



Vol. 16 No. 7

August 30 - September 3, 2015



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

Downward-Facing Farmer, or Dirty Feet Yoga

by Kate Powell

It's somewhere between 4 and 4:45pm on a Friday. Most of the tasks are done for the day – harvest completed, trucks on their way to being packed, veggies have started traveling eastward for weekend markets. We're tired and in varying degrees of dirtiness, but my work isn't finished. You see, I only help out on the farm one day a week and, I think we can all agree, my most significant contribution to the day is not out in the fields, but in the barn where we sweep (most) of the dust off a patch of it and roll out some very dirty yoga mats and proceed to bring balance back to our bodies through relaxation and deep stretching.

I used to work more in the fields

(this is my 4th season with PVF West) but I always had a feeling that farming wasn't all I wanted to do. So I got certified to teach yoga and started offering Farm Yoga because, let's face it; I know EXACTLY how a farmer's body feels and what it needs. Over the last three years, I have taught in some strange locations, surrounded by different animals and veggies. But they all have dust in common! This, however, is the first year it has been so regular and so supported by the farm – with pretty much everyone at West in the afternoon joining in every week. We're pretty serious about DOING Farm Yoga – but we are not serious DURING Farm Yoga! If we ever showed up at a regular studio this dirty and goofy crew would be dubbed 'raised in

a barn.'

Farm Yoga challenges my creativity as a yoga teacher. One time there were crates full of onions in the middle of the 'yoga studio' and every deep breath we took reminded us exactly where we were. Sometimes we're so tired and goofy we mostly lay around laughing until we cry. A commonly heard phrase when in a weird pose: "You guys, if the aliens landed right now..." (sometimes followed by John or Ellen wandering through which is why we can so clearly picture the looks the aliens might give us). On days when it's cooler, we do a more vigorous practice to warm up our bodies more before stretching. On hot days, we move as little as possible – the last two weeks, I taught classes where we never got up from the ground. We target hips and low back to counteract all our bending over. We stretch arms and shoulders to counter lifting. We stretch our necks, hands, and feet to relieve stress and other strain from repetitive movements. We move our spines in all four possible ranges of motion to keep us healthy overall. This year, most folks on the crew seem to run as a hobby (I know, I think they're crazy, too) so we stretch the hamstrings. Some days we talk more about proper

continued on page 2



Summers in Virginia, Winters Somewhere Else

by Mariette Hiu Newcomb

Farming has always been a seasonal preoccupation for us, and the off-season was our chance to get away from the farm. Starting when we were just beginning farmers, every fall after we picked and sold the last corn and tomatoes and planted the rye cover crop, we started thinking about where we would go that winter. We never thought of trying to grow anything between November and April; it was too cold, too hard. At the end of the season we paid the annual mortgage payment to Farm Credit, left the house in the care of renters and took the children out of school, sometimes for a couple of months.

Back in the 1960s and 70s, our pattern was to drive cross-country every other year to California, leave our Econoline van with friends and fly to visit my family and relatives in Honolulu where I had grown up. Besides enjoying the tropical lushness, warmth and beauty of the islands, we got to be



Hiu Newcomb with her family in 1999.

with my family and the children became friends with their cousins.

In the alternate winters, we drove to Florida, to Mexico, to Central America, visiting farms and villages, learning about growing on large and small scale operations, being inspired by the amazing outdoor markets and just being somewhere unfamiliar,

My husband Tony occasionally had economic consulting jobs and sometimes our family went along. One winter we all spent

three months in Turkey while he did a highway feasibility study. Another year, we left the girls with my sister and her family in Honolulu and took 4-year old Charles to Seoul, Korea for a cold three month adventure. I like to think these low-budget early travels contributed to a more expansive worldview for all of us.

I used to fret about the lack of farm income in the winter time and the bleakness of cold dark days. Perhaps because we've gotten better at farming, don't have big

mortgage payments any more, and have more money in the bank at season's end, I can enjoy the non-farming season more.

In fact, the winter seems too short now. I still like to go to the annual sustainable agriculture conferences which get the juices going, but not as much as I used to. I like making up the seed orders. I still like to visit my family and friends in Hawaii but it doesn't have to only be in the winter. I still want to do more sketching and painting and singing, but maybe I could do that during the year now that I don't have to show up for work like everyone else. As long as I'm able, I will work in the greenhouse, help out when needed and stay loosely in the loop in and out of season. Now that I have more choices about how I spend every day, I think that the line between the farming season and my off-season life is blurring. I will never be oblivious to the seasons because I will always be a farmer, but now I am a farmer with more freedom.

continued from page 1

engagement of our core muscles to support our backs and improve our posture. In a non-farm yoga studio, when trying to relax into a deeper stretch, blocks, straps, or other props are sometimes used. In Farm Yoga, we use what we have – bailing twine and baskets... and each other.

Most of the time, I don't practice with them – I am walking around pressing on hips or legs or helping lengthen backs with deep assists. These are usually met with lots of giggles and groans of happiness. So much a part of a good yoga practice is connecting with the community of practitioners. When you live and work together

in a small group the way we do, there are bound to be days when tempers run high. Yoga reconnects us all. It keeps our bodies more limber. It keeps us more mindful and less stressed. And on a farm committed to sustainability, taking care of all these things (body, mind, heart) is a key part of that practice.

A Season for Coming Home

by Sam Sedon

Sometimes we forget, through the balmy afternoons and relentless heat, that the mid Atlantic can be a magical place in the summertime. Forests are brimming with wild wineberries, abundant and delicious, and fireflies light up the sky after fiery sunsets. The air is thick with bugs and the humidity that makes our clothes sticky and our knees sweat. As September creeps up on August, it's easy to get excited for cooler, shorter days, but I am trying to appreciate every second of this season in this place we call home. My commitment to the Wheatland farming community has made me so happy to be home here.

I believe that healthy communities are grounded in healthy food systems. I believe that our community, nestled in the rolling hills of Northern Virginia has something special. Second Spring Farm contributes delicious vegetables for our CSA. Greenstone Fields grows beautiful flowers made into even more beautiful bouquets for us. In exchange for using our digger, the Moutoux farmers unearthed our first bed of carrots. When Tree and Leaf Farm down in Unionville needed help harvesting the potato crop that we've been enjoying in the CSA shares, a crew from PVF was on the way by the time the sun was coming up.

I grew up just twenty minutes from PVF's Loudoun farm, but this is my first summer farming here. Working in Purcellville has given me the opportunity to appreciate where I'm from in a completely different way. Some days we fold up hundreds of feet of remay in ninety percent humidity or wipe sweat from our faces while we drown hundreds of potato

beetles, but cooler-weathered states would struggle to produce the fifty pony mountain of tomatoes that we harvest in a single morning here at Potomac Vegetable Farm. I remember a frantic evening at the end of August in Missoula, covering our most important crops with remay for fear of an impending frost. It left me missing the heat of home. And when I started to complain about the four weeks of rain here in the early summer, I had to remind myself of the weeks we hoped for rain in the southwestern desert. As soon as I graduated from college, I couldn't wait to move away to find another place to be a part of. I had no idea that just a few miles from my hometown there existed this wonderful farming community full of people that care for the land and care for each other.

Right next door we can hear the Moutoux crew pounding posts

for their tomato crop, and from our farmstand we can wave to the Greenstone Fields crew on their way to work. Mountain View Farm is just a short drive away, and Second Spring Farm workers came and helped us harvest garlic scapes in the spring. We all get together for square dances and birthdays and talent shows, and most importantly, food. A potluck tends to be the center of all of our gatherings, and as farmers we tend to food pretty seriously. Lemony golden squash cake, roasted beet salads, and handmade ravioli stuffed with summer vegetables and topped with an alfredo sauce made from raw milk.

Being a part of this place is an honor, and a challenge to do my best for people that we serve. We all work so hard to create a sense of place, and here we are all working together to nourish each other and our communities.



Sam, far right, visiting with Charles and Sue Moutoux at the Blueberry Pickernic in July.

Notes from the Field

I Thought I Was Invincible, But I'm Not

by Jaclyn Mills

Two years ago, I took a job working at a small vegetable farm in North Carolina. The job was new for me in many ways: my first summer not living at home, the first time I worked 40+ hours a week, the first time I operated a rototiller, the first time I worked at a farmer's market. It was also significant because it was the first time I realized this: I'm sensitive.

Okay, if you know me, you already know that I am a sensitive person. This past March, I cried in the Boston airport because one of the flight attendants was short with me. I'm not talking about that sort of sensitive though. That summer, I started to realize how all of my actions were affecting my body.

Let's start with dessert because my philosophy is to start with dessert. Two summers ago, I thought I was invincible against sugar. People would speak of this "sugar crash" phenomenon and I would scoff. What weaklings.

Then I was introduced to the community meal held every Thursday in town. So much delicious food, and always a whole folding table full of pies, cakes, cookies, and ice cream. It was a dream. My dreams were crushed, however, when I ate a plate of dessert and felt like I was walking through quicksand after lunch.

My first week on the farm, I ate cereal and milk every morning for breakfast. But alas, that quicksand feeling made me reconsider my morning food choices. What was my problem?! I used to be able to

eat anything I wanted without any "noticeable" difference in energy.

My energy levels were also noticeably different that summer based on how much sleep I was getting. Who knew? During the school year, I'd stay up till the library closed, working on projects and papers. Working on the farm? 10 pm means I'm staying up late. (This year, it seems that bedtime has started to get pushed back earlier and earlier.)

Several weeks ago, I got into a bad habit of eating lots of bread and pasta, and not so many vegetables. I love vegetables so much! But after I've spent the whole morning harvesting tomatoes, there's not a huge desire for me to go harvest some more for dinner. Of course, we have a pile of seconds produce for the farm workers, but sometimes that 3 minute walk to the barn is just not be interesting to my tired self.

One day, Amelia and I were discussing how we had both fallen into this routine, and how we should probably get some vitamins and minerals back into our lives. At least one vegetable every meal, we decided, would be a good goal to have.

Re-committing myself to those lovely vegetables I tend to every day was an important decision. My body feels more energized, my mind feels more clear, and I even feel better emotionally.

In some ways I feel sad when I have these realizations about food and sleep. I want to eat whatever I want! I want to stay up late with friends and show up to



work ready to be the fastest chard picker! (Just kidding, I don't think that's anytime in the near future.) Anyways, I want to pretend that I'm invincible.

Food and sleep have such healing powers! I just don't notice those powers as much when I'm not farming. To be sure, the effects are there, but they aren't as amplified to me as when I'm out in the sun all day. In a way, farming has made me revere my food for the impact that it can have on my whole being.

So help me stick to my vegetable goal. And the next time you see me at the farmer's market, ask me what vegetable I had with breakfast.