



The Producer

California's avocado country is miles—and worlds—away from the bright lights of New York City's theater district, but Patty Grubman never met a project she couldn't turn into a hit. **BY NANETTE27**

From Broadway shows to summer camps to luscious avocados, Patty Grubman just knows how to make good things grow.

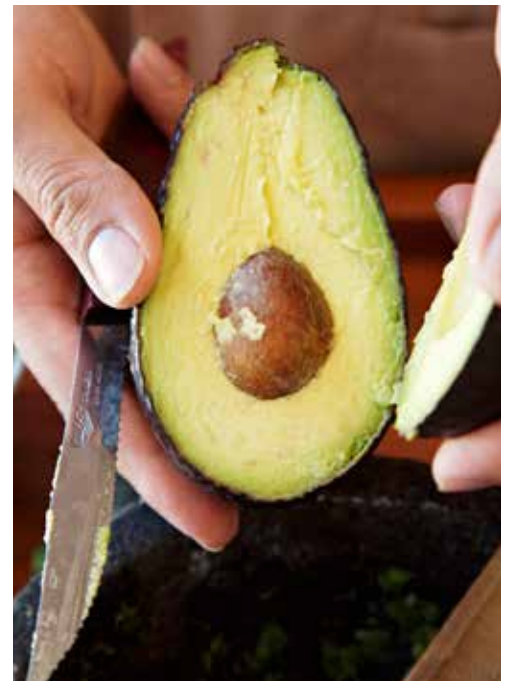
She owns and operates a 2,000-tree avocado orchard in Ventura County, the heart of California's avocado and lemon country. She also sells skin cream, soap, honey, and other goods made with the fruits of her farm. But that's not all. This accidental farmer and former Broadway producer also planted the seeds for what's now a bumper crop of summer camps for children with life-threatening illnesses.

The camps, the orchard, and the avocado products Patty sells online and at The City Farm in Somis, California, are all part of how she pays her good fortune forward. "I want to share my small slice of the country," Patty says, "because it has changed my life."

Country living was not in the original script for this Beverly Hills native. She got her start, back in the late '70s and early '80s, producing Broadway shows. With hits including Bob Fosse's *Dancin'* and the drama *Bent* (which starred a young Richard Gere), Patty's New York theater career was going gangbusters.



In addition to seven different varieties of avocados, Patty sells a rich, citrusy, and slightly nutty Avocado Honey (\$16 for a 16-ounce jar at thecityfarm.com). It doesn't contain avocado, but it's made by the bees who sip nectar from blossoms on Patty's avocado trees and in the lemon groves that dot the surrounding Ventura County, California, countryside.



But a trip home to Los Angeles took her in an entirely different direction. "A friend told me about a camp that Cedars-Sinai Medical Center was running for kids with cancer," Patty says. "When I saw the work they were doing, I knew I had to get involved."

That's just what producers do, of course: get involved and make things happen. What they don't usually do

is give up their Broadway careers to work with nonprofit organizations or to plant avocado trees. "It wasn't on the big screen," Patty says of her new role, "but it was certainly brighter."

Producers also like to have their own show. Before long, Patty and her brother, L.A. businessman Billy Grubman, launched a foundation of their own to bring similar

camps to a wider audience.

For 27 years, their Dream Street Foundation has run free summer camps for kids with severe health issues, from cancer to blood disorders. Arts and crafts, horseback riding, cooking, dancing, and all kinds of outdoor activities are on the agenda, along with around-the-clock medical services for children who might not otherwise be able to

experience summer camp. From a single summer session in California, the Dream Street camps soon expanded to New Jersey, Mississippi, Arkansas, and Arizona (at the Canyon Ranch resort, no less). They now reach more than 800 children and young adults each summer.

As the camps took off, Patty began to crave a little more of the country life for her own children and her miniature horses stabled in L.A. She went in search of a real farm where her kids, now 14 and 16, and the horses could roam.

That's when she found the property in Somis that would become her next production: The City Farm. "I've always gardened, and I love working with my bare hands in the soil," Patty says. "But this place was in terrible shape." The existing avocado orchard was so overgrown and untended, she wasn't sure she could save it.

She and her crew spent two years digging a well for irrigation. They planted an additional 1,000 Hass/Dusa trees—Hass avocados grafted onto a hardy, rot-resistant rootstock known as Dusa. Patty and her children began spending part of the year at the farm, and the trees eventually began producing fruit again and weathering the whims of California weather.

In 2012, a storm blew down 4,000 pounds of fruit. Last year, however, her farm team harvested 160,000 pounds of avocados. "Picking is a back-breaking job," notes Patty, who says City Farm workers earn a wage that's higher than average for most seasonal workers. "They work so hard,

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Clockwise, from top left: The Dream Street camps that Patty and her brother launched provide kids with cancer or other disorders a week in the great outdoors—complete with pony rides. Another of Patty's productions: handmade soaps infused with avocado oil (\$12 for two at thecityfarm.com). Miniature horses greet City Farm visitors and make field trips to schools.

CAMP PHOTOS: COURTESY OF DREAM STREET FOUNDATION



Picking avocados is back-breaking work, and wheeled baskets help with the harvest. The orchard at The City Farm produces up to 80 tons of avocados a year. Unlike many other fruits, avocados don't begin to ripen until they are picked.

and they deserve decent compensation.”

In 2008, Patty opened a store on the property and started thecityfarm.com website. At both, she sells products made from the orchard's bounty—a rich, molasses-like avocado honey made with avocado-blossom nectar (“I love it just slathered on bread or apples,” Patty says), an avocado-infused soap, and even an avocado-oil hand cream. There are buttery homemade caramels and big chewy gumballs, too, along with home goods and pantry items that Patty has sourced from other purveyors she loves.

The best part? Ten percent of the farm's proceeds go to charitable organizations such as the Alzheimer's Association and, of course, the cause that brought Patty back to California: the Dream Street camps and the kids they serve.

Amid the swimming lessons and games, the Dream Street campers meet in small groups to share their experiences. “They talk about issues—about death, scars from treatments, and radiation. When you're sitting there listening to a child talk about all they've been through,” says Patty, “it puts everything in perspective.”

It's one reason that, while meals served at the camps are healthy, snack shops at each camp offer kid-friendly food that Patty describes as “just plain fun”—hot dogs, pizza, and candy. “The kids constantly get medicine and lots of other things they don't want,” Patty says, “so I want to indulge them, to make them have a magical week.”

And that, she says, is the production of a lifetime.