

For now, the would-be farmers are cooped inside, without land to harvest or baby chicks to feed. They are optimistic that will change.

Between stops at nearby assessors' offices and scans of satellite maps to hunt land — and an owner willing to lease acreage — John has started a weekly podcast to bolster his agricultural acumen and small business know-how. The "Growing Farms" podcast launched this month, and features a farmer each week offering advice as the Suscoviches seek to start their farm.

Above audio recording equipment and their home computer, a rainbow-hued postcard hangs on a bulletin board imploring: "Life is a journey, not a destination." On a bookshelf rests "How to Cook Everything." Combining elements of the Internet age with a low-tech activity is nothing new for the couple.

**THREE YEARS AGO, THE 2007** University of Connecticut graduates lived in New York City. He worked as a lighting technician for Howard Stern's TV show. She worked as an educator, and on her master's degree.

"It was there that we both got into food," said Kate, describing how farmers' markets led to work with urban farms. "It just spiraled out of control."

Echoed John: "It took the pressure of an urban environment to draw us out to a more rural lifestyle."

As John tells it, he could not envision decades performing the same work, earning the same salary. The gig was fun, the Naugatuck native said, but he wanted something different from life. He wasn't sure what.

A college friend who left the corporate world to work on an organic farm in Washington's San Juan Islands invited John for a visit in 2009. John read "The Omnivore's Dilemma," about the pitfalls of the industrialized food system, on the plane. He called the trip life changing.

"Not only to be digging something out of the ground and taste how good it was but ... that sense of community," recalled the former Boy Scout who dabbled in various trades.

The following summer, John planned bicycling trips to volunteer at farms within 350 miles of New York. The couple became smitten with farm life.



CONTRIBUTED

John Suscovich of New Milford strikes a celebratory pose in front of a fire after clearing brush at Devon Point Farm in Woodstock, where he and his wife were apprentices for much of 2012.



CONTRIBUTED

Kate Suscovich of New Milford tends to some plantings at Devon Point Farm in Woodstock last year.

Cyclist" as a way to update friends and family on their activities. The organic diet left them feeling better physically and just-dug food tasted delicious, they said

In 2011, the athletic couple embarked on cross-country biking "trip of self discovery," including explorations in farming and craft beers. Through a website devoted to volunteer

opportunities on organic farms, they arranged stops along the way. They lined up sponsors and created jerseys with their logos for the ride. About 5,000 miles, one sandstorm and many adventures later, the couple reflected on their experiences.

"We looked at the people who were happiest doing what they were doing ... it was farmers, so we knew we wanted to develop a life around that," said John.

From early summer through late fall, John and Kate spent up to 16 hours a day working at Woodstock's Devon Point Farm. They received a stipend to do everything from clear brush to oversee a farm camp. The apprenticeship enabled them to learn agriculture industry skills like efficient crop management and marketing, they said.

In Connecticut, the outlook for farming appears mixed. Advocates lament the continued loss of farmland at a rate estimated at 8,000 acres annually. Reports on agriculture in Connecticut cite a rise not only in the average age of the state's farmers — 55 in 2008 — but also a rising interest in farming by younger generations, and consumers.

The same 2008 report noted Connecticut's farms, though small at 85 acres on average, are "repositioning to take advantage of several new consumer trends" including the eat-local movement and a 33 percent annual growth in state agriculture tourism.

### THE SUSCOVICHES REALIZE

they face many challenges. Farming is hard, physically demanding work. Profit margins can be slim. Uncontrollable forces like Mother Nature can wreak havoc in the span of a torrential downpour. Despite warnings of its pitfalls, the couple said as long as they keep well fed, happy and comfortable, they would consider their farming successful. Kate hopes to integrate educational programs in their farming future.

Said John: "They say it's hard work and you don't make any money. I consider myself middle class and I don't know anybody who's not working hard and making little money. ... It's really an assessment of values and what you want out of life."

As John podcasts and searches for land, Kate tutors and substitute teaches. Their first baby is due in July. They hope that 2013 sees them raising chicks and herbs, alongside their child.