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

Learning Curve Still Upward, But Less Steep

by Hana Newcomb

We woke up after a good night's sleep in our family van, parked in a big farm equipment lot in Louisiana. This was about 1970 when all six of us could still fit into "the bus" and sleep at the same time. We peered out the window and saw rows of big tractors and shiny implements lined up in a tidy display. My father was so pleased with himself for finding such an interesting spot to wake up. Once we spent a morning picking lettuce at a small farm run by a friendly Japanese man and his wife, on the western side of Oahu, sometime in the late 70s. One January day we followed a farmer around as he showed us his sorghum making equipment somewhere in the South. Before there were the current day farmers markets in our area, we went to a huge farmers market in Guadalajara and saw the farmers standing up high in the middle of a mountain of tropical fruits, shouting down at the customers as they walked by. In Southern Maryland we spent hours hanging around various Amish farms, learning about working with draft horses.

These vacation destinations were not chosen by us, the children of our parents, the farmers. We



We taught other farmers to mulch with hay, and we learned from the Plancks how to mulch between strips of plastic mulch. This is now common practice in our region.

had no choice. We traveled in the winters, as summers were taken up with vegetable growing and selling, and our parents always found some farmers to talk to on our road trips. They listened avidly, we did not.

Even in this day and age of sustainable farming conferences and regional organizations that

train new farmers, most of us are largely self-taught. My parents had no farm background when they started planting sweet corn, and they learned from their mistakes and from conversations with older farmers.

Now, as I look around our two farms, I can see the results of

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The following pieces are in answer to the question: “What did you learn this week that you did not know before?”

How to Think Like a CSA Customer

by Becky Durst

Hana decided, and I agreed, that someone on this farm should actually participate in the CSA, eating their way through a share each week. That someone, she decided, should be me. And so it came to be that it is my eighth season working for PVF and my first as a CSA customer.

My pretty blue bag arrived on my porch on Wednesday. (I am also a CSA host.) I poked it with my foot. It didn't growl or try to bite me, so I brought it inside. It sat on my counter for a few minutes while I eyed it warily. I am a planner and a bit of a control freak. I am outside my comfort zone.

I emptied the bag.

Green garlic and garlic scapes. Easy. They last a good long time. In the fridge with them.

Fresh onions. Also a nice long shelf life. In a bag and in the fridge.

Cukes. YAY!! Cut and ate one immediately. The other will be



Tonight's dinner at Becky's house: frittata with leeks, swiss chard, summer squash, and fresh thyme.

eaten with...

Lettuce! Easy. But eat soon. With the other cuke.

Kale. Kale chips. An unusual choice for me, but we're heading out of town for the weekend.

Chard. Perfect sauteed with garlic to stuff the next night's calzones.

Summer Squash. Easy sautee with herbs that I can eat early the following week when we're home.

Fennel. A toughie. I am the only one who likes it. But, it will last at least the week, so in a bag and in the fridge while I think.

It's almost like playing zone defense. Divide, assess shelf life, plan. I am definitely feeling amateurly overconfident.

How to Chill

by Sarah Waybright

As a person who works with food all the time as a dietitian, I know that temperature is important - there are lots of rules about how long and at what temperatures foods can be prepared, stored, and offered for both recipe success and food safety. What I had never thought about before working at PVF, though, was how temperature at picking time affects food longevity. It turns out: A LOT.

From the time a food is cut from its roots or pulled from the ground, it loses the link to nutrient and water sources, but continues to photosynthesize and respire so will lose turgor (stiffness from being full of water) over time. The faster produce is cooled after it leaves the hot field, the longer it will last on your shelf or in your fridge! Cooling also slows the process of food going bad by limiting the rate at which microbes do their job decomposing bio matter. Ideally, we would have a refrigerated truck to put just-picked veggies in right out of the ground, but that would be too

	Mini	Reg	8/10/15
Cucumbers	X	X	X
Squash		X	X
Fennel		X	X
Onions	X	X	X
Scapes	X		X
Leeks	X		
Escarole/endive	X		X
Chard		X	X
Kale	X		
Beets/Turnips		X	X
Kohlrabi	X	X	X
Lettuce	X	X	X
Parsley		X	X
Naive database		X	X

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On Learning and Getting Things Done

by Jenna Barufka

My entire experience at Arcadia will be encapsulated in a sum total of seven days. This seems impossible to me, considering that I feel overwhelmed with new information. I went into my internship with Arcadia completely blind. I had barely even gardened before. In retrospect, I have no idea what I thought farming was going to be like. I suppose I thought it would be simpler. I thought there would be fewer pieces to consider. Having spent the past twelve years of my life in school, I expected a similarly regimented process of learning and getting things done; be told the facts and apply them, be told rules and follow them. But farming is filled with an uncertainty I've never really had to deal with before. We have things we know to be true, of course, about the plants and the insects that eat them and the weeds that grow by them. But we also have a million things that we can only guess at, like how much it will rain and when, and whether or not we'll be able to stop mice from eating our seeds. Farming is predicting, observing, compensating, waiting, hoping.

The more I learn about farming, however, the more it becomes incredibly clear to me

that I know nothing about farming. Each time we embark on a new task, Katherine explains to me and the other volunteers what we are doing and why. I feel as though there must be always one million things flying through her head. The other day, as she explained how to transplant squash seedlings into landscape fabric mulch, she told us that "they don't like the fabric worrying against their stems." Perhaps this is common sense to some people, but it is

something I would have never, never thought about. In fact, to even consider that there is a certain way the stems of golden glory squash like to be treated is so far from my average train of thought that it, despite seeming so simple, feels revolutionary. I'm not getting my questions answered, I'm being informed that there were questions to have in the first place. It's not, Oh, I've always wondered what the stems of plants felt about rubbing against landscape

fabric, it's, The stems of plants care if they touch landscape fabric? And what's landscape fabric? I feel as though all my life I have just assumed that certain things are as simple as they seem; seeds fall, plants grow, etc. Now I am unlearning.

In fact, a large part of my experience at Arcadia has been unlearning. There are some things you have to unlearn if you want to be of any use at all. Unlearn a fear of bugs. Unlearn hesitancy to get dirty. Unlearn infrequent water drinking. In the best way possible, seven days at Arcadia has been a process of forgetting; forgetting the simple way I thought about farming, forgetting the limited way I thought about learning, forgetting the structured way I thought about working and getting things done. It's been a satisfying personal experience, not only because it allowed me to meet a lot of interesting people and doing rewarding work, but also because it gave me a foundational understanding of something I had no concept of before. It's only a beginning, but I at least now have somewhere to begin. And, if nothing else, I have gained an incredible, incredible amount of respect for good food and good people who work in the heat.



Jenna volunteered at Arcadia, the farm that is run by Katherine who worked for us for two years.

"Learning," cont. from page 1

55 years of learning from others, as well as from our own repeated trials and errors. Growing on beds came from my mother's summer sabbatical working with Heinz at Genesis Farm. Staked tomatoes we saw on a big organic wholesale farm in New Jersey, and we switched over from our 30 year old practice of letting the vines sprawl on the ground. Ellen learned about rotating crops with a really long rotation of cover crops in between from the Nordells who use horses, not tractors, so our Loudoun farm is always half planted in non-cash crops now. She learned to make high quality compost from some talented Austrian farmers, many years ago. We learned to grow onions from seeds from a farmer who first learned to farm from us.

The list goes on and on. We are still learning from each other -- and many of the farmers that I consult now have been farming for much less time than we have. They have spent time learning skills we want to have, and they gladly share their experience. I am the Help Desk, by text, for a former worker who is now managing a farm on her own.

Nowadays there are college curricula to get farmers like us started, and there are organizations dedicated to teaching as much as they can, but I am certain there is no better way to learn to grow ginger (for example) than to call Heinz and ask him exactly what he does. Casey, our former farm manager, told me in a few minutes of texting, what I needed to know about flame weeding carrots. Ellen, our recently retired fellow PVF farmer, is a deep source of knowledge after 25 years of wrangling the Loudoun farm into being.

You might think that eventually you would know what you need to know, but it turns out there is no end to the learning. Now that I am older than my parents were when they dragged us from farm to farm, I understand that there will never be an end to the questions. We are lucky to be still farming after all these years, because now there are lots of new farmers who can teach us, and of course we have lots of experience to share too.

Up Before the Birds, Once

by Ari Lindenbaum

For millennia, people have depended on birds to wake them up. Where I live is surrounded by trees in which many crows make their homes and they help me wake up in the morning. Normally around 5:30, the crows start talking to each other. Every morning they talk about how the sunrise looks, or the news from yesterday, and the validity of the expression "straight as the crow flies" as they never normally fly straight anyways, but often travel in circles. In any case, this week was the first in which I woke up earlier than the sunrise to go to market. I walked outside and was excited to hear what the crows would be talking about in the moonlight, but I did not hear any. That morning I learned that the crows around here don't start talking until the sun rises.

"Chill," cont. from page 2

expensive and impractical - there are often up to a dozen people picking from different parts of the farm at the same time! So, we have a system to get it cool as fast as possible:

1. As soon as a crate is full, it goes into the shade by a cart, or covered with a dark sheet to keep sun off

2. Small loads of crates are constantly ferried back to the farm stand so that most produce is out of the field within the hour of its picking

3. Crates are stacked and sprayed down with cold (ish) water immediately upon arrival at the cleaning area, then pushed into the walk in cooler on a giant sled

4. Produce is washed in a sink of cool water to remove field dirt and keep damp (remember: losing water is the reason for wilted plants!)

We also pick the day before selling at market or offering for CSA, and usually only in the morning before peak heat

of the day to keep food as fresh as possible and least heat taxed as possible. It's quite the process to see! And sometimes so hot that we wish WE could be put on a sled and sprayed down and pushed into a cooler. Luckily, PVF has an all-you-can drink water policy so we are at low risk of wilting!



Kayla on her first day of work, getting the field heat out of the lettuce, and keeping herself cool at the sink.