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Ted Dobson is the **King of Greens**

Judith Lerner, Special to the Eagle

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Why is Ted Dobson one of the most popular farmers in Berkshire County?

"He delivers," said chef Rosemary Chiarello, after serving Dobson's Equinox Farm mesclun mix and micro-greens the other evening at her La Terrazza Restaurant at Gateways Inn in Lenox.

"And," she added, "his greens are top quality."

Chefs and restaurateurs from Allium, Alta and Café Adam to The Old Inn on the Green, Red Lion Inn and Stagecoach Tavern and many area restaurants, agree.

Michael Ballon of Castle Street Café called Dobson *"the King of Greens."*

"He's organized and disciplined. He actually shows up and returns phone calls. Nobody has been as consistent for over 20 years as Ted," Ballon said.

Halle Heyman, manager of Allium, calls him "the Godfather of Greens!"

In 1983, Dobson and his then-wife, Anne Banks, developed a diversified three-acre organic farm on Dobson family land in Hillsdale, N.Y.. Eventually, he moved his Equinox Farm to 15 acres in Sheffield and specialized in growing the organic mixed baby lettuces, arugula, braising greens and micro-greens and Northeast-specific heirloom tomatoes for which he is now known.

"Everyone eats salad," Dobson laughed

Home cooks can buy his mesclun mix, baby spinach and arugula at Price Chopper, Guido's, Berkshire Co-op Market and through Berkshire Organics.

Route 7 Grill owner Lester Blumenthal said, "He picks the same day. [He has] fair pricing. He's a great guy to work with and he's Johnny on the Spot: If we run out of lettuce on a Saturday night, he'll bring by a case of lettuce."

And, said Blumenthal, "During the spinach scare, I had no worries."

This year, Dobson has gone greener than ever. He has stopped supplying the high-end New York City restaurants that have been his main source of income since 1984 and, again, diversified his plantings.

"As much as everyone eats salad, there's nothing like the staples. I'm gonna stay local and diversify," he said.

Now coming up are a variety of radishes; purple top, red and white turnips; red, white, gold and striped beets; French fingerling potatoes; beefsteak and 12 to 15 different kinds and colors of heirloom tomatoes; peppers and eggplants; red, yellow and orange spring bunching carrots; and full, mature size greens including spinach, dandelion, arugula, red and green mustard, turnip and beet.

He is also growing Italian and opal basil, chervil, chives, cilantro, dill, lemon verbena, mint, curly and Italian parsley and both red and white scallions. And he will also get into winter storage vegetables.

"Everything is up and running," he exclaimed. "Everything will be ready in July -- tomatoes, too."

He planted his greens in late March this year.

"A solid month earlier," he said. "The frost didn't go deep this year because we had a good snow cover. And I raised my beds."

But the 16 inches of rain in the last two weeks hasn't been pleasant. "The last few days," Dobson said, have been, "the last straw. The heat traps the humidity around the base of the plant and it begins to rot."

"We had a glorious spring," he noted, "with beautiful growth, a very, very dry spring. The last growing season was very wet, then we had a classic winter with plenty of snow and a classic spring and, until two weeks ago; but when it rains it pours."

"We're still getting the volume out every day, we're still harvesting, but it's taking much longer," he explained.

Since all the leaves are covered with a fine silt from the rain, the crew has to wash more times.

As a child, Dobson said he was fascinated by farms. By the time he was in his mid teens he knew he would be a farmer.

Now 49, he said he was influenced by his mother and by Rachel Carson's "Silent Spring" as a young teen. In 1980, he studied organic farming at California's University of Santa Cruz. He was in a three-year farm and garden project run by English biodynamic, organic horticulturist Allen Chadwick. He graduated in 1982.

"I got a hands-on, old world horticultural education. Everything was worked entirely by hand. No machines," he said.



"We grew peaches, plums, avocados, figs, artichokes," he recalled. They raised animals, grew vegetables, "every kind of family.

"It was the most stimulating period of my life to that date. We felt we had a mission. It was a spiritual quest. So few people were doing it [at the time], especially by hand."

Dobson plans to put a farmstand at the edge of his field on Bow Wow Road in Sheffield and the farm is participating in the farm markets in Sheffield, Great Barrington and Norfolk, Conn.

"We're using every square foot, every inch of cultivable land," he said. "I'm hopeful we'll have a drier season this year [than last]. Get back to me at the end of the summer and ask me how it worked out. That'd be an interesting conversation."

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