

materials to wholesalers and developers, but that only accounts for about 20% of the business today. The rest is retail landscaping and heirlooms. “We consider ourselves a boutique nursery,” Christ says.

Those components, however, aren’t all there is to Florence Farms. Kieler and Christ also operate a winery on the property, and they host weddings and other events in a restored 100-year-old barn they moved from Wisconsin, where Kieler grew up. While the winery serves wines made at vineyards elsewhere, much of the produce it serves is raised just steps away at the nursery. They’re also planning new facilities to expand the event-hosting business and a new line of salt-dried herbs that will be sold to restaurateurs and at retail.

Christ says the various businesses complement each other. The winery enhances the offerings for event attendees, all the while showing off Florence Farm’s produce. “We created the gardens around the barn [using plants] out of the nursery so it could double as a backdrop for weddings and for people who were shopping in the nursery,” he says. The gardens create a lush setting for events and allow customers to see what plants grow in shade or sun.

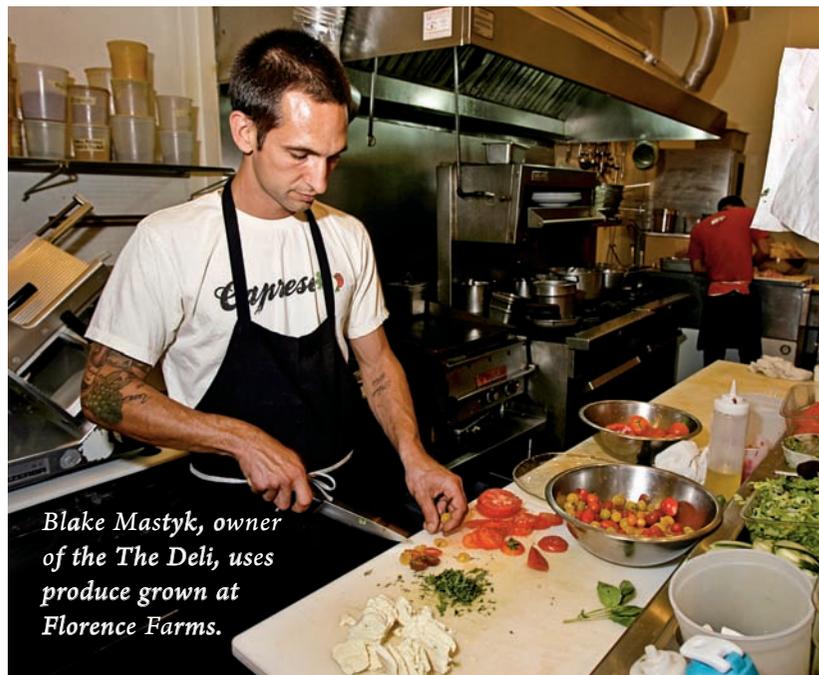
Noting the land that Florence Farm now occupies was once used as a dairy and the barn’s connection to Midwestern agriculture, Christ says, “We’re a unique venue that’s also attempting to preserve agricultural history. It’s just a different environment from practically anything else in this area.”

It’s a reinvention, if you will, of the standard nursery. “A nursery in this economy would not do it,” says Christ. “I don’t think any piece of it [as a stand-alone] would. It’s that diversification and how these different disciplines of winery, wedding, nursery and vegetables work together.”

“I’ve been fortunate that I’ve had opportunities in other businesses. Don’t get me wrong, I really liked them, but Katie and I have found something here that’s special. It’s funny that after the other ventures, I’ve come back in some ways to my roots, and I’m providing others the chance to experience a working farm, too.” **FL**

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Read more and see photos of the 100-year-old barn Florence Farms restored and moved some 1,900 miles. Visit go.myfarmlife.com/florencefarms.



Blake Mastyk, owner of the The Deli, uses produce grown at Florence Farms.



A Great Little Workhorse

FLORENCE FARMS NURSERY OWNER Harold Christ is in awe of his Massey Ferguson 235. “It was the first tractor we acquired here ... so, it’s done everything. I mean it has loaded trucks. It has cleaned up. We use it all day harvesting palm trees, pulling trailers. It is literally the jack of all trades. It’s had nine lives just because of how we’ve utilized it.”



MASSEY FERGUSON

In addition to that hardiness and versatility, it’s also easy to use, says Christ about the tractor he purchased from Empire Agriculture in Casa Grande, Ariz. “It’s very simple and useful, and a lot of equipment isn’t. We were just working on something yesterday, using an off-brand—a name I won’t mention—and, gosh, we were on and off and on and off trying to get things hooked up. That’s not the case with the Massey. The hydraulics are quick and implements are easy to hook up.”

“Really,” Christ says, “it’s just a great little workhorse for an operation like ours.”