October 2015

From the Editor (Editor's Note)

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Recommended Citation
Boyle, Gerry (2015) "From the Editor (Editor's Note)," Colby Magazine: Vol. 104 : Iss. 2 , Article 21.
Available at: https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/colbymagazine/vol104/iss2/21

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I have to admit it. A couple of hours talking with Joel Alex ’08 made my head spin. Alex is the founder of Blue Ox Malthouse and one of several food-related Colby entrepreneurs featured in this magazine, (“They Care What You Eat?” P. 20). He’s started producing malt, the processed barley that is the main ingredient in one of Maine’s fastest growing products—craft beer. But when we spoke at the malthouse in Lisbon, Maine, Alex didn’t talk much about beer. He did talk a lot about environmental policy, sustainable development, decentralization of commodities, R&D grants, feasibility studies, business relationships, market research, business development, narrative writing, industrial design, driving a forklift, and the need for a new crop for Maine farmers.

“I’m a lifelong learner,” Alex said. Well, yeah.

He isn’t alone. Exploring the food- and sea-to-table world was an education itself, as Colbians traced the routes that led from Mayflower Hill to their respective callings. Without exception they showed that since Colby they hadn’t gathered any moss.

Laura Neale ’99 improvises with new crops on her farm, a community-supported agriculture initiative. Carter Newell ’77 uses his Ph.D. in marine biology to continuously refine the oyster business he runs with Smokey McKeen ’76. Robyn Wardell ’11 sees food as the linchpin of a movement to ease poverty and social disadvantage. Ben Rooney ’10 has proved the naysayers wrong by successfully growing rice in Maine—a farm-sized science experiment.

You can read and see more, both in this issue and in extended coverage online, that offers fascinating details.

My takeaway? These alumni, and many others like them in the food movement, left this educational greenhouse on the Hill with some of the tools to get the job done, and—more importantly—the ability to procure the rest.

Alex said his academic experience at Colby—with an environmental science and international studies double major—was really the study of relationships, crucial to what he does today. His capstone project was a report on the state of Maine’s environment. “I loved that class,” Alex said. “It was really, really hard, but it was immensely satisfying.”

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Managing Editor