



## Down on Beach Plum Farm

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I was in the offices of Cape Resorts the first time I heard of Beach Plum Farm. It was a warm day in mid-May, 2009, and I was there to interview Curtis Bashaw, co-managing partner of Cape Resorts, [for an article about upscale Jersey Shore nightlife spots.](#)

Mid-interview, a farmer carrying a box of strawberries walked in.

"Where are these from?" I asked, taking a sample of what was the sweetest strawberry I'd ever tasted.

"My farm," said Bashaw. "Would you like to see it?"

Then, Beach Plum Farm was a new operation, and not open to the public. In 2007, Bashaw bought a 62-acre plot that had been a lima bean farm, abandoned for a decade. The goal was to grow fruits and vegetables for Cape Resorts' restaurants: The Ebbitt Room, Blue Pig Tavern and Rusty Nail in Cape May, and Chelsea Prime and Teplitzky's in Atlantic City. In 2009, the farm wasn't much more than a greenhouse and rows of fruits and vegetables.



Now, Beach Plum is a fully functioning farm with over 100 types of fruits and vegetables. This winter, they also added chickens, and in May, sheep.

It's also open to the public for self-guided tours on Tuesday and Wednesday from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. and Thursday and Saturday from 9:30 a.m. to noon. Visitors can also go on guided tours on Tuesday and Wednesday at 11 a.m. and 1 p.m., and shop at the new farmer's stand that just opened on the property.

### Thousands of pounds of produce

Last year, the farm produced 2,033 pounds of strawberries, 64 pounds of blueberries, and 10,787 pounds of 10 types of tomatoes. As I walked the property with farm manager Jamie Alvarez, I saw the following plants: peonies, sunflowers, chives, mint, oregano, parsley, sage, rosemary, thyme, strawberries, blackberries, blueberries, watermelon, peppers, squash,

cucumbers, zucchini, onions, collards, scallions, eggplants, garlic, cauliflower, broccoli, broccoli rabe, broccolini, brussel sprouts, raspberries, kale, spinach, tomatoes, three kinds of radishes, a dozen different lettuces, garlic and sweet corn, plus wildflowers and 250 chickens that lay eggs used in the Cape Resorts restaurants.

Alvarez encouraged me to taste from the farm, and I picked asparagus, peas, cherry tomatoes and nasturtium, an edible flower, to eat about as fresh as you could get.

"We make the most out of every little piece of ground," said Alvarez.

The farm is set up in two different areas: when you enter, a front plot is mostly herbs and greens, and a green house. It's very French garden-like, with manicured rows and walkways. This is also where you can shop the farm stand.

The second part is down a shell-covered pathway that's shaded by a canopy of trees (this is where you can see how overgrown the land was when Bashaw bought it in 2007). When you come out of that pathway, you'll forget you're down the shore: it's wide open spaces, rows and rows of new greens and budding fruit. Beyond the land being used to grow produce is what will become the sheep meadow when the current herd of five expands to 15.

### **Smart farm**

Clover and peas are grown between rows of fruits and vegetables to put nitrogen back into the ground. Oats are grown, too, to form a base of green manure that is used to add nutrients to the soil. Fly paper hangs from the ceiling of the greenhouse to catch pests. They bring in lady bugs to eat eggs of bugs that would otherwise kill crops, and they have 12 bee hives, not only to produce honey, but because the bees help pollinate plants. To keep seagulls away, they've set up an air cannon that fires at random times — the noise scares off the birds.

"I eat this stuff. I don't want it full of chemicals," said Alvarez as he munched on a bulb of garlic he'd just pulled out of the ground in the same way I'd eat an apple.

The farm right now is run by two full time employees, one part timer, and a few volunteers. Bashaw still works on the farm when he can — he was the one who drove the sheep from Virginia to their new home in Cape May. Alvarez says they hope to bring in a few interns this summer to give agriculture students real farm experience.

### **Beach Plum continues to expand**

This year, they're canning some of those fruits and vegetables so that the company's chefs can use that produce year round. A section near the farm stand has just been cleared so they can grow herbal teas. Bashaw says he wants to make blankets from the fleece of the new sheep, too.

"It's like a big cycle that goes around and around," said Alvarez. "Sometimes I'll be here from six in the morning until eight at night. I enjoy it. I don't want to leave." ■

