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POTOMAC VEGETABLE FARMS
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While You Were Sleeping

by Hana Newcomb

Not everyone on the farm is lucky enough to be a morning person. Some of us have to be jolted from sleep with an alarm, others wake up without help and roll out of bed, ready to go. But on Saturdays, we all have to get up early and move quickly. It's our big

market day.

The crew of two that goes to the Leesburg Farmers Market meets at the barn at the Purcellville farm at 5:45 in the morning. They roll the crates of leafy greens out of the cooler and shove them into the back of the ancient Ford cargo van. They work to wedge in the flowers

and a few more empty baskets for display. They check their list to make sure they have all the paraphernalia: scales, bags, change, drinking water. They drive the fifteen minute trip in the new light of day, and arrive at the strip mall parking lot.

Meanwhile, thirty miles away in Vienna, there is a

loading party going on in the stand parking lot. Five or six of us meet at the same hour of 5:45 and start loading the vans for Arlington and Falls Church and Reston. These vehicles are already loaded with the vegetables that don't need refrigeration -- we

continued on page 4



Amelia is a morning person.

Announcing Our Annual CSA Farm Tour

Dust off your sun hats, find your bug spray, and slather on the sunblock. CSA customers from far and wide are invited to our annual CSA Farm Tour on Monday, September 7 (Labor Day!) from 3-5pm.

This year we're going picnic style! In addition to our traditional hayride farm tour and self-guided walking tour, we're asking everyone to bring a snack and a picnic blanket to share. We'll sprawl out, soak in some late summer sun, let the kids run amok, and snack on tasty goodies. (Hint: I love brownies.)

The farm tour will be held at our Vienna farm location. Meet at the roadside stand and we'll venture out from there. The address is 9627 Leesburg Pike, Vienna, VA 22182. There will be limited circuits of the hayride, so please be prompt.

Please RSVP to becky@potomacvegetablefarms.com if you are planning on coming. We like to know how many hay wagons to have ready and how much salsa Hana and Jon need to make. We hope to see you!

The Low-Budget Water Park: PVF's Hidden Gem

by Kate Salamido

In this area, the season known as “summer” is really one long heat wave, often accented with bouts of soul-crushing humidity that only serve to remind us why it’s a bad idea to build a city on top of a swamp. When the mercury starts steadily climbing and the heat index approaches the triple digits, some retreat into their air-conditioned homes and offices, while others flock to the local pool or ice cream parlor.

At PVF, we have more unusual ways of cooling off. As you read last week, many of us simply walk around with freezer popsicles sticking out of our mouths (the hands-free method) or with one popsicle in each hand (the double-fist



Workers cavort at the high-budget water park.

method). Others drink liter upon liter of water, or take a few minutes to stand inside one of our walk-in vegetable coolers, where the temperature never goes above fifty degrees.

I believe that there’s a better way of staying cool during the dog days of summer. When it gets hot – and I mean really, really hot – I put on my best I’m-willing-

to take-one-for-the-team expression and volunteer to wash dirty buckets and crates. This doesn’t sound like a particularly good idea, but when it’s close to one hundred degrees and sunny, any activity that involves unrestricted access to a powerful hose is a godsend. Sure, the buckets are crusted with putrefying rotten tomato sludge, but relief from the heat more than makes up for the slime.

The sanitization station – which I have rebranded as the “Low Budget Water Park” – includes many picturesque elements, such as the mountain of grimy buckets, and the bloodthirsty swarm of mosquitos. There’s also a hose, which is used to remove the scum from buckets and crates, but the water comes out at

all angles, often spraying the user. But my favorite part is the tub, rim covered with a rusty patina, which would look equally at home in a hipster’s exposed-brick loft. This tub is filled with water and disinfectant, and de-grimed buckets are dunked in the slurry then set out to dry.

This whole process – blasting grime away with a hose, dunking in the tub, lugging dripping buckets and crates out of the water – involves a lot of splashing and spraying, and much of that water ends up on me. By the time everything is clean and lying out to dry, I am soaked from head to toe. Drops of water fall from my eyelashes and bead on my forehead. I can feel the sloshing inside my shoes, and my shirt and pants are so wet that they cling to my skin and drip moisture onto the gravel. I’ll have to put on a new set of clothes before I go do anything else, but that’s fine by me. I’d pay any price to steal a few hours of refreshment in the Low Budget Water Park before heading back out to pick tomatoes. I may be soaked, but I’m cool, and that’s all that really matters.



Kate shows off the low-budget water park.

One Week in Eden

by Ellen Polishuk

We have a long history of humane employee practices here at PVF. That includes accommodating a week vacation during the busy summer for each person. We certainly encourage folks to go BEFORE the tomatoes come in fast and hard in August.

In the past, I always headed to the beach, where I would resolutely sit under an umbrella – I sure didn't need any more sun on my skin! But in more recent years, I've headed north to the Adirondacks of NY for my R&R. It's quite a different experience, but the results are the same: coming home rested and ready for more farming. A farmers market friend got me access to some privately rented cabins on a small lake called Uttawana Lake, near Blue Mountain Lake, deep in the Adirondacks. Thankfully, there is no cell phone access, and no internet. As a family we agreed (okay I demanded!) that we also ban all electronics from our time there. That means no games on the phone, no earbuds blaring music. This has become a sacred time for enjoying the peaceful quiet of the lake, and for just being with each other.

Our little settlement includes the main cabin (kitchen, living room and big bedroom for the grown-ups), a bunkhouse cabin for the kids, and a bath house. All these gorgeous wood and stone cabins are nestled very gently into a rocky, uneven landscape, surrounded by big evergreen trees. We call it our Hobbit Hole. The builders didn't move anything, or flatten the ground, just put these buildings up on small stilts. So, just outside the living room window are huge fern and moss covered boulders. And pine needles are everywhere. There are wild blueberries all around. We have a dock where we can sit and enjoy the view, and the sun, and the cold lake water. Our car and the rest of the world are a good 15 minute canoe ride across the lake.

So, what do we do all



day for 6 days? We talk about eating, we cook, we eat. We nap, swim and walk about. We play a lot of card and board games. We read, and knit (just me knitting). We canoe or kayak down to the inlet end of the lake and look at all the fascinating plant life (pitcher plants are my favorite). It's fabulous. We keep our eyes and ears peeled for the loons who live there. What an eerie sound they make, especially at night.

As Friday rolls around, we pack up and reluctantly head back into the regular world. It's hard to leave such a little Eden.



Notes from the Field: Crossroads

by Tillie Newcomb

It was a blow to learn that the Spanish I was speaking was no better than the ten year old's who was shopping at our stand. I have been taking Spanish since seventh grade and I think I am a decent speaker but at market I could only understand the easy questions. I could answer questions about prices, I could tell them we don't have basil, but that was about it. Of course I was selling with Peio from

Spain, so it was impossible to feel really good about my own accomplishments.

I was astounded by the number of people who showed up at market, and even more surprised by the whole food stamp program and how it works to give access to good food. Our prices are set to match the amounts of the WIC checks, as very few people pay in cash.

And I was also glad to see how many people cared about the way we grow the food. They asked if it was organic. I didn't really expect that, and I was glad to be able to tell them about our growing practices.

For some reason, they asked if we were all related. We don't look alike at all – but people always think we are all from the same family. This happens at all the markets and at the stand, too.

This market is so diverse – people from South America, the Caribbean, Africa, China and Takoma Park – and they were all in one place looking for good food. The market feels like home to them, and they come every week.

I come to visit the farm every summer for a few weeks (I am related, actually) and it was amazing to see our stand at this unusual market, providing access to good food at affordable prices. It felt like a really big deal and I was happy to be there.



Tillie (center) surveys her domain at Crossroads.

continued from page 1

add the buckets of zinnias, the crates of beets and lettuce and chard, slam the doors shut, wish each other good luck and roll out.

We go to four farmers markets on Saturday and they all start at 8 AM. That is a lot of simultaneous activity. I love thinking about the four separate teams (almost all women, this year) unloading their vans at the same time, lowering the tables off the back, pulling the tarp poles out and laying them out on the ground. Our rigs are not elegant, by any means, but we have streamlined our set-up so that any of us can go to any market and feel comfortable.

We have homemade table tops, dozens of 10' pieces of electrical conduit, custom made corners to hold the tarp frames together, and inexpensive tarps for shade. It takes less than 10 minutes to create a shelter overhead, one that keeps the rain off and provides up to 400 square feet of sales space.

Some of us have been going to market for decades, for others it is a new form of Saturday morning entertainment. Of all the farm jobs, this one seems to come easiest to almost everyone – we have all been on the other side of the table, shopping at a market, so it is not so hard to switch to the farmer side and get busy setting out the tomatoes and chard.

By 8:00, Potomac Vegetable Farms is ready for business, all over the nearby region. It's not always smooth. We forget things. Our scales have bad batteries. Reston got all the mint by mistake and Arlington got all the hot peppers. Sometimes one of us has to drive between markets, bringing a functioning scale just in the nick of time. But at 8:00 our vegetables are poised on the tables, glowing in the morning light. We have been awake for at least three hours and some of us are in need of a dry T-shirt already – but the fun is about to begin and we love this moment every time. It is vegetable theater, week after week. The bell rings and the conversations begin.