

Farm Notes

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Getting CRAFTy at PVF West

by Stacey Carlberg

Last week, 50 farm workers and farmers descended on the farm at PVF West as part of the growing Chesapeake CRAFT program. CRAFT stands for Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training.

The first CRAFT program was created in upstate New York in 1994. Three years later, a group of farmers in northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin founded a program for the upper Midwest. There are now 14 CRAFT programs throughout the U.S. and Canada. Chesapeake CRAFT was founded in 2010 and includes farmers from all over the Bay area, representing livestock farms, vegetable farms, orchards, for-profit farms and non-profit farms in a wide range of acreages and missions.

So, what IS CRAFT? Basically, it's an organized schedule of farm tours and potlucks during the growing season that allow farmers and their workers to share their farms and methods with each other. The idea is that we're better growers through learning from each other. And, we can expose new growers (our workers) to a multitude of methods so they can decide which type of farming they might like to pursue someday should they continue in this line of work. For me, this is one of the most important and most fun parts of having workers – training someone new to grow food, too.

Each farm is really molded to the personality, experience and resources of the farmer that runs it. We, as farmers, decide what tools we like to use (and can afford), which crops we want to grow, how we want to grow them, how we want them picked, how we want them washed and packed, how we want to



market them and how many people we want to work with. Workers at one particular farm really learn the methods of that particular farm over the course of the season. Visiting other farms is a great way to see all the ways that people farm.

On the PVF tour, we highlighted things that make us different from our farming friends. First, our business has TWO farms and supports 8 permanent, salaried employees. We have a large number of seasonal workers as well, which enables us to supply vegetables to 550 CSA shares, 6 farmers' markets and 2 roadside stands. This makes us one of the biggest businesses on the CRAFT tour this year. We talked about making our own compost, showed off our large perennial herb bed and talked about our methods for growing a large quantity of beets and carrots.

Every CRAFT tour is followed by a potluck, a more informal chance for workers and farmers to mingle over good food. At our potluck, I sat next to Eric Plaksin from Waterpenny Farm, where I first learned about growing vegetables and across from Susan Planck, the farmer from whom Eric learned. The program helps us all feel like we're part of an established yet growing farming community.

PVF History — New Vision, New Projects: Seventh in a 12-Part Series

by Hana Newcomb

In 1990, we were farming on about five different rented fields in McLean in addition to the home farm on Leesburg Pike and Beulah Road.

This seemed normal to us since we had been commuting up and down the road for years, towing equipment, hauling dump truck loads of straw bales from Hazleton's to Odricks, driving pickup truck loads of vegetables to Odricks to sell at the little stand, bringing tomatoes from Springhill Road to the shady area behind the stand on Leesburg Pike. We drove tractors on Route 7 before or after rush hour, remembering Dad's strong advice to stand up so people could tell something was strange in front of them, and to weave a bit so they would give us some space. In my wildest dreams, I imagined having enough land to farm in one place so we wouldn't have to drive tractors on the road anymore.

While Ellen was out in Loudoun struggling with tractors and Johnson grass and deer (gradually creating that farm that required no tractor time on the road), my mother and I were contemplating taking a sabbatical, or at least downsizing the whole operation. We hadn't made enough money to pay ourselves more than a few thousand dollars a year, although we were still paying all the bills and making the mortgage payments.

When I was in my early 30s, maybe six or eight years after my father died, I began to feel that I was starting to have some ideas

of my own. I still didn't have a long range plan, but I had a grasp of the calendar, I was running the morning meetings, and I knew what we needed to do in order to maintain the status quo. Some of us had to work 70 hours a week, and the regular paid workers worked about 50 hours.

In 1993 my mother took her sabbatical. She went to New Jersey to work on a small, intensive biodynamic CSA farm run by a Swiss farmer named Heinz Thomet. She lived in a room in a house owned by one of the CSA members and reported to work every morning at 7:00 on the dot. She barely had time to go to the post office, so she was mostly out of communication with her own farm and family in Virginia. Mornings were long, the crew had lunch together, and then everyone went back to work for another five or six hours. It was the hardest she had worked in years (and she was already 58 years old). She learned a huge amount and Heinz became a friend who ended up changing all of our lives.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch,

we kept the farm going, with our children in tow. We had a summer work crew of about ten people with a range of capabilities and a full time babysitter who took care of Jesse, Stephen, Michael, Benjamin, Alissa, Rebecca and her own sons Pablito and Adrian. We had a work list that never ended. Jon had a full time off-farm job so all the mechanical work happened in the evenings and on weekends.

All this did not keep us from dreaming of something different. My sister Anna and I would fantasize about building one big house for our two families – really a duplex with shared kitchen and dining room. We knew we were spending way too much time and effort driving our children back and forth between our houses – we lived almost five miles apart. Anna and Jim hosted regular potluck dinners for all the farm folks, and they liked being in the midst of so much easy community.

So when we learned about this idea for a different kind of neighborhood – called “cohousing” – it seemed like a perfect answer to so many of our domestic dilemmas.



PVF Ain't the Movies

by Amelia Gavurin

With only two real jobs under my belt (unless you count camp counselor which I don't because it's just babysitting) I really can't say I know a whole lot about the working world. In my eyes it consists of suits, small talk, and Microsoft PowerPoint. I was not always a jolly PVF worker, merrily picking veggies and packing CSA bags, no, once I worked in the film industry. I was an employee at AMC theaters in Tysons Corner last summer (That counts as film industry, right?) and it was quite the experience. The differences between AMC and PVF aren't just "Well AMC doesn't sell tomatoes" -- they are much deeper than that.

"The Man"

When working at AMC I saw my "boss" ("boss" because he was just the general manager, my real boss was some big shot CEO sitting in a tall reflective building in a Brookstone massage chair) maybe twice. Once when I was hired, and again when I quit. Here at PVF my boss is as much my coworker, mentor, and friend as my boss. Those who know her have described Hana Newcomb as a "Yoda" figure, and I concur. She has a biting sense of humor, a great work ethic, and is extremely fashionable (socks and sandals anyone?).

"The Perks"

AMC had some great perks. Free movies, early showings, and all the popcorn I wanted! Last summer I thought I had it made, that was until I got to PVF and experienced the utter joy of driving a golf cart. Nothing, I mean NOTHING, can compare to driving that door-less wonder around the farm. I also get to gorge myself on veggies, a healthy alternative to the unlimited popcorn diet of last summer.



"The Customers"

Ah yes, the humans we PVFers serve so loyally. Although the shucking of the corn can be a bit hard to watch as a standworker, I know it is done with good intentions so I say, "Go ahead and shuck it all you want! Eat more veggies you healthy individual you!" After a summer of unsatisfied movie goers yelling at me to make the child who took their seat move, or to make a whole new batch of popcorn so they get the "freshest" the occasional shucker is really no problem at all.

"The Coworkers"

I've lived my whole life in NOVA, so the people I worked beside at AMC really gave me a glimpse of the real world. There were college dropouts, teenage dads, middle aged singles, and the occasional "retired" elder. They were masters of sass and sarcasm and although they didn't show up to work on time usually, they were always fun to be around. PVF workers have a similar "No BS" outlook. When I spend a morning picking with Becky we talk like there isn't a 20 year age difference. It isn't everyday you find adults who treat you with such trust and respect. As counterintuitive as it may seem, coming to work tends to be more of a vacation than a job.

"The Atmosphere"

I really do love the outdoors, but AMC didn't have mosquitoes.

The film industry and the farming industry are two very different experiences to be a part of. Neither one better or worse than the other, just different, so to compare them is like comparing chard to sun jewel melons (you just can't...). As I develop into a mini adult I've realized PVF is more my scene than AMC was, so next summer I'm hoping to be back at the farm picking, packing, and maybe writing another one of these articles.

What's Growing in Lucy's Dorm Room?

Do It Yourself: The Back-to-School Edition

by Lucy Smith

If you want to create a bountiful harvest in a dorm room you have several key problems: light, time, space, and cost. Light is the biggest challenge. Grow light bulbs can be placed in most desk lamps. Time becomes a precious resource especially during midterms or finals; therefore the physical set up must be efficient, easy, and practical. Hanging herb garden and self-watering containers are low cost, space saving, and bountiful! Using two five-gallon buckets, simple hardware items, and a plastic shoe rack you have two planting systems that provide herbs, lettuce, and spinach all year long.

A vertical herb garden is great for dorm living due to its compact shape, hiding cinderblock walls, and adding flavor to any cafeteria meal. (Don't be afraid to bring some fresh herbs to the dining hall, your taste buds will appreciate it!). Take a plastic hanging shoe rack, the kind with pockets for shoes hanging vertically, not the shelf variety. Poke holes in the bottom of each shoe pocket making sure the water

drips into the pockets below it with a drip tray on the floor. Plant water loving herbs like mint and basil at the bottom and dry climate herbs like rosemary at the top.

Five-gallon self-watering containers are the simple solution to limited time, space, and money. Essentially there are two five gallon buckets, one inside the other acting respectively as a planter and as a water reservoir with a soil wick slowly absorbing water to keep the soil constantly moist. Materials required are two food grade five gallon buckets (ask the cafeteria managers the next time you go to the dining hall or try local restaurants), a drill, a 1/4" bit, a 3 1/2" and 1 1/4" saw attachment, and a yogurt container. Using a 3-1/2" saw attachment cut a circular hole in the center base of the planter bucket, then drill 1/4" holes throughout the base to allow for drainage. Next drill/cut small holes into the yogurt container and place it into the 3 1/2" hole in the planter bucket, the rim of the yogurt container should fit snugly if not use duct tape liberally. The planter bucket is completed and can be placed within the reservoir bucket. They should fit tightly together -- make sure that the weight of the planter is not being supported by the yogurt container, there should be about an inch between yogurt container and the bottom of the water reservoir bucket. On the side of the water reservoir bucket drill a hole using the 1 1/4" saw attachment, this will be where you pour the water, and it only needs to be watered about once a week!

Both the hanging herb garden and the self-watering buckets require really good potting soil to keep your plants healthy and happy. Luckily a college campus is the perfect place to get coffee grounds or used tea bags that can be mixed into the soil to add nutrients. For both the self-watering buckets and the herb garden you can start the plants from seedlings in covered egg cartons or toss seeds into the containers and thin accordingly. Another option: place most of the lettuce or spinach seeds into the buckets and pick the sprouts or small plants to use in salads, naturally thinning the bucket until there are several larger plants. For a constant supply of the greens plant several seeds every two weeks.

