



Farm Notes

CSA Newsletter

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Community Supported utopiA

by Stephen Bradford

When my grandfather Tony Newcomb set out to create what would become Potomac Vegetable Farms, Incorporated, he was inspired by the idea of developing an agriculturally based Utopian community. While I very much doubt that our lovely CSA is just what he had imagined, it actually might be on the right track. And if you know to look for it, I think you'll find that stuffed in your CSA bags between the kale and kohlrabi, there's a radical revolutionary potential hidden in Community Supported Agriculture, that just might save the world, and feed you in the process.

Granted, it's certainly no post-capitalist paradise, but in the grand Utopian tradition, Community Supported Agriculture exposes some of our society's worst limitations and suggests possibilities for a more equitable

future. By joining a CSA we take a step back from the prevailing economic system that has brought us human exploitation, environmental degradation and consumer alienation. We enter instead into an alternative value structure with potential to foster a more direct connection

to production and promote an intentional relationship between the land, consumers and producers.

Most members, I assume, aren't in the CSA because they believe it is the cheapest and most convenient source of produce, just as most farm-workers (in the local food movement at

least) have not chosen the profession because they think it's the easiest way for them to get rich quick. In both cases, we have been motivated by a desire to pursue certain values, but similarly, it is our own financial security that has allowed us the luxury to promote these values through our economic decisions. What we then have is a community founded on shared values but in some ways beholden to an economic system that deprives so many others of the freedoms we enjoy.

Does that get us to Utopia? Or do we have to take things a few steps further? What Tony had first envisioned was not necessarily an agricultural business financially supported by a community of conscientious consumers, but rather an intentional community with an agricultural foundation. Surely in the latter case,



Tony Newcomb in the corn field, in the early years of the Utopian quest.

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Notes from the Farmer's Messy Desk: You Just Never Know What Will Happen Next

by Hana Newcomb

Almost 75 years ago, my grandmother Carolyn Newcomb was standing in line to sign up her little boy at Madison Elementary School in Falls Church. She struck up a conversation with another young mother, Katherine Moutoux. That conversation lasted for the rest of their lives, happily. And the ripple effect of that chance meeting has affected thousands of people, actually -- including you.

Those little boys, Tony Newcomb and Charles Moutoux, became the best of friends. They lived just a half mile apart until they were 13 years old and they had long unsupervised afternoons together swimming in Holmes Run, building underground forts, playing endless games of Monopoly, and concocting schemes. Charles says that Tony was always the leader, and that was just fine with him.

Charles' parents decided to buy some property further out in the country and found a piece of land on Beulah Road, about 7 miles west of Falls Church. Tony's parents accepted the opportunity to buy the 8 acres on the front corner of the property that included a barn, house, granary, chicken coop



Charles and John Moutoux in the orchard in the 1950's.

and a big open field. The Newcombs fixed up the house and moved to their country place in 1949, and the Moutoux established a commercial peach orchard on their ground. Eventually they sold peaches at Seven Corners, using an old fireworks stand. The peaches were ripe, huge, sweet and perfect. (No one sells peaches like that now.)

Charles remembers the summer of 1955 when he was employed by Tony

who had established the Newcomb Boatbuilding Company. He says there were several employees -- they all worked for 2 or 3 hours in the mornings and then stopped to swim in the pool. He does not remember that they sold a single boat, but he recalls the difficulty of fitting the planks together because of the curve. The math was complicated. I can attest to the existence of several of these boats, still languishing in our

barn today.

John and Katherine Moutoux moved to the farm in the mid 1960s, after building a new house and barn at the orchard.

The Newcomb and Moutoux families now lived within shouting distance of each other, but Charles and Tony were already grown and living on their own -- Charles was an engineer working at NASA and Tony was married with children, living in DC, working for the federal government.

Tony and Charles decided to go into the corn business together in 1961, renting ground on Spring Hill Road in McLean. They had every possible problem: a dry year, lots of weeds, corn borers. They lost \$3000. Charles decided not to try a second season, but Tony decided to do it again.

Over the years, Charles got married and got involved in his father's peach business (while keeping his job at NASA) and Tony and Hiu kept on going with the corn business. The Moutoux bought corn from the Newcombs and sold it along with the peaches. Tony and Hiu bought land adjacent to the Moutoux Orchard, establishing the home base of Potomac

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PVF North Infiltrates Boston CSA

by Rebecca and Alissa Groisser

I'm sure any of you reading this will be shocked to hear this, but having grown up participating on the production end of a weekly organic CSA, we've heard a few complaints over the years. The quality of vegetables is lower than expected, the quantity of vegetables overwhelms the average suburban fridge, the inconvenience of driving out to the dropoff point - and more importantly, remembering to drive out to the dropoff point - is too great. There are people who try out the CSA on a trial run who decide that the list under the cons column outweigh the pros, so one mini share later, they return to the Whole Foods from whence they came.

Not knowing any better, we assumed there was some validity to their complaints. Maybe the hassle of being expected to keep up with a weekly box of vegetables was too much. Heck, we didn't know - vegetables and their production take up so much of a farm worker's thoughts, and we can't reasonably expect an office worker who has just left their nine-to-five to have the same priorities as we do.

Then we moved to Boston and bought the equivalent of a regular share from a local farm with our roommate. And now, a few weeks into the season, it has become abundantly clear that we were completely, totally wrong to lend any credence to these complaints.

I mean, come on! Some kind, benevolent soul just gives us a box of vegetables every week! It's like Christmas, except better, because we actually get presents (our Jewish parents didn't put a whole lot of stock in that whole business). Yeah, we don't always love the mustard greens, but

who cares? We've got corn and tomatoes! We feel that the number of exclamation points we've used is growing excessive, but we don't care - we have potatoes, eggplant, onions... And recently, butternut squash and apples. Mmmmm.

We're employed and in school full time, so you'd think it might be a challenge to process all these vegetables into palatable quiches and pasta dishes. But it's not; it's a joy. We live in a home consistently full of nutrients and good flavors and positively hippie values - while hundreds of miles from home! So we get the added bonus of feeling virtuous and healthy to boot. Alissa's classmates (many of who are living in the dorm, bizarrely) are all jealous, but heck, they can get their own dang CSA shares. They are plentiful and relatively cheap in Boston - some of them even deliver directly to your door at no added cost!

So life is pretty grand, experiencing this from the consumer's side. We can say with actual authority that it's not as bad as some disgruntled former customers have made it sound. But granted, our situation

is different from most of the PVF CSA customers. Maybe if you guys got to split the CSA three ways, it would seem pretty cheap to you, too. And our roommate is the one who brings it home for us, so we don't have to go pick it up. Obviously, we are acting smugly superior about something that we know nothing about.

But corn and tomatoes!

Okay, more seriously. There are legitimate reasons not to get a CSA share, or not to be able to keep up with the one you have. People are busy, people have other important ways to be spending their money, people don't like leafy greens. But it's been fun over the last few weeks to live on the other side of it. It's such a lovely gift to be given a box of vegetables each week. The inconvenience of fetching it every week is offset by the convenience of not having to go to the farmer's market. And our parents stocked us up with plenty of eggs, so really, the only reason we have to go to the grocery store these days is to replenish our cheese supply.

So far, no complaints. Except that mustard greens thing.



Our CSA share, similar in size and contents to the PVF regular share. But look, apples!

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farming would have something greater to offer its community beyond a steady supply of high-quality vegetables. In such a Utopia, agriculture must provide the community with a common cause. The community would develop a shared understanding of the value of human labor and a more intimate relationship to the land. This would enable a fundamental reexamination of the basis of our economy, followed by a necessary adjustment of the way we interact in the

capitalist system.

While it may be that some full-diet and more participatory CSAs could come closer to this model, it's fairly clear that the PVF CSA does not fully embody this agrarian Utopia. Perhaps in our specific case, the true contribution of farming really is found in our produce, whose revolutionary potential is drawn from its superior quality and the exceptional respect it implies for workers, consumers and the environment alike. Yet crucially it is a product available only to a select community in our

condemning fact which should move us to reexamine and challenge the root causes of this injustice.

The real utopia lies in each perfectly juicy bite of a really good summer tomato, which in turn

exposes to us a society plagued by insufficient access to high-quality, humane and sustainable food. So by all means, take a bite and savor it. Just remember, you're eating a tiny piece of Tony Newcomb's Utopia.



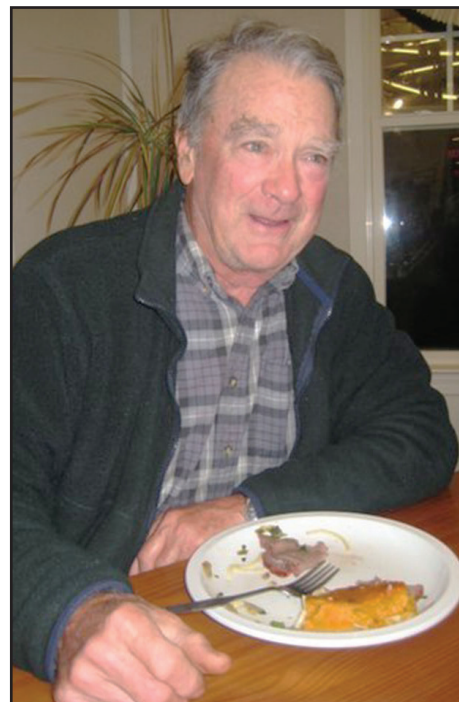
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Vegetable Farms on Leesburg Pike. The families grew another generation of Moutoux and Newcomb children, living next door to each other.

I still remember how my dad and Charles Moutoux would greet each other: "Carlos!" "Antoine!" They always had plenty to talk about – they had very different approaches to similar challenges, but they never argued or dismissed each other's viewpoint. They had grown up together and they knew each other's strengths and tendencies. They laughed loudly together – big belly laughs that make me smile as I think of them.

When Tony wanted to buy a big farm in Loudoun County in 1973, it was way too expensive for the Newcombs to purchase by themselves (almost \$350,000). So they pulled together some friends to purchase this gorgeous 400 acre piece: Charles and Sue Moutoux, John Graybeal and Chip and Susan Planck. As Charles describes it, "Stuart Petroleum owned the

land and took the note on the whole thing. Tony couldn't borrow enough to pay, got an interest only 5 year loan, hoping that land would appreciate in value by the time the balloon payment came due. Graybeal, Moutoux, Planck had enough to pay for their pieces and their parcels would have come out



after 5 years if Tony couldn't make the payment. Doug Mackall was trustee. Tony gambled it would go up in value. It did."

And that is how the beautiful, mile-long piece of property, now home to PVF-West, Moutoux Orchard, Greenstone Fields, my sister Lani and her thousands of chickens and dozens of horses, and Chip and Susan Planck (former farmers of Wheatland Vegetable Farms), began its new life as a community of sustainable farms.

You just never know what might happen – in 1941 Carolyn Newcomb and Katherine Moutoux never could have imagined that their little boys would grow up to be farmers. Farmers with adjacent farms, and with children who continued to farm the adjacent farms. For 40 years we crossed through the Moutoux Orchard in Vienna to get to my grandparents' property. And now in Loudoun, our farm sits between their two pieces of property and they cross through, waving from the tractor. It just goes round and round, and the story keeps unfolding.