



Mindfulness in Joanie's Garden

Why We Choose Local Foods (and How You Can, Too)

As a market manager for the Santa Cruz farmers markets, Mike MacDonald has been helping us procure all of the fresh ingredients for meals at 1440 since the campus opened. Mike was so impressed with our commitment to freshness that he inquired about working for 1440 directly and within the last year has become our Master Gardener, tending Joanie's Garden. With his background and education in agriculture, food systems, and gardening, Mike collaborates with the chefs at 1440 to ensure that Joanie's Garden is an ever-evolving, blossoming, and sustainable haven on campus for all who visit to enjoy.

1440: How did you first get interested in farmers markets and gardening?

Mike: I had been studying biology, and I got really interested in nutrition. That led me to investigate where food comes from and food systems. I became horrified by the way that a lot of the food systems in the United States and all over the world work. So, I started a community garden at the college I attended in Pennsylvania.

1440: Food systems correlate to how we all share resources as one community on the planet. Community is at the heart of 1440's vision to foster compassionate communities leading generative lives. What did gardening teach you about communities?

Mike: I was coming out of my early adult years of being all about "me, me, me," and starting to recognize the value of people working together and supporting one another.

The community garden I started brought people together of different ages and cultures, and everybody really enjoyed themselves. Having a sense of belonging in a community is something I didn't have before. But once I had it, it was hugely valuable to me. Ever since then I've actively sought out places where I can plug into community.

1440: That sounds like a profound realization.

Mike: I didn't go into gardening seeking that, but it changed my life completely.

It was a real lightbulb moment. I started to realize the effect of being regarded as valuable by people, and regarding other people as valuable whom I'd never met before and wouldn't have met otherwise.

1440: If you were in Pennsylvania, how did you end up in California?

Mike: In 2014 I moved out here to study agriculture and community under the environmental studies major at UC Santa Cruz. It's cross-disciplinary with a lot of sociology, science ecology, and in-depth study in food systems and the way that food is produced and distributed.

1440: That must be eye-opening. What inspired you most?

Mike: One thing that really inspired me was learning about cultures that are producing most of their own food on their land. In most parts of this country, we don't do that. If you live in Pennsylvania and you want strawberries year-round, then they have to come from California or Mexico; you can't grow them in your backyard.

The culture around food changed a lot in the last century, especially between the '50s and '70s so that people have come to expect to get everything consistently throughout the year. The understanding of seasonality went out the window.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

1440: Now that we know better, how can we make better choices?

Mike: One of the most important things for food sourcing is seeking out farmers markets. Farmers markets are a good supporter of local agricultural systems. That's where you can find the most local, chemical-free, organic, and sustainably grown food.

1440: And what's the ripple effect?

Mike: If you're shopping at a farmers market, you are cutting out the middle person that you would have with a grocery store, which often is a large corporation. All the money that the corporation is extracting from that transaction is not going into your local economy.

If you buy directly from the farmer, you are supporting your farmer, and they're going to be using that and reinvesting it in the local economy. So that's good for your health and good for your economy.

1440: What if we don't have access to farmers markets?

Mike: Food cooperatives tend to have upstanding ethical codes.

1440: And if we are going to shop at larger grocery stores?

Mike: A lot of grocery stores now will have local products. Seek those out and look for the labels, that's the third best option. The other two are definitely much better.

1440: How did 1440 start procuring such fresh, local, and seasonal ingredients?

Mike: Before 1440 first opened, [Executive Chef] Kenny Woods came to talk to the executive director of the farmers market. Basically, Kenny wanted to buy everything at the market [laughs]. Kenny knew that the farmers market was the best way to get connected.

1440: What difference has it made in the community that Kenny reached out for this connection?

Mike: It has been making a really significant impact. All the farmers were really interested in the program. When 1440 is

buying \$1,000 to \$1,500 worth of produce at once, the farmers are happy to say, "You're welcome to come buy our produce any time."

So, the farmers are happy and 1440 is happy to have the best, freshest, and most sustainably grown produce available.

1440: It makes such a difference in the flavor, color, and nutritional value of the food to get ingredients from the local farmers. And, what do we grow on campus, in Joanie's Garden?

Mike: I grow a lot of edible flowers, herbs, and some fruit and vegetables. I preserve a lot, and I have a lot of dried foods, such as dried chiles from the summer and sunflower seeds.

1440: And are ingredients used in the Teaching Kitchen?

Mike: Yes, ingredients are used as garnishes in the Teaching Kitchen and Kitchen Table. We have fun when we have a banquet or private dinner in the Teaching Kitchen. We're picking flowers and sprinkling them on people's plates right there. It doesn't get more local than that.

1440: How do you decide what to plant in Joanie's Garden?

Mike: I mostly work with Kenny and the other chefs to decide. We have the chefs' wish list.

1440: What are some of their unique requests?

Mike: They've asked for a winged bean, which is a Chinese bean that has interesting ornate frills on the outside of it. Also, red-veined sorrel is a garnish that you'll see on a lot of dishes. It's a beautiful small leafy green with bright red veins. That's generally what the design of the garden is built around: what do the chefs want that I can't easily find growing in bulk.

1440: And where are these ingredients used?

Mike: Most of the unique items will be used for private dinners because the garden is not large enough to produce ingredients for the number of guests we have on campus.

Guests are welcome to visit the garden, though.

1440: Yes, especially because of its significance to how 1440 got its name. Could you remind us of that story?

Mike: Joanie Kriens, cocreator of 1440, was in her garden at home when she felt so present in the moment that she wondered how many minutes were in a day that she could feel that way. She learned that we have 1440 minutes in a day, and so her garden is where all this was born.

1440: Does being in the garden help you feel connected to the moment, connected to nature? And can it help others in that way?

Mike: Absolutely. You're interacting with nature. You have your hands in the dirt. You're watching and hearing insects and birds. You're observing ecology in a way that you don't get a chance to do in other aspects of your life. Gardening is a very contemplative endeavor. ■

field notes

- In addition to the European honeybee (*Apis mellifera*) that we all are familiar with, there are over 16,000 known species of bees in the world.
- Yellow jackets and other wasps are some of the most important garden pest predators.
- Strawberries, raspberries, apples, peaches, and almonds are all members of the rose family (*Rosaceae*).
- Limes are yellow when ripe. The green limes we all know are sold unripe, to increase their shelf life and shipping durability. Green peppers are also unripe, and will turn red, yellow, orange, or sometimes purple if left to ripen.

