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Accelerando: It's June!

by Hana Newcomb

We started the farm season, nice and slow, in mid-March (*adagio*). We waited for the day to warm up before going outside, and we stayed inside when it seemed like it might still be winter. By early April we were planting lettuce and onions and chard and our backs and hamstrings started to get the picture – the season had started for real (*andante*). May was a beautiful month for mulching and weeding and more planting (*allegretto*). We spent all our days making sure the vegetables had what they needed (*dolce*).

And now it is June, all of a sudden (*subito*), and we have so much to do (*allegro*)! We still have to keep weeding and mulching and planting and picking for markets, but it's CSA time and that means starting almost every day with a sharp knife, a bag of rubber bands, and lots of sanitized crates. Time to pick! Fast! *Vivace*!

You get the picture.

This is our 16th year of the CSA, so we are not surprised by the adrenaline rush of June. We have been building up to this for months. It is exciting to have deadlines. It is motivating to know that we need to pick 200 heads of



lettuce before the dew dries. It is fun to work in groups, filling crates with kohlrabi and salad mix. We start early and we pick with great focus for about two hours, then head back to the sinks.

Most people cannot imagine how much food goes through our hands every week. The people who work here can't even imagine it sometimes. Every 100 households eats about 50 crates of vegetables a week. On Tuesdays, we will be preparing 230 shares. Wednesdays we only have to fill 182.

After 15 years of practice, we have learned to manage the flow. It is not quite a military operation, but there is a rigor to it. We divide up the tasks – some people pick, others wash, others pack greens into clear plastic bags, others fill up the blue, green, white bags. From above, we probably look like a bunch of crazed ants who are trying to shift their whole inventory to a new location, on

short notice. One of us watches the clock the whole time (usually me). We need to get the signs up in the CSA room, we need to sweep the floor, we need to load the vans, check the charts, count the flower bunches, make sure each route has the right number of eggs and bread packed. At noon, we have to be out of the way because some of the customers who pick up at the farm are incredibly punctual.

And while all that is happening in the CSA area, there is a group in the fields, making sure there will be something to pick next month, and the month after. They pound stakes in the tomato patches, weed carrots, finish planting the last celeriac, carry bales of hay for mulching. The list changes daily, hourly as they check off one task after another.

But in the heat of the afternoon, we stop pushing. We like to get

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PVF — 2.0 or is it 8.0?

by Ellen Polishuk

One of the most striking features of the farm business we own is its ability to morph over time, adapting to the addition and/or loss of key people. Hana has written before about how PVF recovered from the death of her father Tony way back in the early 80's. I have written before about how PVF expanded greatly over time to accommodate me and my agricultural ambitions. We gladly absorbed the addition of Carrie in Vienna, and Jon as a part-time (in name only) general fix it man. Then in 2011 we welcomed Stacey and Casey to begin to take over the Loudoun farm from me as I pursued other career options. All of these changes had agricultural and business consequences. Basically PVF thrived throughout. That's the sign of a very healthy company! Remember that during all of these changes, Hana and Hiu remained steady at the helm.

Last fall Stacey and Casey decided to leave PVF, and return to the farm where they met. So, once again, a pulse of change ran through our company. We decided not to hire a replacement manager for Loudoun. Instead, Hana and I are co-managing the Loudoun farm. That meant putting Carrie more directly in charge of all Vienna

farming, and Becky's role increasing to lead marketer in Arlington, and even more in charge of the CSA vegetable management.

For Hana, the most interesting and exciting part of this new arrangement was the possibility of reconfiguring our business to be really one company, with two farm locations. Over the last few years we had acted more like two separate farms – with many redundant crops and activities. Hana saw that we could now plan as one big complicated farm, reaping the rewards of better crop planning,

and more thoughtfully coordinated activities. Just as importantly, Hana was anxious to create a new spirit of togetherness between the farms and all the folks that work for us. Over the previous years, there had developed a bit of a competitive atmosphere between the two farm locations, and she was glad to have this chance to change that.

So, here we are, 8 months into this new Re-unification Program, as I call it. Both farms are running quite smoothly and successfully. Indeed, the spirit of togetherness abounds. The crew is more mingled between

the farms, and all are pulling for each other and celebrating the successes of both locations. For me, this had been a major change in my daily routine and mind frame. My role last year was quite limited and now I am central again to the Loudoun farm. My favorite part of all of this is that I now get to talk to Hana multiple times a day! I love having her here so many days a week, and to actually get to work together sometimes. Hana is an amazing leader, and I am honored and pleased to be at her side as we continue to develop and change this farm business!



Ellen (left) and Hana (right), enjoying an outing together, in clean clothes.

Notes from a Veteran CSA Member

by Betsy Erickson

In the interest of full disclosure, you should know that Hana and I have been friends since we attended the J.F. Oyster Elementary School together back in the 1960s. Which is to say that I learned decades ago that I should always take Hana's advice, and I have developed the habit of doing whatever she tells me to do. For example, she called me one day maybe 20 years ago and said she thought that my family should get involved with this new cohousing project she and her family were creating. Because of that, we have had the very great good fortune of living at Blueberry Hill for the past 15 years. And the first summer we lived here, I asked Hana whether I should sign up for the CSA and she said no, you already eat lots of different vegetables and you can stop at the stand and get whatever you want. I said fine, that makes sense. But, a few years ago, when PVF started the market-style CSA, she told me I should sign up, so I did. And, of course, she was right.

Every week, I get to go down

to the farm stand and peruse the beautiful and bounteous offerings of the CSA room and select my eight or nine or however many items, and every week I have the same two conflicting thoughts: only eight? It all looks so delicious, why can't I have one of each? And, at the same time I think: how will we cook/eat all of this before it goes bad? So I take my allotted number of items and happily stash everything in the refrigerator (or not, as advised by the very helpful PVF website), and start to think about how I will prepare everything. Usually, we manage to eat everything up in the first few days, or I will at least cook the things that need cooking and may end up putting some things in the freezer for another date. But the ugly truth is that, on occasion, I also find an old withered butternut squash in the bottom of my vegetable drawer and I wonder if I should just concede defeat, chop it up, and add it to the compost pile. Usually, I cook it and it tastes delicious anyway, because vegetables that we get from the farm are so much fresher

than vegetables that we usually buy at the supermarket that they can live a long time in our fridge and still be highly edible.

One of the lessons I have learned after doing this for a few years is that it works well to select a combination of items that need to be eaten/cooked quickly (e.g., greens) and items that can last a bit longer (e.g., garlic or grains). That takes some of the pressure off. And I have to admit, even though I've been a good vegetable eater most of my life and have tried to expand my repertoire on a regular basis, the CSA experience has been a good incentive for me to try some unfamiliar vegetables and I have found the websites that are suggested in Becky's weekly emails to be incredibly helpful in guiding me towards some new ways of preparing even familiar items. Of course, sometimes, I fall back on my standard method of throwing all of the different greens in a pan and cooking them down with garlic, onion, spices, and a little broth. That never fails to satisfy!

The latest challenge I face with my vegetable consumption is that our household is now only three, as opposed to the five we had when we moved in here. My husband thinks (and he may be right) that I am constitutionally incapable of adjusting to cooking for two or three, and that we should be consigned to having ridiculous amounts of leftovers forever. What's so bad about that, I ask myself, I eat leftovers for lunch, take them to the office, foist them off on unsuspecting strangers, etc. It's a lovely and comforting thing to have abundant food on hand, and who knows, maybe the kids will stop by for a bite, and we always want to be prepared for that, don't we?



Tasty pad thai with PVF carrots, cauliflower, ginger, and kale.

Notes From the Field: My First Farm Season Ever

by Jess Royce

The first time I met Hana, during my interview to be exact, she stated that she was only hiring people who liked to write. That every year they did a biweekly newsletter and she didn't want to drag it out of us and well, I like to write but not generally for others to read. I suppose to me it seemed fitting that during a time of change in my life I try writing for others and pushing the comfort boundaries.

Hana and Carrie did not seem surprised to meet a 30 year old with no farm experience who wanted to learn about growing food. At the end of the visit it I told them it was amazing to meet people who thought like me in regards to Food and Health. How much I never realized the importance of food and its role in healing. When I left that day they had offered me a spot for the season and even though I told them I had

to interview a few other places they said "Well, we will see ya or we won't. Just let us know."

I walked away amazed. They were so easy-going, understanding. I thought for sure that my earrings, tattoos and the lack of previous experience in farming would make it very difficult. Apparently not!

In January, I said I would love to join the PVF crew but I

had obligations at my veterinary job. I wanted to work Wed, Sat, Sun and help with deliveries. I was able to take off 3 weeks to be full time with them and really see what it was like working daily. Hana gave me the Ok! And when April came I started working Wednesdays, then May came and I am now 2 weeks into my 3 weeks full time and I can't imagine not being here

daily, so I'm not going to leave. I'm working it out with my other job and I'll be there at least 4 days a week.

There is something amazing to be said about being in the elements all day (I've been so hot I'm down to a tank and running shorts but I've also been so cold on a rainy day that I had two sweatshirts on, tall socks and heavy pants). The ability to work so hard that when you come home you have just enough energy to make dinner, do some laundry and go to sleep without thinking about the sleeping pill that used to be a necessity. The availability of food fresh picked, grown with the help of your hands and energy put forth being the dinner you serve friends. All these things are what drive me daily to get up and head to the farm with a smile on my face. I've never been more gratified than I am right now, in this moment, regarding my life choice.



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all the hard work finished before it gets too hot. The delivery vans (air conditioned, thank goodness) will roll out after lunch, making four or five stops, dropping off bags of vegetables on porches (not air conditioned, alas), coming home by mid afternoon.

And the next day we will get up and race the clock again. Our busy season will go until Thanksgiving,

without a pause. We will take turns getting a break, staggering brief vacations so the vegetables will continue to move. The vegetables have no idea if it is a federal holiday. Squash grows fast, day and night. Tomatoes ripen in the dark. There is no stopping us for the next 24 weeks.

You provide great inspiration for us, since you paid for these vegetables months before you ever saw a single garlic scape. We

are glad to be back in the fields, fulfilling our part of the deal. And we hope you like all the eating and cooking that will be your job, because now that we have started, the vegetables just keep on coming (legato, tenuto).

When we get to Thanksgiving, we stuff the bags with root crops and leafy greens as we try to fit all that is left into the shares (fine). Ritardando, as we put the farm to bed.