

/ SAVE THE DATE /
FEBRUARY 18
BLUE RIBBON
BACON FESTIVAL
Des Moines, IA
 More than 12,000 pork lovers—many donning costumes that honor 2017's "The Good, the Bad, and the Bacon!" theme—will go whole hog at this kooky celebration of the other white meat in breakfast-strip form. Sponsored by the Iowa Bacon Board, the one-day event showcases snacks like bacon sushi and bacon ice-cream sandwiches. Winners of the dance-off at "Club Sizzle" earn \$500 and a year's supply of (what else?) bacon. (*General admission, \$25; blueribbonbaconfestival.com*)

/ WE DIG THIS /
 Sly shoppers, take notice: Twenty bucks buys this foxy canvas throw pillow. Yes, that amount includes the insert. And, nope, this bargain's not postage stamp-size, but a generous 18 square inches. (\$20; *worldmarket.com*)
 —Natalie Warady, contributing editor



Learn what's fresh, via text

An innovative app strengthens the farmer-consumer connection.

Most folks who grow up on unprofitable farms turn away from the family business. Simon Huntley, 33, decided to confront agriculture's inherent financial challenges head-on. Three years ago, Huntley, the computer-programmer son of Pennsylvania sheep ranchers, developed FarmFan, an app aimed at a major conundrum for many indie producers—namely, how to move enough merch, given limited farmers-market schedules.

The app allows farmers to text opt-in customers with market reminders; special discounts; and photos of the fruits, veggies, and meats available on any given day. "The idea is to

turn occasional browsers into regular shoppers by incentivizing repeat business," Huntley explains. As for the casual communication method: Stats show that 90 percent of texts are opened and read within three minutes of receipt, compared with 25 percent of emails and 4 percent of social media posts. Even better, texts don't require smartphones, a plus for flip phone-prone rural residents.

Nearly 27,000 consumers, or "Farm Fans," in 30 states have downloaded the free app and willingly given their cell numbers to the 100-plus participating purveyors and farmers markets, all of which pay a monthly fee of \$35 or more (depending on the number of patrons reached). "Texting is such a personal medium, because we're accustomed to using it with friends and family," says Huntley. It's a lucrative one, too, according to Art King of Harvest Valley Farms in Valencia, Pennsylvania. "Last year, my sales were 13 percent higher than the previous year, and I didn't do anything different other than use FarmFan," King says. "The app's a no-brainer. Any way you can improve your relationship with your customers will positively impact your bottom line." (*farmfanapp.com*) —Leena Trivedi-Grenier



WHAT WE'RE READING NOW

From cut flowers to compact farms, winter's best books will have you dreaming of spring.

100 Plants to Feed the Bees Anyone with a little outdoor space can lend honeybees a hand, thanks to this guide from the Xerces Society, which details the flowers, herbs, shrubs, and trees that attract these threatened pollinators. (\$17; *Storey*)

The Unsettlers Author Mark Sundeen weaves together the stories of three pioneering couples—organic vegetable growers in Montana, off-the-grid Missouri homesteaders, and urban farmers in Detroit—to explore what motivates so many of us to carve out a more sustainable existence. (\$26; *Riverhead*)

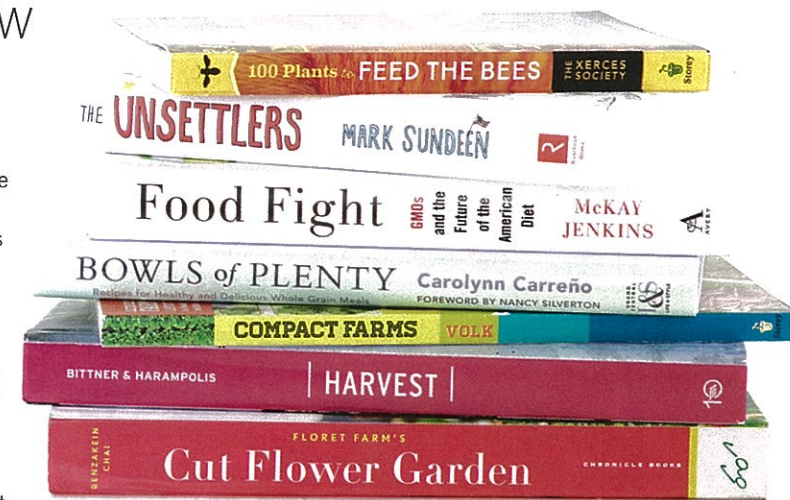
Food Fight This comprehensive look at genetically modified organisms balances the opinions of folks on all sides of the debate. Before your eyes glaze over, rest assured: Environmental reporter McKay Jenkins delivers a nuanced overview of the controversial topic, pushing beyond the science to cover the ripple effect GMOs have had on the global food system. (\$26; *Avery*)

Bowls of Plenty Whole grains provide the foundation for Carolynn Carreño's collection of more than 75 nutritious recipes. The James Beard Award-winning author layers toppings over quinoa, farro, millet, and more to create satisfying one-dish meals. (\$28; *Grand Central Life & Style*)

Compact Farms A huge proponent of small-scale agriculture, Oregon farmer Josh Volk outlines 15 case studies—real-life operations on five acres or less—that prove it's possible to make a living off very little land. (\$20; *Storey*)

Harvest Bay Area landscape designers Stefani Bittner and Alethea Haramopolis offer unconventional uses for nearly 50 garden plants. The duo's recipes for marigold bitters and calamint lip balm might inspire you to add a few new seeds to your list for spring. (\$22; *Ten Speed Press*)

Floret Farm's Cut Flower Garden Not just another pretty book of blooms, this practical manual by Erin Benzakein, the rock star behind Washington State's Floret Farm, covers arranging, sure, but also how to test soil, start seeds, plan a bed, and make money. (\$30; *Chronicle Books*) —M.M.W.



BARREL-AGED BEER

An unexpected offshoot of America's recent bourbon boom? Craft brewers have taken advantage of all the resulting whiskey-soaked casks to experiment with barrel-aged beer. Central Waters Brewing in Wisconsin makes the most "normal" one shown at left: **Brewer's Reserve Bourbon Barrel Scotch Ale** (\$14 for a four-pack of 12-ounce bottles) tastes like beer—malty and sweet, with a pleasantly bitter finish. **Mash** (\$21 for 750 milliliters), a butterscotchy barley wine from California-based The Bruery, is massive in both flavor and alcohol—about 13 percent, triple the level in most beers. Miraculously, Colorado's Avery Brewing manages to strike the right balance among the vanilla, cinnamon, cacao nibs, and chiles that inform its imperial stout **Xolotl** (\$13 for 12 ounces). Fruity and slightly tart, Shmaltz Brewing's **Chanukah in Kentucky** (\$13 for 22 ounces) is aged in Jim Beam and Heaven Hill casks. —James Rodewald



TOP: MONICA BUCK; BOTTOM: ANDRÉ DA LOBA.

MONICA BUCK