



and Saturday, June through October, farmers set up stalls in a field at Ashlawn Farm and hundreds shop every week, many also visiting the coffee shop.

Dahlke buys her green coffee beans from a New York distributor, in 130-pound burlap bags. There is a wide variety, from Africa, Asia, Central America and South America. They are all organic, which she says is important since many countries where the beans are grown don't have strict restrictions on pesticides.

The decaffeinated coffee is made with a water process that extracts the caffeine without using chemicals.

Dahlke roasts the beans in a big red machine installed behind the coffee bar, a roaster that runs on propane. They are heated to 400 degrees, for 15 to 20 minutes.

She's been developing new recipes, adjusting the roasting times according to aroma, color and taste, and now offers about 12 varieties of coffee.

But Dahlke said flavored coffees, which are created by adding syrups, are becoming less popular these days. She says she offers them because some customers still ask for them.

The Asian coffees, which she describes as full bodied, with an almost wine-like acidity, are growing more popular. Sumatra and Timor are big Asian sellers.

Everything is bagged with an expiration date, and after a few weeks anything that is not fresh enough to be sold retail goes on a markdown shelf. She also will replace any expired coffee from her commercial customers, to be sure everything sold to the public is farm fresh.

There is now one employee, Hiram Maxim, a neighbor and the town's historian, who commutes across the fields on an ATV. She plans to hire one more person this summer, for deliveries.

The wholesale side of the business now accounts for about 50 percent of total sales. Some places that serve Ashlawn Farm Coffee include Flanders Fish Market in East Lyme, Goodspeed Opera House in East Haddam, Smith's Acres in Niantic, Old Lyme Ice Cream Shoppe, Lymes' General Store in Old Lyme, and Thames River Greenery in New London.

A lot of customers just drop by on their way to work. One celebrity customer is writer Dominick Dunne, who lives nearby. This year they plan to expand the shop, adding tables and baked goods.

Dahlke said she currently has about 20 wholesale customers, for whom she provides coffee-making machines. She says she's not out marketing right now for new wholesale customers and would prefer for the business to grow slowly.

"It's nice to grow at this pace," she says. "But there is certainly a demand out there for good local products." ■



Sean D. Elliot

*Maxim and truck driver Vin Barnett haul a load of coffee beans into the barn.*



Sean D. Elliot

*At Ashlawn Farms in Lyme, coffee is fresh roasted daily and sold from a coffee shop in one of the farm's big red barns.*