm on my way to the farm of Eli and Sylvia King—for hidden down a long gravel driveway in rural Gordonville, in a small, nondescript building behind a large, traditional white stone-and-timber barn, is a secret not many non-Amish (or "English," as we're called) would ever know about: the cheese room. Not only is Eli King a dairy farmer, he's also one of a growing number of Amish who have turned to cheesemaking to preserve their families' way of life.

When I first met Eli last winter, he was bent over a large rectangular stainless vat, cutting and turning large blocks of cheese curd. This process, known as "cheddaring," expels the whey. Two hundred pounds of cheese was cheddared that particular day, an amount obviously greater than what could be consumed by just the Kings and their five



young children. Enter Howard Field. An outspoken man with a booming voice and an even larger persona, Field is an anomaly here. A non-Amish businessman, Field runs Farm Fromage, linking the cheesemakers of the Pennsylvania Dutch community to the outside world.

"There's nothing I like better than selling things, and there's nothing the Amish dislike more than selling, so we make a perfect team," says Field, who began Farm Fromage in August 2010 with little more than a love of cheese and a desire to help the small dairy farmers in his community. "My goal is to help the farmer get enough money to keep his family on the farm and not have to move out to another community across the country," he says. "I do that that by making and selling artisan and farmstead cheeses that are not your typical Pennsylvania Dutch or Amish cheeses."



THE FLAVOR OF CHANGE

In Amish culture food is viewed as simply fuel, not something to be savored or eaten for pleasure. There are no wine-and-cheese parties, no gatherings of friends to sample the latest award-winning artisanal creations and debate the nuances of their aromas, body, and flavors. Cheese is simply a nutritious, wholesome protein. As such, Amish cheese has historically been rather overwhelming. Big blocks of shrink-wrapped orange cheddar-style cheeses, thick half-moons of baby Swiss, generic bricks of “farmer’s” cheese, and typical Jacks, with flavored variations that include herbal, hot pepper, bacon, and Colby—in other words, cheeses that are good but not great.

“If you ask the average Amish cheesemaker what kind of cheese they have, they’ll all have [the aforementioned flavors],” says Field. “It’s fine to sell among the community, it’s wonderful to eat and feed to your family, and it’s a good way to use up your milk. But we also strive to make more worldly cheeses.”

The Kings’ farm, King’s Kreamery, is a perfect example of that. On this, my second visit to the farm, King and his young workers are once again making cheddar—this time a sheep’s milk cheddar. And they’re also making something new: a cow’s milk Camembert.

Eighteen-year-old Jesse has been working for King since June 2011. A soft-spoken young Amish man with dark hair and teen-idol good looks, Jesse recalls only ever eating cheddar or Muenster before starting work at King’s Kreamery. One year on, his palate has



PREVIOUS PAGES: Draft horsepower in Lancaster County; **OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:** Classic Amish attire drying in the breeze; Amish values prohibit the use of cars in favor of the horse and buggy; **THIS PAGE, ABOVE:** Slicing a traditional flavored block cheddar; **RIGHT:** A cow's milk camembert from King's Kreamery





They have a treadmill for the horses that charges the battery that runs the vacuum-packing machines.



expanded to include many—but not all—of the more than 40 varieties of cow’s, sheep’s, and goat’s milk cheeses available through Farm Fromage.

“Have you ever had blue cheese?” Jesse shyly asks, without looking up from his job of stirring a vat of cheddar curds. His voice becomes almost apologetic. “I don’t really care for that one.” The innocence behind this comment makes me laugh. “It’s definitely an acquired taste,” I assure him.

To help develop such tastes, two years ago Field began bringing recipes from books and the Internet to his Amish colleagues. And he took many of them to fine cheese shops to sample varieties. Several have also attended cheesemaking classes, and four of the creameries Farm Fromage works with have hired Neville McNaughton and Peter Dixon, two highly regarded cheese industry consultants.

While many Amish still prefer to eat traditional varieties of cheese, one thing is certain: making cheese is becoming big business in Lancaster County. According to Jeff Roberts, author of *The Atlas of American Artisan Cheese*, “The Amish are the single most important group of cheesemakers in this country who are still working with traditional methods.”

At King’s Kreamery, much of that tradition is on display on the morning I visit, despite its sometimes being difficult to distinguish from

modernity. In a small room next to the entrance to the cheesemaking room, 13-year-old Lillian Sue, her name delicately embroidered on her white headscarf to differentiate her from her twin sister, is packaging cheddar. After carefully weighing each piece on an electronic label-printing scale, Lillian Sue places them in a tabletop vacuum sealer, which seals the cheese for transport and sale.

At first glance the sight of this young Amish girl—in her conservative, handmade utilitarian brown dress and black apron tied at the waist—working with modern business equipment seems a contradiction. But then I learn a little secret: the machines are powered not by electricity drawn from the public grid but by batteries that are charged by horsepower. Real horsepower.

“They have a treadmill for the horses that charges the battery that runs the vacuum-packing machines,” Field explains. This large contraption, an inclined belt loop of wooden slates with rollers at each end, housed in a sturdy frame and enclosed by a stall to keep the horse in place, sits outside in the corner of an open barn. It looks like a giant gym apparatus from another time awaiting its oversize client. But deeper inside the barn, behind the horse stables, at a row of milking stations, old-fashioned manual labor still gets the job done; the sheep and cows here are milked by hand every morning and evening.



BALANCING CHOICE

While it is well known that the Amish shun the use of electricity, especially in their homes, it is often allowed for business purposes, such as powering equipment and light and heating barns and work spaces—in effect, tapping the benefits of the modern world while still maintaining an Amish identity.

This is especially notable in the Pennsylvania Amish community, an Old Order population, the most conservative of the area's "plain" groups. Other Anabaptist plain families include Mennonites and Brethren, all of whom can still be found in Pennsylvania Dutch Country, an area in southeastern Pennsylvania centering around the towns of Lancaster, Reading, York, and Hershey, as well as their surrounding counties.

In the 1920s the Pennsylvania Amish community prohibited the use of the 110-volt power generated from public utility lines. However, the use of self-contained batteries and generators, often powered by nature (windmills dot the landscape), hydraulic motors, and propane is permitted. Phones are also allowed for business, although frequency of their usage depends upon the individual farmer.

"Our biggest frustration is that communication with the Pennsylvania Dutch community is difficult at best," says Field. "If a tree falls in the forest, and no one hears it, does it make a sound? Well, if you call an Amishman and

leave a message, but nobody checks it because the phone is in a trailer or out in the outhouse, did you leave a message?"

Back inside the creamery, Jesse and his young coworker, Andrew, continue to stir the heated curds. To a cheesemaking novice the equipment looks like that of any industrial factory: large hulking squares of shiny stainless steel. But while the equipment and tools may be modern, the craft itself remains a manual process. There are no rotating mixers or mechanized machinery here to eliminate the laborious activity. Prior to scalding the curd particles, Jesse crosscuts the curds with a large rectangular-framed sieve, akin in appearance to a stainless steel baby gate. Then, using a stainless steel rake, he stirs the curds, breaking them down into smaller pieces as the whey separates. The resulting whey is drained and fed to hogs, specifically heritage hogs such as Tamworths and Berkshires, which are raised for charcuterie—another benefit of the cheesemaking industry.

To the right of the door is a recent addition to the creamery: a vat pasteurizer. Pennsylvania law requires that all raw-milk cheese be aged at least 60 days. While most of the cheeses made at King's Kreamery are aged for that long or more, there are those that demand a greater freshness, such as Camembert, chèvres, and crottin. To be sold to the public, they must be pasteurized.



OPPOSITE PAGE: Stirring freshly cut curd before draining the whey; **THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** An Amish woman weighs cheese using an electric scale powered by a treadmill for horses; new Amish cheeses include washed rinds and bloomy rinds; in Amish culture, no trading is allowed on Sundays



"I'm still learning how this works," says Jesse, as he adds cultures to what will become the Camembert. "It's all so new to me."

FROM TOYS TO GOATS

About two and a half miles west of King's Kreamery, in neighboring Leola, sits another creamery, Misty Creek Goat Dairy. The farm's owner, Amos Miller, is a first-generation cheesemaker, as are most Pennsylvania Amish. (Of the 35 Amish cheesemakers known to Field, only one is second generation.) A former toy maker, Miller got into the goat business after his mother, who has since passed away, expressed a desire to have a goat dairy on the two-acre property. Initially, Miller would transport the goat's milk in large metal cans by horse and cart eight miles away to another cheesemaker, where he apprenticed to learn the craft. He kept this up three times a week for three years, and then, in 2008, Miller began making his own cheese. He uses the milk of his 150-plus goats and that of the cows owned by his uncle Levi, who lives next door and operates a harness shop.

"In the beginning I just had an interest in milking goats and making a little cheese," says Miller, an unassuming yet gregarious man whose voice rings with an almost childlike enthusiasm. "Now as we go along, that interest has grown by double and triple." No wonder his dairy makes some of Farm Fromage's most popular cheeses, including Kidchego, a Spanish-style Manchego made from raw goat's milk, and the best-selling Misty Lovely, a creamy goat's milk ricotta salata that starts like a feta and finishes like a cheddar. (Emeril Lagasse uses it on his roasted beet salad in Emeril's Chop House in the Sands Bethlehem [Pennsylvania] Resort.)

"Misty Lovely is a wonderful mistake," says Field. "Amos thought he'd make a feta. Well, he's never been to Coatesville [about 30 minutes east of Lancaster], let alone to Greece." After aging the cheese for 60 days, Amos was not satisfied and planned to feed it to his pigs. At Field's insistence he brought the cheese to Bill Houder at the Clock Tower Cheese Shoppe in nearby Gap, who declared it to be "just lovely." And a new favorite was born.

Another popular Amish "mistake" comes from Wakefield Dairy, maker of such well-known and well-loved cheeses as Bouche and Smethe under the Wakefield label, as well as Pennsylvania Noble for Green Valley Dairy. A few years ago Wakefield proprietor Henry Lapp made a cheddar that somehow got put in the back of the cooler and forgotten . . . for a very long time. "It's two and a half years old and is beautifully crystallized," says Field. "It's just an absolute winner and our new go-to cheese." Farm Fromage has been selling 50 pounds a week of the Wakefield Dairy cheddar since its discovery, and Lapp is currently making more.

More demand for this cheese and others translates into the need for more milk and more workers to turn that milk into cheese. It means more staff are needed to take the cheese to the farmers' markets and introduce it to stores. It also means more stores become willing to sell the cheese. And that all adds up to what Field was hoping for all along: more money for the farmers so they can remain in their community.



THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Young dairy cows enjoy some wildflowers; On-farm sales are a common site throughout Lancaster county; Amish mother and daughters, between chores

And he's had success on another level, too. "When I first said to the community that we're going to make cheese and I'm going to promote it, they looked at me like 'we've heard this a thousand times,'" says Field. Now that he's made good on his word, Field adds, "my wife and I have been to Amish weddings, we've been to wakes. We've been invited to workers' dinners and into people's homes. It's wonderful." **c**

C For more on the agricultural richness of Lancaster County and a listing of local markets that sell Amish cheese, go to culturecheesemag.com/amish.

Rebecca L. Rhoades is a writer and the associate editor of AAA World, the publication of AAA Mid-Atlantic.



LODGING

Bird-in-Hand Village Inn & Suites

2695 Old Philadelphia Pike (Route 340),
Bird in Hand, PA 17505
717-768-1538,
bird-in-handvillageinn.com;
villageinn@bird-in-hand.com

A collection of four historic buildings: three homes and the 1734 Inn, all in the heart of Amish Country. Packages include tours of Amish farmlands.

Homestead Guesthouse

901 Peters Road, New Holland, PA 17557
877-272-7252, homesteadguesthouse.com;
info@homesteadguesthouse.com

For a true Amish experience, visit the 60-acre farm of Stephen and Martha Stoltzfus and their eight children. Stay in the guesthouse with three bedrooms, or for married couples, the 17th-century Garden Time Cabin. Feel free to join in at chore time.

The Inn at Leola Village

38 Deborah Drive/Route 23, Leola, PA 17540
717-656-7002, theinnatleolavillage.com;
sleeptight@theinnatleolavillage.com

True luxury in a down-home setting at Lancaster County's only AAA Four Diamond hotel. Stay in one of several restored 1860s homes and barns on this converted tobacco farm, relax in the full-service spa, or dine in style at the on-site Restaurant Mazzi.

Rocky Acre Farm Bed & Breakfast

1020 Pinkerton Road, Mount Joy, PA 17552
717-653-4449, rockyacre.com

Pioneers in the farm-stay industry, Galen and Eileen Benner have been welcoming guests since 1965 to their 200-year-old working dairy farm. (Non-Amish)

DINING

Miller's Smorgasbord

2811 Lincoln Highway East, Ronks, PA 17572
717-687-6621, millersmorgasbord.com

Meals cooked from scratch are made from farm-fresh ingredients sourced from surrounding Amish farms. Choose from the traditional smorgasbord or à la carte items, including the dish that started it all in 1929: Anna Miller's Chicken & Waffles.

Plain and Fancy Farm

3121 Old Philadelphia Pike (Route 340),
Bird in Hand, PA 17505
800-669-3568
plainandfancyfarm.com; info@goodnplenty.com

Featured on the Travel Channel's *Man vs. Food* and one of AAA's top 10 best down-home dining restaurants in North America, this landmark has been offering an Amish Farm Feast with made-from-scratch fried chicken, Lancaster County-style chicken potpie, shoofly pie, and more since 1959. Family-style dining.

Shady Maple Smorgasbord

129 Toddy Drive, East Earl, PA 17519
717-354-8222, shady-maple.com;
smorg@shady-maple.com

Home of the 200-foot-long smorgasbord. Try one of the more than 300 baked-goods items from the on-site bakery or the nearly 100 varieties of smoked meats from the on-location smoke-house. For a quick dining option, try the fast-food Dutchette.

Stoltzfus Farm Restaurant

3716A East Newport Road, Intercourse, PA 17534
717-768-8156, stoltzfusfarmrestaurant.com;
info@stoltzfusfarmrestaurant.com

Travelers can't miss the giant sign painted on the side of a barn directing them to the original home of community founder Amos Stoltzfus. Enjoy an all-you-can-eat family-style meal at your own table featuring such Lancaster specialties as chow-chow, homemade sausage, ham loaf, apple butter, and house-made shoofly pie.

ALSO IN

Lancaster

