



CHRIS HARTMAN

Icon in the locally grown and movement spends his time doing good

CHRIS HARTMAN WEARS 'GOOD' ON HIS CHEST EVERY DAY. HARTMAN IS THE CREATOR OF HEADWATER FOODS, INC., THE PARENT COMPANY TO HIS OTHER BRAINCHILD—THE GOOD FOOD COLLECTIVE. AND WHEN HE GOES TO WORK HELPING BUILD RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE FARMING COMMUNITY AND THE COMMUNITY AT LARGE, HE DONS A GREEN APRON WITH FOUR CAPITAL LETTERS: G-O-O-D.

“When the history books are written, I wanna be in the paragraph, and hopefully it’s a whole chapter, but if it’s just a paragraph I wanna be in the part that was like, ‘Yeah, and there were people who were trying to create change,’” he says. “There were people that recognized the irresponsibility of certain systems or approaches.’ And we’re not pointing fingers or blaming or calling it out on bad or malicious people, but trying to rally the society to say, ‘We can be smarter than this. We can be more effective. We can be more durable, sustainable and nicer—we can be nicer than this.’ ... I wanna be in that group.”

Chris Hartman wants to be good, do good, teach good, live good and, of course, eat good. The Good Food Collective does a little bit of all of that, making the distribution of local goods simpler for farmers while enhancing the convenience factor for consumers who are strapped for time with jobs, families and life in general. A 1993 graduate of the Harley School (where he now teaches), Hartman grew up under the tutelage of his father, one of six boys to his farm-owning grandparents. The men before him were tinkerers who had a passion for figuring out how things worked and how they could work better. It was this culture of curiosity toward the physical world that first shaped him.

“As a kid early on with my grandfather and my uncles and my father, we were always engaged in some weird, interesting project,” Hartman says. “Building our own paddleboats, me and all my cousins, supported by my uncles, built a giant paddleboat out into the Finger Lakes, building three-story forts and sort of linking them all together, designing our own cross-Europe trip as kids. We were given a lot of support and scaffolding to do creative interesting things, and allowed to live with some independence and some leadership,

really unfold those, and, again, like we create here, taking on small challenges that sort of lead you to the next step.”

For Hartman, the next step was to Vassar College and a budding degree in physics. But like a lot of college students, he began to question his direction. Inspired by his farm and outdoorsy upbringing, Hartman took a semester to try the National Outdoor Leadership School, essentially a class where the seminar is given in the woods while students learn survival skills and discuss things such as environmental stewardship. Hartman “basically hiked in the Rockies and came back three months later.” He returned to Vassar with a new passion: teaching.

Hartman soon found himself with an internship at Sprout Creek Farm in Poughkeepsie that allowed him to put all of his passions to work. Run by a pair of nuns who were both former educators, the farm provided learning programs to locals who wanted to know more about where food comes from.

“It totally changed my life, and those women were and continue to be influences on me and what I’ve done and how I’ve done it, both as an educator and indeed as an entrepreneur and community organizer around food.”

Hartman’s impressive work as an intern earned him a job at Sprout Creek after college, where he embraced the opportunity to expand the farm’s learning programs, as well as the farm.

“When I started there, we were hand-milking two cows and we had a small flock of sheep, some chickens running around, some goats, a little orchard and a vegetable garden,” he says. “By the time I left eight years later after getting a handful of grants—some for a significant amount of money and other support—we were a seasonal, grass-based



organic dairy farm milking 50 cows in a state-of-the-art creamery making high-end cheeses that we were selling to New York City, as well as to our local Poughkeepsie population.”

All of this was done while living in a hand-built cabin with his now-wife and high school sweetheart, Vicki. They returned to Rochester 12 years ago and now raise their son, Quinn, 10, and daughter, Sawyer, 7, here. Having started the South Wedge Farmers Market together and now running Headwater Foods together, they often get confused for a family that eats only the healthiest meals.

“Our fridge, people often imagine that I’m some god of good-food eating,” Hartman says. “Just the other day I was going down the road eating. Someone picked me up either a Starbucks or Dunkin’ Donuts’ sausage, egg and cheese breakfast sandwich with a nasty gas station cup of coffee and I’m driving off to some meeting that I’m late for—I’m just like everyone.”

With his roots intertwined in farms and physics, environmental and social responsibility, Hartman has crafted a busy life that utilizes all of them. He is a farmer, not just of agriculture, but of human culture. He sows the seeds of collaboration, creativity, and curiosity into the soil of his students’ consciousness with the same project-oriented freedom of thought that has watered him since childhood. Whether they grow to become great farmers, great designers, or great engineers isn’t important to him. They just need to be good.

“I wanna be somebody who helps create change. I wanna be somebody that’s working in collaboration with really inspiring people helping to motivate me, and together we’re part of the group that’s trying for positive change.”

—Paul Gangarossa