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The following pieces are in continuation of the answer to the prompt: “Tell us about a tool or a task that you particularly enjoy.”

Friday Favorites: Flowers and Food

by Pam Relph

What task or tool do I particularly like? Without trying to sound too much like a keen bean, there isn't much that I have done that I dislike all that much! I have only been at PVF since July and so I still have an unyielding optimism about everything to do with farming, but have not yet experienced a Virginia winter!! Ask me next year, and it might be a little different.

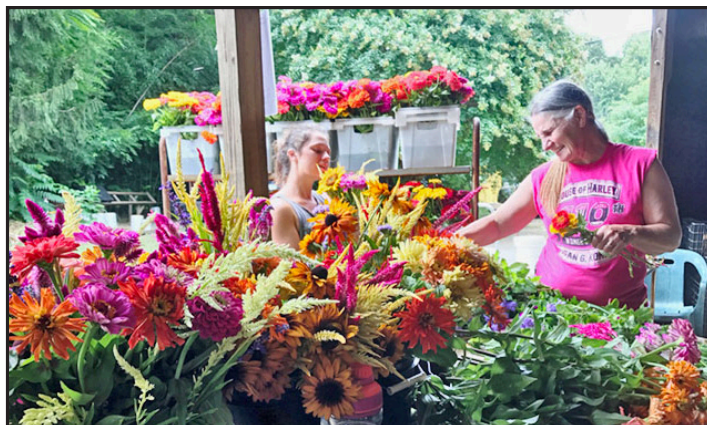
If I really had to choose a single task I would say that I enjoy bunching flowers for market. On a Friday afternoon right after

potluck, a group of us will sit around a big table which is covered in beautiful flowers and make bouquets. We talk about farming, books we've read, and how full we all are after lunch. There is always a lot of laughter for a few hours, whilst we are being creative and making things that our customers at market enjoy so much!

The result of all this flower bunching is then, on the following day, lots of people coming to the stand and being overwhelmed by a sea of colour (spelt the English way!) and comments about how beautiful the bunches are.

I couldn't count the number of times I have heard a customer say “but I can't choose, they are all so pretty”. Each week at the market, I see people taking photos of the flowers. I have considered starting to photo-bomb them and become internet-famous. The Falls Church Farmer's Market Photo-Bomber!

In all seriousness, I am about to end my first summer season at PVF and I will really miss it. I'll miss the flower bunching and the potluck lunching. Most of all, I will miss every now and then, hearing one of my co-workers say ‘tomatoes’ in a British accent!



Creating the CSA Room

by Hana Newcomb

About 40% of our customers never get to see the CSA room. This is a shame – it can be the most rejuvenating space on the whole farm (except for the walk-in cooler on a steamy summer day). It is a surprise every CSA day, full of color and fresh smells and remarkable beauty. The room itself is not pretty: the walls are plain plywood, the floor is rough cement and the furniture is boards and boxes and a repurposed warehouse shelf. There are whiteboards with messages on them, with no artistic flair and no Trader Joes handwriting.

It's not the CSA room that I really like, it's the process of creating it. When we first start to work on it in the morning, it is an unholy mess. There are fruit flies and empty baskets and scraps of leaves and sweet potato dust. The tomato table needs a wipe-down and there are tomatoes on it that should go straight to the pigs. We sweep up the detritus, peel off the old signs, reconstruct the shelving and begin the job of creating a space worth visiting.

On Sunday mornings we are getting ready for our biggest crowd, and we know the first

people will arrive at exactly 11:00 – straight from church and before lunch. It is like getting ready for a train to arrive. There is no wiggle room in terms of timing. We pull cartloads of crates from the coolers and start to fill the shelves. There is no formula and we don't have any idea which vegetables will go where – they just start to take their places. It takes about two hours of steady work to cram about 30 crates of vegetables onto the shelves. Often we will set up a whole shelf and change our minds, moving armloads of beets to the front table and pints of shishitos out of the high dollar real estate. We make judgments about which items will be the most popular and which will only be interesting to a few.

It doesn't sound very exciting, but every single time we feel the same sense of pride as we sweep the floor and get out of the way of the shoppers. It is a task that is never the same twice, even though we do it three times a week, 24 weeks in a row, plus the eight sporadic weeks in the winter. And quite often someone says to us, "I love coming into this room. It feeds my soul." Or something equally dramatic.

It takes only a few minutes

for the artwork to start to come apart, as chard gets knocked sideways and empty pint boxes get scattered around. But the job of maintaining the room (called "fluffing") is almost as satisfying as creating it, as we try to figure out the right "price" to move something along at the proper pace, or as we find ways to make the 4:00 room look as appealing as it was at noon.

We learn a lot in the CSA room as we watch people choose their vegetables for the week. We also learn a lot at the farmers markets about what quantities are appropriate, how much people think they will eat in a week. One of the most intellectually interesting parts of setting up the room is figuring out the right prices – based entirely on supply and demand, with no real regard for the prices outside of that room. We don't think about the real world price of tomatoes when we decide on the amount that makes up an item. We think about how many tomatoes we have and how many we hope our customers can eat. When we put something precious in a small container, it may have a "price" that exceeds

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Love Letter to My Favorite Farm Tool

by Mariam Frick

The sun is burning, your water bottle is empty, your buckets are full and heavy, there are many of them standing all over the field.

And there it is: waiting for you like a loyal companion, ready to go with you wherever you want and not only going with you but bringing you, carrying, caring for you.

Yes, I'm in love with my golf cart! No, not with mine – it doesn't belong to me, it has its own free spirit and besides, categories as mine and yours and theirs don't exist here. I'm in love with all the golf carts here on the farm (a bit more with the electric ones though, I have to admit).

To make it clear: it's not only about helping to carry and being faster (even though they do a great job doing exactly this and make farm life so much easier – it wouldn't be possible without their help).

But driving a golf cart is more than that.

It's a whole experience that transforms you, makes you breathe and gives you energy. When one job is done you load your buckets, tools and other stuff and drive back to the barn to unload and drive to the next task.

And these moments in between are sacred.

From one moment to the other you don't feel that you're sweating, you don't feel that you're exhausted, you just feel the air on your skin and in your hair and you look around and see the beauty of the farm with all its different workers, of all the fields and the growing vegetables, some of them on the back of your golf cart waiting to be washed, put in the cooler and be sold on colourful markets. Distances are not very far on the farm but this one minute on the golf cart makes you realize how special and beautiful this place and ecoganic farming is, make you realize how beautiful life is – oh yes, that sounds dramatic. But I'm in love! What do you expect?

And the ride both separates and connects the different jobs you're doing on the farm. You pick Swiss chard, you drive to the barn, you unload and wash it, you drive to the arugula to cover the fragile little plants with a long, long cloth wafting in the wind, you drive to the barn, you load the buckets and crates, you drive to the tomato field, you pick tomatoes, you drive to the barn, you unload, you drive to the beans,... Farming is not one job, it's thousands of jobs, recurring and changing every day. You don't drive with your car to work in the morning and drive back in the evening. You do many different things in different places, fields, rows. And you drive



your golf cart in between. Golf carts are the perfect vehicles for a farm – personally I think they are much more suitable for a farm than for playing golf. I would therefore suggest to rename them and call them farm carts. Golf players can of course still use them but only while acknowledging their real nature as farm carts.

I've never played golf in my whole life. So I hadn't been driving farm carts before coming to Potomac Vegetable Farms. Now they became so part of my farm life here that I can't imagine a life without them anymore. Having to leave PVF quite soon, I will have to leave many beautiful things behind. But maybe I could try to come through customs and smuggle a farm cart in to Germany and drive through the streets of Berlin. The air will be definitely not as good as it is here, the surroundings not that green and prolific, the sun not that strong.

But I will feel free!

From one moment to the other I won't feel that I'm sweating, I won't feel that I'm exhausted, I will feel the air on my skin and in my hair and I will look around and see the beauty of the city and all the diverse life styles, of all the streets and its growing humans, some of them on the back of my farm cart waiting to be dropped off at the canal to have a coffee together and go shopping on colourful markets. Distances are very far in the city, but this one hour on the farm cart will make me realize how special and beautiful this place is, make me realize how beautiful life is.

And I promise, even having you in the city, I won't turn you into a city cart; I will fully accept your identity and acknowledge your real nature as a farm cart.

Oh, beloved farm cart, I think we have a future together!

Update on the Pigs

by Hana Newcomb

We thought we had two pregnant moms, but it turns out we didn't. They never really acted pregnant – they never slowed down, they never seemed to get fatter, they stayed frisky and silly. Finally we asked the pig farmer, Bev Eggleston, if he could possibly be wrong about this. Well, maybe so. So he brought us three little pigs last week and he took away Abby and Georgia who were really so big that they were kind of scary. Our season starts in early October and little pigs are much more fun for little people who are about the same size. They don't have names yet, so if you have any good ideas for a threesome (two girls and a boy), we are taking suggestions.



“CSA,” cont. from page 2
the price at market, but it reflects the value of that item within that room.

Not only is the room a place for vegetables, it is a space for conversations about cooking and eating. People talk to each other, they talk to their kids, they talk to us. We may not know each other in any other context, but we know we are all there for the same reasons, and that gets the conversation going.

One of the most entertaining things (for me) is to watch people choose their items. It goes pretty quickly at first, as they get the stuff they like the most, and then as they get closer

to their last item, the decisions come more slowly. That last item is a killer. People wander around and around the 12x12 room, looking for the perfect final selection. Sometimes

they think they are finished, so they leave, put then they pause, think, turn around, come back, put back the chard and take the beets instead.

It is always easy to tell

when someone who is not a CSA member has wandered into the room. It happens on Sundays more than other days – and you can tell because they come without a container, they look puzzled as they read the cryptic numbers and odd messages, and they can't figure out the prices. “Where do we pay?” they ask.

There are so many tasks that I enjoy – this one uses such a spectrum of skills (without hurting knees or back) so that it is always an interesting challenge. It is marketing without the usual parameters. It's the farmer's version of a game.

