



Farm Notes

CSA Newsletter

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PVF East Open House: Delicious, Delightful

by Michael Lipsky

We had an unusually robust turnout this year -- about eighty people attended the annual Open House, including children who had come to past events in utero, parents of CSA members who happened to be visiting, and one or two stand customers who wandered back to the CSA area to see what the fuss was all about, and helped themselves to lemonade, chips and salsa.

Sunday afternoon in late summer at the farm has a certain routine. The stand enjoys a steady stream of customers for sweet corn and tomatoes. The truck from the Takoma Park farmers'

We are thrilled to announce that Becky and David are brand new parents!! We welcome Rowan Elizabeth Durst, born on September 4, 2013, healthy and perfect.

7 lbs. 11 oz, 20 inches. Being a team player, Rowan politely timed her arrival for after Labor Day weekend was over, allowing her mom to work at the Reston Farmers Market on Saturday and both her parents to come to the Open House on Sunday.

market rolls in about 3:30 to be unloaded. Zach Lester arrives after the Dupont Circle market is over, bringing vegetables for the CSA from his Tree and Leaf farm in Orange, VA, and from Next Step Produce farm in Newburg, MD.

About 2:30 on this particular Sunday, the farm demonstrated the nimbleness for which it is famous (in an admittedly small circle) when this routine was interrupted by Hana and the very pregnant Becky and others transforming the CSA area into an event venue, laying out space for the snacks guests would bring, creating a welcome table for filling out nametags, and generally making a festive environment in a space usually reserved for bagging vegetables. Many guests brought treats, and Mom's Apple Pie donated sheets of pastries and mini-quiches.

We hooked up a tractor and trailer for a continuous loop hayride to our five acre field on the other side of the former Moutoux Orchard, now the neighborhood of Maymont. Hiu, the original farmer, rode along so she could point out the highlights along the way and answer questions. We also created a self-guided tour of the farm as an active alternative to waiting for a hayride in the 90 degree heat. Visitors took a walk up the hill to the greenhouse and beyond, and learned about the ginger, spinach and kale, our pigs and chickens, and the bee hives that a neighbor keeps in our fields.

The self-guided tour seemed to be popular. Looking ahead, if any of our CSA customers has experience developing audio tours like those found in museums, we would appreciate hearing from you.



Notes from Behind the Stand: Diary of a New Farm Worker

by David Smyth

I wandered over to the Reston Farmers Market one Saturday and offered to help Michael and Thera pack up at the end. Her Ladyship asked me to put the concrete bucket weights into the van. I tried in vain to pick one up with two hands. To my utter shame, she grabbed one in each hand and calmly walked over to the van with them. Have been practicing carrying them whenever I have a quiet moment. She will not prevail! It will be a long time before I challenge her to arm wrestling.

Was told to be wary of any female staff whose first names ended in A. Alas, nearly all of their names end in A! No one ever warned me what to do if it also started with A. Was first introduced to Becky. Next Beck-A, who promptly disappeared. Can't wait to meet Beck-B, Beck-C and Beck-D.

Even Bletchly Park staff gave up trying to crack the PVF secret road sign code, as described in each nightly work assignment email. Google Earth is way out of date showing the various parts of the farm. Once, I had to ask: What's a leek? when asked to weed the Driveway leek bed.

I was asked to try my hand at weeding one "row" of some flower crop. "Someone" was very quiet about the row having a weedy left and a weedy right side, plus a weedable middle row to boot, each with an average length 50 yards.

After washing my 1,500th green baskets and 100th Pig Food buckets, I am expecting promised promotion from Farm Foot to Farm Hand. Cart driving lessons: some painful progress. Prefer using my own vehicle, which no one should ever get confused over.

Get to look after the Hens. All are called Dorothy, so I won't miss the one whose real name is, say, Amelia, if she "moves on" to greener pastures...

In submitting an estimated time to weed the black berries, I did the math based on the length of nearest row, about 30 yards long. However, the last row turned out to be twice as long. Plus I forgot the weeds were on both sides. My estimate was based on a tight square which turned out to be a humongous trapezium. I am grateful to Kay and Brad for bailing me out of my estimate.

Google is useless for understanding farm lingo: Pony, Skitwam, Stand, "Cheese", Hoopy Houses, Underwater Coolers, among other expressions.

If you thought plucking eye brows/eye lashes (always get these mixed up) was a pain, try thinning beets without tweezers.

The "Small job" to get mud off two yellow concrete parking blocks was later listed as power wash the Parking Lot.

Satori, Amani and Emma have found anagrams of their names: Ratios/Mania/Meam. The letters in Amelia's name can be rearranged into the unlikely expression: "I a male". Thera can be rearranged into Earth(!), and Carrie into Racier. Hana is not a US Scrabble word.

Just found out why the dear hens I look after and which I had called all "Dorothy", totally ignore me when I talk to them. Apparently, Hiu had previously named them all Henrietta.

Picture the view from my 3-walled office: a convoy of golf carts, loaded with harvested produce, coming home over the hill near the blackberry bushes, followed by the Stand staff call to 'Action Stations'. This scene reminded me of the opening scenes of MASH, when the

helicopters are seen flying in over the hill with the casualties from the battle field and the medical staff are similarly called to action. My action: fill the bathtub and prepare for carrot battle.

It's a really sad day when red wine vinegar costs more than the original red wine bought for sole purpose of trapping a few fruity flies.

When I Come to the Farm
by Leah Fenster

The farm is a beautiful
place to be.
There are so many things to
see.
There are the blackberries
And the pigs
There's lots of garlic,
But no figs!
There's lots of tomatoes
That taste like the sun
And picking them is even
more fun.
I like to stuff them in my
mouth
To make the juice come
squirting out.
We saw the new fields cov-
ered with soy
Those fields are too tough,
they won't grow bok choy.
We walked around the farm
looking for bees
But found the huge pile of
compost, higher than our
knees.
When I come to the farm, I
love to pick
But the summer is going by
fast, so you better come
quick!

Weariness of the Watermelon Lifting Worker

By Amelia Gavurin

When I was ten, my mother told me that frequently knocking over glasses of water was just me getting used to how long my arms were. When I dropped three plates of spaghetti at a buffet when I was fourteen, it was “just another growth spurt.”

Well, I am now nineteen years old and although one doesn't need a ballerina's grace to work on a farm, I still manage to embarrass myself on a daily basis. I'm leggy 5 foot 7 inches and work on a farm where the average worker's height is 5 foot 4. They are what I consider to be perfectly packaged individuals, they are strong and agile and compact. And I look a bit like an orangutan.

My long legs and lack of coordination spun me in the direction of track and cross-country in my high school days. Good ol' fashioned cardio, it's great for keeping the body nice and lean but let me tell you how much it helps you on a farm. Not. At. All. Farm work is all about the muscles. It's about squatting and lifting crates of watermelon (Yeah, you know those little ones that are so tiny and cute? Imagine 10 in a crate and 4 or 5 crates being hoisted into vans and out of vans and into vans and out of vans. Not so cute.)

Farm work is about bending and hoisting and pulling and pushing. Farm work is not easy for a cardio loving runner. Oh my heart may be healthily pumping oxygen to my tiny but hardworking muscles, but those muscles just can't pick up the slack. I imagine that the following conversation occurs between my heart and my muscles when lifting a crate of potatoes:

Heart: “Okay guys, you've been preparing for this all season, you started with chard and now you're here, the big time. PO-TAY-TOES!”



Muscles: *groaning*

Heart: “OKAY, on the count of three, I'm gonna send you guys oxygen, and all you have to do is lift! I'm here spotting you!”

Muscles: *groaning*

Heart: “One... Two....Three! GO GO GO GO GO THIS IS YOUR TIME!”

Muscles: *snapping* *crackling* *popping* *slowly working* *in pain but pushing through*

Heart: “AND....RELEASE! Great job guys, take a breather while Amelia walks to the cooler to get Becky some corn.”

Muscles: *groaning*

I know I've probably become a

lot stronger, but it's like running every day and then huffing and puffing up a flight of stairs. It never gets easier. There is always something higher to drag down, and something heavier to lift up. There is always that little voice in my head that says “Hana carried two crates at once, so I can too!” As my second summer at PVF comes to a close, I acknowledge that the job never really got easier. More predictable? Maybe. But never easier. That being said, anyone who takes this job doesn't expect or even enjoy things that come too easily. It's the challenge that makes it worth it.

Notes from the Stand

Zen and the Art of Tomato Table Maintenance

by Amani Greene

Red. Pink. Yellow.
Green. Heirloom.
Celebrity. Zebra.

It is hard to keep track of all the different varieties and their names, so I keep them in color groups. You may have noticed that the tomato table tends to have bars of color. If you shop at the stand, you will also know that the red tomatoes are on a different table from the other colors. That is because we have more red ones. Every time I have a stand shift, one of the first things I do is to re-stock the tomato tables. It is one of the first things people notice when walking into the stand, so the tomatoes tend to go very fast. It's a little hard to watch

your beautiful creation get little holes and giant gaps poked in it, knowing that as soon as the customers leave you'll have to refill them.

At first, I try to keep them perfect as long as possible by quickly refilling the gaps, but as the flow of customers picks up, I have less free time to devote to my tomatoes. Once or twice I have realized that almost half of the tomatoes are gone and have rushed to the rescue with a pre-sorted basket, refilling it as fast as I could. Other times, when no one is there, the red tomato table is nice and full and then I can move on to the other tomato table: checking all the tomatoes already on the table, sorting them into colors, and



then refilling the gaps. The multi-colored table is a little easier because it has the giant heirlooms on it, which take up the space of two or three regular-sized tomatoes. And then once that table is perfect, there is always

another customer who has taken some red tomatoes or a couple colored ones and the job begins again.

Sorting and filling the tomato table is a repetitive motion that occasionally sinks me into a meditative state. My mind wanders freely as I inspect tomatoes and put them to one side, keeping the seconds in a basket away from the others. Even though I know that it is a task that never ends, I don't mind. I like the way that I can be in my own world while still keeping an eye on the customers walking around the stand. It is hard to be on a constant quest for the perfect tomato table, and then to have it taken away in an instant, but I will continue to try.

