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# Bill of Fare: Brick Farm Tavern thriving in Hopewell

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By **Susan Sprague Yeske | For The Times**

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You can check out the online menu for Brick Farm Tavern in Hopewell, but don't be surprised if when you visit it isn't quite the same. The tavern, which is a sister enterprise of the Brick Farm Market in Hopewell, changes its menu frequently, based on availability of meats, poultry and produce from its partner Double Brook Farm.

"Each week we determine which vegetables and meats are available," explains general manager Mike Lykens, so that executive chef can Greg Vassos can create his menu from that list.

Not every ingredient comes from Double Brook's 800 acres of land, which are farmed by Jon and Robin McConaughy, who also own both restaurants. But the amount is larger than most farm-to-table restaurants, which rely on local and regional farms for ingredients.

The tavern opened last November as a fine-dining extension of the more casual and already successful farm market, where customers buy their food cafeteria-style. The two businesses share their food supply and employees, Lykens said, so if you visited both you could conceivably find the same ingredients prepared in different ways.

The tavern is located in a handsome stone building that was a home until four years ago when the McConaughys bought it to convert into a restaurant. There is a casual, cozy bar, and a more elegant dining room with a fireplace.

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We started our meal with orders of pork belly, \$18, and gnocchi Bolognese, \$16. On the day we visited the pork came from Berkshire hogs raised at Double Brook.

The pork belly was pan-seared and served with a complementary brown butter apple puree, while the gnocchi were made in-house and served with a meaty tomato sauce and a side order of tender, flavorful short ribs.

From among the entrees we tried the New York strip steak, \$37, and pork loin, \$34. We asked for the steak to be cooked medium, and while it was very tender, it was redder than we preferred. If ordering it again, we could ask for medium well done.

Accompanying the steak were smoky potato croquettes and a mix of the vegetables available for the day. Since it is winter, that meant mostly root vegetables out of the farm's root cellar, cooked as a stew-like fricassee. Among the surprises of the day were rutabagas, a vegetable that is rarely seen at upscale restaurants.

The pork loin was enticing because it included another rare menu siting: homemade sauerkraut made from the farm's cabbages. Crisp and mildly briny, this was a rare treat and a nice complement to the pork which also came with the vegetables of the day.

Before and between meals the chef provided two amuse bouche; our favorite was a sample of the in-house blueberry sorbet, which had truly outstanding flavor. We easily could have eaten a full order of this wonderful treat.

An order of noodle custard, \$10, also was a big hit. The custard was rich and creamy and served with a lovely brown sugar ice cream that had a subtle flavor and texture. Served on a crunchy cookie, it really didn't need the long, thick noodle that straddled the dish.

Service at the tavern is exemplary; the well-trained and knowledgeable staff checked in just the right number of times despite the fact that the dining room was busy.

Fans of farm-to-table dining will find themselves very much at home at the Brick Farm Tavern, which strives to be as self-sufficient as any farm of 150 years ago. If you choose to go, reservations are strongly recommended, as this is a restaurant that has been filled with loyal customers since its opening.

### **Brick Farm Tavern**

**LOCATION:** 130 Hopewell Rocky Hill Road, Hopewell.

**CONTACT:** 609-333-9200.

**HOURS:** Open Wed.-Sun., 5-11 p.m., closed Mon.,Tue. Open Tuesdays beginning in the spring.

**CREDIT CARDS:** Most major.

**FOOD:** Very good farm-to-table seasonal cuisine.

**SERVICE:** Excellent.

**AMBIANCE:** This converted stone home has a cozy bar with exposed interior walls, and a more formal dining room with elements of an upscale hunting club.

**COST:** Starters \$10-\$18, entrees \$24-\$37, chef's tasting menus \$75-\$9 (wine additional).

**Full bar**

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