

# Farm Notes

## CSA Newsletter

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POTOMAC VEGETABLE FARMS  
www.potomacvegetablefarms.com  
(703) 759-2119 ... Vienna  
(540) 882-3885 ... Purcellville

## You Absolutely Can Get Good Help Nowadays



The last day of onion picking: Connie, Tillie, Lucy, Adam, Robby, Sarah, Yoella. A well balanced group, average age 25.

by Hana Newcomb

At 5:45 on Saturday morning we met behind the Vienna stand in the first light of day – Hannah and Scout arrived from the Loudoun farm, loaded with crates of herbs and chard for the Arlington market. Peio, back for a third season in Virginia from his cool and comfortable home in the Basque Country, came swooping in on the golf cart right on time. Carrie and I pulled crates out of the cooler and we all loaded the market trucks, quickly and cheerfully, considering the muggy temperatures already congealing

around us at dawn. At 6:15 sharp, Tillie and Robby (second cousins, one from Denver, the other from Boston) arrived to load up for the Reston market. They met Kate and Emma there, one high school graduate and one rising senior, both seriously competent.

There is nothing noteworthy about this little scene – we repeat it every week – but the crew is always a different configuration. This week most of the Saturday workers were born after 1996. In other words, most of the people who were selling at the markets this weekend were about one third my age. And they did a

great job, every one of them. It is so much fun to be around this much energy and enthusiasm and keen intellect. My niece Tillie is ebullient. My cousin Robby is determined and ready to try anything. Scout is consistently energetic, running from one task to the next. Everyone on both farms is so interested in doing a good job, it's amazing.

Not everyone who works here is under the age of 20, but there is a lot of youthful energy on this farm. Those of us on the older end of the youth spectrum are forever grateful for their strong backs, intense work ethic, and joy.



# Marvelously Mellow Mondays

by Matilda Newcomb

Without the stress of a stand shift or filling bags for CSA, Mondays at the Vienna farm offer a respite for your hardworking farmworkers, or so one might think. Previously known as 'Mellow Mondays', the first day of the workweek is now called 'Marvelous Mondays'. In reality, Mondays begin at six-thirty sharp and come with the portending heat of the day. Your PVF workers are just as cynical about Monday mornings as you are. Yawns can be heard throughout the fields along with the occasional, "Why am I awake right now?" Monday is the day we spend preparing for a busy week of CSA, stand, and markets. This past Monday seventeen crates of leeks were picked in under two hours, five hours of mowing



Tillie Newcomb driving the golf cart, with Emma Knoke beside her.

occurred, and one person picked seven ponies of delicious tomatoes. The former mellow in 'Mellow Mondays' has been replaced by 'Marvelous' in order to describe the outrageous amount of work that gets completed.

Monday mornings at PVF, however dreadful, do have their highlights. The farm has a myriad of characters – like recent college freshman studying engineering, college graduates, and avid hikers. The variety

of backgrounds melts together to create an almost hysterically positive group of people. While some complaining does occur on Monday mornings, shouts of 'You got this', 'We're almost done', and 'Oh my god I just stabbed myself in the foot with a pitchfork' can be heard through the fields by Beulah Road. This past Monday, post leek digging hysteria, your Monday farmworkers were completely hosed down by Hana Newcomb

herself (water fights are the only way to survive the heat). After the heat sets in, Monday returns to more mellow vibes down at the stand. A few hours of chatting, leek cleaning, and cheesy vegetable puns in the shade keep your farmworkers sane.

It's easy to dread Monday mornings, especially 'Marvelous Monday' mornings, but we have achieved the perfect balance of suffering and fun. Tromping towards the leeks that are nearly invisible after three months of competing with the weeds, I am up to the challenge of wrestling them out of the ground because I have Molly to cheer me on. By lunchtime, with hands covered in dirt, tomato juice staining my hair, and food puns galore, I return home satisfied after a Marvelously Mellow Monday.

## Two Weeks of Hard Labor



Robby Lamont, filling the gas tank, making no mistakes.

by Robinson Thomas Lamont

I left my comfortable home in Boston and came to Virginia to work on the farm for two reasons. First, I wanted to reconnect with family. My aunts and uncles used to spend their summers on the farm and have fond memories of it and many of my second cousins work here every summer. I always felt as though I were missing out on working there and decided it was time to visit.

The second, equally important reason is that I'm lazy. Really lazy. Get up at noon lazy. And, as a budding adult who is heading to college

"Two," cont. on pg 3

# Demanding and Strenuous Work – But Fun!

by Lucy Santa Cruz

From the first moment I stepped on the Vienna farm for my interview, the environment was like no other I'd encountered. As soon as Hana picked me up in a golf cart, gave me a tour of the farm and yelled at the top of her lungs for geese to get off her field; I knew this was the place for me.

On the farm, I'm surrounded by coworkers and volunteers who are just as interested in learning farming techniques and skills as I am. Everyone works hard as a team and motivates each other to succeed. I've gained both skills and friends as we sweat together, learn together, laugh together and receive scoldings from management for doing things we're not supposed to be doing, together.

Although we have fun on the farm, we take our work very seriously. Work on a farm is physically demanding, fast paced, and strenuous at times, but this is why I enjoy my job. I like being a part of the productivity on the farm and literally seeing our team efforts of planting,

weeding and picking vegetables as I drive around on the golf cart or sell at farmers markets.

I went to school for Environmental Science and have learned what textbooks cannot teach me through hands on experience. On the farm, I've become more knowledgeable about growing and harvesting vegetables and have concluded that I would like to pursue a career as a soil conservationist. Through farming, I've seen organic and soil conservation methods be used firsthand, such as cover crops being used as buffers between planting crops, tilling, and learning about the importance and effectiveness of crop rotation. I've gained some good work experience in the agricultural field and hope to use this knowledge in the future.

PVF is a family to me, filled with a very diverse group of people, who have come together for the sole purpose of farming. I'm so grateful to be have been given the opportunity to work with wonderful people who take pride in their work and I'm so happy to have had this experience.



Lucy Santa Cruz, finished stringing tomatoes, still smiling despite the heat.

*"Two" cont. from pg 2*

and starting his new and exciting life full of opportunities, I can't be lazy. My (perhaps counterintuitive) reasoning was that I would exorcise the lazy out of myself by intense farm work.

My first week I worked as much as I could, remediating chard and harvesting carrots in the morning, picking cherry tomatoes, Juliettes, and onions in the afternoon, and helping unload trucks returning from Loudoun in the evening. One day I worked nearly 12 hours,

starting work at 7:15 AM and ending at 6:30 PM. Towards the end of my visit, it became far too hot to work in the afternoons, sometimes reaching 100° F, so we started work at 6:30 and ended at 12:30, and although the work days were shorter, the heat made them equally exhausting.

I believe my trial-by-fire style laziness treatment worked well and I will take many lessons with me. First, and rather obviously, I learned how to work on a farm. If I ever need to I can pick onions, pull carrots, string tomatoes, drive a tractor,

clean garlic, operate a farm stand, and box eggs with Lani's secret method. I even pioneered my own onion harvesting technique now officially known as the Robinson Method (after a chunk of onions are picked, jump ahead but work in the opposite direction to meet your onion picking partner, ensuring no onions are skipped). Second, when sunburst tomatoes are ripe, they are yellow, not red; do not leave yellow tomatoes on the vine, you'll get in trouble. Lastly, I learned that I can work at lot more than I thought I could.

Even after 6 hours in 100° F weather I was able to pick an extra two buckets of cherry tomatoes or help unload another truck. This is a lesson that I will use more outside the farm. I know that when it's crunch time I can push myself to do more work, even if I'm exhausted.

I know there is so much left for me to learn and do at PVF. I truly enjoyed my farm experience here and am already planning my time for next summer. I know I haven't scratched the surface of my egg boxing efficiency and will practice in the meantime.



# Notes from the Field:

## Light Over the Day

by Katherine Parker, aka Scout

Last summer was my first season working at PVF, and after a cold winter in Vermont I have come back to Virginia to work and learn some more at the farm. Something I didn't understand last year when I stepped onto the farm was how nuanced the work could be. Many of the skills that I have acquired can't necessarily be taught, but rather refined and molded by my own repetition. On my first day of work, I beheaded about 12 chard plants, and only now am I beginning to find some speed and direction in the task. It took some time to find the best way for my body to tie tomatoes, and figuring out how to spot and cut a squash more efficiently also came with practice.

All this time on the job has not only improved my work skills, but it has also adjusted my eyes and ears to my surroundings. Certain bugs are more familiar, and I am conscious of which direction the storms usually come from. Working outside everyday has finely tuned some observations for me, and I find that I really enjoy watching the light pass over the day.

On market days we wake up very early. Last Saturday was still very dark at 4:30. When I pulled into the farm, my Chevy's lights shone under a big moon, and the green barn was spilling light into the dark misty morning. I love watching the steam rise from the earth in the early morning, and sometimes the clouds come tumbling over the mountains in the west. I like to watch the world wake up when the light trickles in.

Lately my days have started at 5



Light over the Loudoun farm.

to 5:30, when the sun is still rising over the horizon, and the bird symphony is just past full swing. For a week or so the sun would drench my wet, dewy windshield in golden, beaming light during my morning commute. Twice, I almost drove off the road, blinded by morning's glory. The sun was especially regal this morning, and its deep orange-pink rays faced a blue sky in the west.

Last week we harvested the rest of our garlic. We had a big team, and we worked in the same field from 6:30 to 11:30. The stars and moon receded into the light, the sky went from pink to blue, and the clouds rolled on through. By 11:30 the day was hot and bright, and we were all thirsty for shade.

The farm is also very beautiful in the evenings. One afternoon I had a bout of enthusiasm for tomato tying, and so I trekked into the tomato fields to do a little stringing. Four rows later my enthusiasm

had waned and I plopped down between the rows. The sun was in its descent, and its tired rays were sifting through the leaves beside me. All around me was bathed in golden light and defined by quiet shadows. I was very content to sit alone, dirty with a few blisters, and watch the sun set.

Around this time the trees begin to silhouette themselves against the sky, and the fireflies take advantage of this dramatic backdrop for their show. Once the night has settled in, they take to the trees and flicker in the blue night- sweet little lights.

It is said that Claude Monet used to sit for hours before a landscape and study how the light moved over a scene. I'm no painter, and I've never studied art, but I think I can understand this fascination. I'm happy to have found this appreciation for the light, and I know that it has only come with time spent outside.