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The 2012 Farm Olympics: PVF Wins Gold

by Rebecca Groisser

Even the threat of the grey storm clouds looming overhead did not prevent the occurrence of the most highly anticipated sporting event of the century: The Farm Olympics (in no way affiliated with the Olympic Games, so if you happen to be an official for the organization, please don't sue).

Host, organizer, and orchard owner Rob Moutoux was the reigning champion in multiple categories; he is known for his ridiculously high bale toss and his fearless tractor backing. His legend will not be forgotten with time, as he claimed gold in both events once again. There was some discussion over penalizing Moutoux for familiarity with equipment, as it was his own tractor that was used, but the committee concluded that

it was an easy tractor so there was nothing to complain about, and this was the last event before the pot-luck so we should all just shut up if we ever wanted to get food.

But Moutoux was challenged every step of the way, primarily by young up-and-comer Aaron Whitehead, son of PVF-West manager emerita Ellen Polishuk. Whitehead, only 16 years old, tied Moutoux for gold in the hay bale toss and may or may not have edged him out in the sprint (a complication in the form of a PVF-East pickup truck in the path was cause for ambiguity). Whitehead probably won something else also, but this reporter spent some time sneaking into the kitchen to eat vinegar-soaked fried potatoes and missed some stuff.

The tarp setup remains PVF-East's strongest event, with our team of young suburban professionals working in perfect synchrony to have the market tarp set up and taken down while the other groups were still working on attaching the



Rob Moutoux clears the high bar.

corners to the poles (no, you don't have to understand the significance of that, just understand that it was a truly humiliating defeat for the other teams. Although we can't really blame them, as PVF-East was a team of cousins that have been going to market together since they were 13 years old, so it really isn't fair to the others).

The potato relay was another solid PVF-East victory, due in strong part to the fact that we were the only team not to trip and spill our potatoes onto the ground.

But PVF-East did not have quite as dominant a victory in the basket



Bradford and Giusti win gold in the basket stacking event.

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PVF History — Loudoun Farm 1992 to 1998 : Sixth in a 12-Part Series

by guest writer **Ellen Polishuk**

I worked at PVF, commuting from my parent's house in Reston, the summers of 1981, 83, 84 and spring of 85. The first two seasons helped me decide to leave UVA for Va Tech to pursue a degree in Horticulture. I was lured back to PVF in the fall of 1991, when I was visiting Hana and the farm. I was complaining about how I couldn't figure out how I was ever going to farm (on my own) as I didn't have any land or equipment or the money to buy either. She countered with an offer to move to the Loudoun property and manage it for PVF. I took the offer.

1992 was the first year we planted something other than corn or beans or pumpkins on the Loudoun farm. I planted 1000 tomato plants — we didn't harvest one fruit as the deer ate every one! This was the first of many speed bumps — we learned about the need for deer fencing. All the other speed bumps were related to my inexperience and the lack of infrastructure here in Wheatland. There were two gas powered, tricycle front end, non 3 point hitch Oliver tractors, two disks and a corn planter. That was it. No plow, no cultivator, not even a fuel tank. The barns and sheds were full of manure and garbage — I mean FULL, like no usable space! No coolers, no irrigation, nothing but vast fields. My mandate was to grow 15-20 acres of chemical sweet corn, and anything else was up to me.

The Newcombs paid to build me a house to live in, which was completed

in 1993. I was unhappy with using chemicals to grow the sweet corn, so we quickly began the transition to all organic out here too (PVF East was certified organic in 1990). PVF poured money into buying tractors, implements, and other infrastructure so this farm could become more diverse and functional. In 1995 we invested in our state of the art composting facility (compost pad, turning machine, compost covers, skid loader). This was a major commitment to our determination to improve the soil and crops and to do it organically.

My son Aaron was born in 1996. A colleague farmer from NJ who needed a farm to land on moved into my house that winter to help me farm while I was pregnant and mothering. Heinz Thomet brought with him vast experience and knowledge from a lifetime of farming. During this period we invested heavily in more specialized vegetable growing equipment. We tackled reclaiming the barns and sheds so there were roofs over that equipment. We rearranged the size and shape of the fields, planted windbreaks, built a bridge over a creek, upgraded irrigation and deer fence, built a cooler. And Heinz helped me learn how to grow all kinds of vegetables really well — celeriac, carrots, potatoes etc.

In those early years, my produce went all to PVF East to get sold at the stand or added to the loads heading to markets. I slept at Hana's house on Friday nights before Arlington market. In about 8 years time this farm transitioned from 25 acres of chemically grown sweet corn, to 40+ crops grown organically.



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stacking competition, losing the first heat in a tragic upset. Fortunately, Michael Bradford and teammate David Giusti took the second heat, and went on to win by a narrow margin in the final round. Jesse Bradford, a loser of the first heat, claims that it was an

issue of strategy rather than speed that kept his team from victory.

Hana Newcomb took bronze in the tractor backing and did pretty well in the women's bale throwing. Her most memorable moment was the unsportsmanlike trash-talking while watching the tarp setup, notably her calls of “Have

your guys ever done this before?” to Polishuk. Polishuk, still glowing from her perfect finish in the weed identification event, neglected to respond.

Oh yeah, and there was also a triathlon, but since PVF didn't perform very well in that event, we neglected to cover it.

Raccoon Tale

by Michael Bradford

"What are you planning on doing with it once you catch it?" each one of my family members asked incredulously. To each person I gave the same response: "I'll cross that bridge when it comes."

A raccoon had been making himself at home in my house, which is not very separate from nature (it's a shed, built in the 70s for workers). I encountered him late last summer in my kitchen at night, and then again when I came back from college early this year he was living in my walls and I chased him off. He was a nightly visitor, chewing through anything that looked like it might contain food, including one of my VHS tapes.

I know you're probably thinking that I should just plug up the raccoon sized holes in my house. Easier said than done: they're crafty creatures and I have a lot of holes. I'm sure that he could figure out how to open up my door, which swings open without a doorknob. Anyway, I first attempted to trap him the classic way: with a box, a stick, and a string. I ran the string through a pulley attached to the back of a black crate and tied it tightly to a bag with bread in it, with two cinder blocks on top. The trap was sprung the first night in operation, but it was on a table and he managed to push it to the edge and sneak out. I fixed this flaw, securing the edges of the table, and the next night it was sprung again, but with no raccoon inside. He had figured out my trap and wouldn't be fooled again. I was having a blast designing this

trap myself, but I knew it wasn't going to work anymore so I asked my grandma to get me a real professional cage trap and she obliged. I set it with some bread inside for bait and went to bed.

I had trouble going to sleep that night. I was excited by the thought of finally catching this creature which had been pestering and evading me for so long. I was like a little boy on Christmas Eve; I thought about the moment when I would see him in the trap and I would go up to him and triumphantly announce "Ha! You're finished! You knew this day would come and yet you still kept eating my food, and now your greed has undone you!"

By the following morning, however, Santa hadn't come. Nor did he come the next day, or the one after that. In the mean time I caught two squirrels, or maybe one stupid squirrel twice. It was very frightened, clawing frantically at the cage. I know it had probably caused me some trouble, but I just don't think of squirrels as vermin, so I let it go.

The raccoon had caught on to my ways, and I was beginning to think that it would be impossible to catch him. I upped the ante by putting some sardines in the cage. Nothing. Then I went away to spend the night on another farm. Apparently my absence was encouragement enough, because I came back the next afternoon and saw my prize waiting on the ground in the cage.

"I've been expecting you," I said out loud. Yet those words I had planned, my triumphant diatribe,

seemed completely inappropriate now. Unlike the squirrel, this raccoon was sitting peacefully, calmly. He wasn't frightened or angry, he just seemed sad. I moved him outside and he slowly rolled on his back, trying to squeeze through the side of the shut door. I looked at his belly and discovered to my horror that this raccoon was definitely female. I imagined for a second that she might have kids to feed, waiting patiently back home...

I sat with the raccoon and tried to explain why I caught her, why she couldn't go home, why she would probably have to die soon. I of course know full well she couldn't understand me, but I felt that I needed to explain myself. Nothing was good enough for her though; she kept calmly trying to get out of the cage. I gave her a couple more sardines as a show of good will, but she wouldn't eat. She just wanted to be free and go home.

So now the end to this adventure which I expected to be felt with sweet triumph is not even bittersweet, it's just bitter. Nevertheless, I made up my mind and I killed her, quick and clean. It is a tough fact I must learn to live with that many things have to die so that we may live. It would be dishonest of me to deny this, to release her far away pretending that she wouldn't find her way back or eat someone else's food, or become rabid and attack someone's dog. I wonder if any of you think that what I did was wrong. If so I wouldn't mind hearing from you.

What's in PVE-West's Picnic Basket?

Squash Pickles

by Ashley See, Ethan Strickler, and Amy Halloran

The sun had set, laying the hot grass to sleep in a lavender blanket. Ethan emerged from the darkness of the trees, walking with the stealth of a jungle cat as he entered the squash patch. The zucchinis and patty pans hid under giant leaves, shying away from the foreign presence. Ethan marched on, his steps deliberate. He sought the thing his heart most desired, the thing he had waited for all day long — The Magda.

There she lay in the dusky night, too big to hide, too proud to bother. Ethan had known she was the one from day one, but it was only after his fellow farmers had retired to their sleepy dinners that he could creep into the squash patch to take, for once, something for himself. The hours before had been torture as he watched others slash and collect the gorgeous green goddesses and even worse when they threw the overgrown beauties into the mush of mulch. Now, he picked not from the plant, but from the ground and cradled the obese undesirables. He stuffed every last one into his bushel, his shirt, his pockets. Not one would be left behind.

As he walked home, he rejoiced. Once the field had been filled with what would become rotting squash and now his hands were full of bounty. Yet, one little piece of the plan had been left untouched. He furrowed his eyebrows and moved steadily toward the kitchen as he pondered how he could possibly cook so much squash.



From left: Ashley, Ethan, and Amy.

It was then that the jug of vinegar was placed before it. You see, this wasn't the first time Ethan had foraged for the unwanted in the wee hours, so mountains of Magdas and their departed cousins lay about. In a fury of what needed using, and a burning desire for clean countertops, Ashley took on an "I can pickle that!" attitude. Two hours and several jars later there wasn't a raw cucumber in sight. It was then she spied Ethan's beloved stack of Magdas...

After an exhausting day in the field, Amy was feeling particularly hungry. On this day, her appetite grew and grew as she transitioned from thinning beets, to planting brassicas, and finally to harvesting magda, zephyr, and pattypan summer squash.

She went to the refrigerator in search of something quick and refreshing. There she noticed two jars of assorted squash, freshly pickled a night ago. Her choice was simple. For Amy, the next fifteen minutes consisted of contentment and satisfaction. She dined lavishly on crispy slices of pickled squash and zucchini until both of the two large mason jars were robbed of their squash and reduced to a mixture of basil, mustard seeds, hot peppers, garlic, and pickle brine.

Squash Pickles

- 2-3 small, or 1 large summer squash (Magda and Classic Yellow Zucchini, as they give the brightest, crispest flavor)
- 7-8 basil leaves
- 1 sprig of thyme
- ½ a small onion
- 1 clove of garlic
- 2 dried red chilies
- 1 tablespoon mustard seeds
- 1 cup water
- 1 cup white vinegar
- 1 T salt per quart of liquid

Place the basil, thyme, garlic, dried chilies and mustard seeds into a one-quart jar.

Slice the summer squash and onion (cut the onion in reasonably thick half-moons, if too thin then they're hard to get out from the jar) – make sure you cut them so that they'll fit snugly in the jar without damaging them. Place both in the jar.

Mix the water, vinegar and salt together. Stir to dissolve. Pour the liquid over the jar, making sure there is enough to cover every last onion and squash.

Place and keep in the refrigerator. They will be ready to serve in about a day and continue to soak up the flavor for about a week. Consume within 1-3 weeks for maximum flavor.