

# Grower Direct

An Interview with Campus Forager Pete Delfino

*It is the 1440 vision to create hope for living well, and campus forager Pete Delfino demonstrates how that looks in reality with his newfound energy and the way he connects his communities at 1440 with local growers to benefit each guest we feed both on and off campus.*

How does grower direct impact the quality of the food we serve at 1440? Grower direct is the special way we source local, seasonal, and organic ingredients for our ever-changing menus.

There are almost 2 million farms in the United States. About 80 percent of those are small farms, and a large percentage are family owned. Produce this fresh can be available to the public through local farmers markets and farm stands; however, at 1440, we have direct access to a wide variety of local growers because of Pete Delfino, a treasured member of the 1440 team. We call Pete our “forager” for the way he procures 100 percent of the produce, meat, poultry, fish, spices, flours, and unique ingredients that our chefs request.

Pete’s story of becoming our 1440 forager speaks to the power of community, creativity, and learning—not only as necessary ingredients for providing delicious, sustainable menus, but also for restoring vitality at any age.

Pete comes from a prominent local farming family who have been farmers in the area since the 1920s. His mother’s side had row crops, and many of us across the United States (and even in other parts of the world) have eaten food from their farms and the farms of their friends. Pete has seen the name of his mother’s farm on the backs of trucks in movies.

On his father’s side, Pete’s father was the largest single artichoke grower in the United States. Pete’s life was farming, and after graduating from Cal Poly (California Polytechnic State University) with a major in soil science, his family’s artichoke farm sparked an idea that developed into his own renowned escargot company.

Pete noticed his family spent years trying to kill snails that they saw as pests in the artichoke fields. These snails had



been brought over by the Northern Italians and French after the California Gold Rush of 1849 as a food staple. Since these weren’t the typical local snails, Pete took 20 acres of artichoke fields and began harvesting and selling the European snails. It was a win-win for the artichokes and for Pete’s new escargot business. He and his company were written up in the San Francisco Chronicle, Los Angeles Times, and California Farmer, which is the Sports Illustrated of farmer’s magazines.

After many successful years as a farmer, Pete intended to retire soon. His plans unexpectedly changed once he started delivering produce to 1440. He enjoyed his growing relationships with the team here and came to appreciate the commitment we had to locally grown produce. When he heard 1440 was looking for someone to step into a procurement role, he jumped at the opportunity. His first week in the forager role, 1440 had its largest recorded crowd to date with 600 people on campus. That was 1,800 meals in one day for four days straight, and that’s how Pete took over the job.

With his expertise, creativity, curiosity, and connections to the farming community, Pete brings so much passion and natural expertise to the 1440 family, and in return he feels re-energized.

In his own words:

*I fell in love with how innovative and creative the team and young chefs at 1440 are. There’s so much passion for this place – it’s addictive. It gives me energy, and my family noticed a difference in me after one day. I was sitting in my chair upstairs and my son walked in. I said something, and he replied, “Oh, Pop’s back.”*

*Then, my daughter came home for the weekend. And after I said one sentence to her, she said, “Oh, Pop’s back!” I asked, “What are you talking about?” She said, “You’re back to your old self again. Lately, it’s been like you were bored. Now, you sound like how you sounded years ago. You seem so happy that even your voice sounds different.”*

*And that’s 1440. That’s why I am here.*



Pete tells us that the mandate of going 100 percent grower direct is a creative challenge, with new ingredients and menus every week. He feels like a little kid again with eyes wide open, ready to learn, supported by the others on the team who, he says, are there with all hands on deck, ready to make it happen.

The next time you’re savoring a meal at Kitchen Table, you might take a mindful moment to appreciate local growers of our region and the thoughtful process of foraging that Pete does behind-the-scenes at 1440. You’ll know that a few days earlier, Pete received a list of what’s available from the growers, many of whom he grew up with. After looking over the list, he then brought it to the chefs and bakers, pointing out some of the especially unique offerings that week.

Finally, the 1440 culinary team dreamt up creative menus and told Pete what to gather just in time for the new week when you’d arrive. ■