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This week our writers struggled to stay ahead of the tomato avalanche. But some did answer the question: what was harder than you expected on the farm? Some chose other themes...

Surprising Challenges of Being On This Farm

by D. Smythe

- Carrying one or more concrete buckets more than three feet.
- Accurately sorting the recycled 1/2 doz egg cartons into at least six different sets.
- Remembering what produce Hana never wants to find inside the main cooler.
- Weeding when the weeds were taller than the weeder and the constant fear of mistaking cash crops for unusual weeds.
- Finding one egg left over after filling 90 1/2 dozen egg cartons for the CSA room.
- Putting the correct amount of water for the flowers in dozens of black buckets in a hurry.
- Carefully weeding carrots without using eyebrow tweezers to avoid ruining the expected crop yield.
- Explaining to elementary school groups about exactly where Hiu's chickens' eggs come from.
- Underestimating how hungry certain staff can get when they find out there really are oatmeal cookies chilling out in the freezer.
- How hard it was to drive a golf cart at any speed without spilling water in a half filled cup.
- Bilingual skills were redundant with trying to interpret jargon: Ponies/CoolBot/Wubbies/FrouFrou/Remay/Scapes
- Timely getting around the unposted farm beds without SIRI
- Feeding the pigs with slightly bruised produce, but never onions or rubber bands
- Constantly harvesting half buried rocks that seem to grow in size overnight after every passing shower.
- Safely getting the top crate of eight down to ground level for cleaning its onions.
- Accurately counting a hut full of skittish chickens.
- Spinning spinach was not as safe an assignment as it was made out to be. The rare Spinach-related accident was timely treated by a visiting veterinarian.
- Keeping up with the changing names of the produce in the CSA room.
- Enjoying handling personally yukkie vegetables with love.
- Remembering rubber bands don't compost very quickly.
- Keeping the CoolBot dry after torrential rains using a recently patented three hose siphoning system.



One of David's many jobs is cleaning onions late into the night.



Notes from Deep in the Weeds

by Dick Clement

As a rookie farmer, my hardest job to date has been—yes—weed pulling.

Now weeding can be a social task while pulling ordinary weeds. Or a hard and also humorous task when confronted with this unnamed, possible pre-historic weed that has staked a claim in the bean rows at Parent's Patch. This weed

knows good, fertile, ecoganic soil when it finds it.

It will not yield to any ordinary tug. Two hands, put your back into it, and it may come loose. I looked up from my struggle with this weed to see one of my farmer companions in a full leg press, both hands gripping and – falling backward with weed in hand. SUCCESS!

A bonding, laughable moment in the bean row.

Our newest worker, putting his back into it.

Gratitude for the Group AND the Satisfaction of Solitude

by Bethany Towne

I worked on a farm in Pennsylvania for a few years, much of it by myself. This year I was happy to have the opportunity to move to PVF and work here for the summer, as well as at the neighboring Second Spring Farm. I knew there was a fair sized crew at PVF and was interested in seeing what that would be like. I arrived here in mid June, near the height of blueberry picking! It was a change to be able to whisk through so many tasks during the day. There are advantages to working in a group here at the farm. It's likely one person could forget to bring a tool needed, or the specifics of some instructions given, but much less likely that six brains will all forget! Few jobs take more than a few hours in a day. Instead of harvesting chard for an hour, I can harvest chard with two other people for 20 minutes! 8 hours of picking tomatoes can be divided by the number of people helping. And many beds

of sweet potato plants that need weeding are not so overwhelming when you are part of a crew. There are lots of tasks where it is easy to chat with everyone, play a word game or sing. And if I am not feeling like talking then there are conversations to listen to! Especially if we can keep task efficiency in mind, working in a group can be ideal!

But there are positives to working by myself. There is ample opportunity to give thought to the task and the most efficient way to accomplish it. In an often busy world, it can be a gift to have time to feel grounded, or give thought to what needs it. I find working alone to be a funny experience; if the task I am working on is simple enough, (and goes on for long enough) I find that I can just be a witness to endless thoughts that my mind is creating. I don't even have to work to make them happen, they just do, unceasingly! Of course it is unfortunate if I find myself stewing. If I have some complaint or negative thoughts

about my life or the world I can get stuck. Trying to refocus my thoughts or concentrate on my breathing or think of a song can help for a little while, but if it's a stewy day then it's a stewy day and I would sure wish I had company to better distract me from me.

One experience which would be difficult to have while working in a group – after working on a repetitive task for a little while, which may have even been difficult or annoying to begin with, I can become very focused and feel more energy and drive. It doesn't happen that often but it's really neat and might be similar to a state of mind that's been named "flow" or "the zone."

So, if you work by yourself you have to deal with yourself on your good days and bad days and if you work in a group you also have to deal with them on their good and bad days. There is potential in any group for its members to cause trouble and strife for each other but my experience at PVF has been a very uplifting one so far.

At Long Last, The Pigs are Here!

by Hana Newcomb

We borrow pigs every summer – they usually arrive as cute little babies, just weaned, and we feed them and play with them and let them eat as many tomatoes as they can stand. We give these pigs the best life ever. They root in the compost pile with their super strong pig noses, sleep in the shade, cool off in a muddy puddle. This has been going on for years. At the end of October, we give them back, bigger and more socialized than when they arrived. They are the best pets ever – so happy to see us, delighted to eat whatever is offered, and thrilled to be scratched on their leathery, hairy backs.

We had to wait forever for the pigs this time. Our benefactor, Bev Eggleston of Eco-Friendly Foods, had a million other things to do and he just couldn't get organized to load up our baby pigs and drive them four hours to the spa. Every few weeks he sent me another text

with another reason why they weren't here yet. Meanwhile, Michael Bradford kept working on the pen, making improvements, getting it all ready. One weekend, when we were supposed to have the pigs already but once again they didn't make it, a sudden storm blew through, knocking down a very large oak tree, smashing the fences on both sides of the pen. It took Michael about a month (of inconsistent, sporadic effort) to cut up all the brush and then remove about two tons of firewood, using levers and chain saws and ingenuity and sweat.

Bev had an idea, taking our pig experience to a whole new level. And he finally got two pigs loaded into the trailer and delivered them to Northern Virginia. He brought Abby and Georgia back – the same two who left here last fall so reluctantly (when he loaded them up to take them home in November, the back gate on the trailer was not closed correctly and they just stepped back



out and returned to their comfortable pen, but Bev didn't even know this until we sent him a confused text about the pigs that were supposed to be gone. He was already at the Dulles Toll Road, and he hustled back here to scoop them up again).

Anyway, Abby and Georgia are back and they are unrecognizable. When they left, a strong and brave person could still catch them and lift them. Now they each weigh about 350 pounds. I wondered if they would remember this place. As soon as they got out of the trailer, it was clear that they knew exactly where they were. They ambled down to the wettest spot and dug

themselves a muddy place to cool off and rest. They were unperturbed. They had a long nap. And since they arrived about four days ago, they have devoured watermelons and dozens of buckets of rotten tomatoes, had several showers a day, and slept for hours during the steamy afternoons.

But here's the best part – if all goes well, there will be piglets arriving in the next month or so. No specific due date, but we will be watching closely and we will joyfully announce the arrival of all those new personalities. It's better not to have a due date as it is so hard to wait. This way we will just be surprised.



Memories of the Spicy Leopard Pepper Woman

by Scout Parker

Once at Leesburg farmers market, I was struck dumb by the mystery of a beautiful, leopard clad, hot pepper-buying woman.

It was the summer of 2015, and I was even more of a confused, burgeoning kid-woman than I am now. I had been giving what I thought was a delightful and informative tomato exposition, when quite suddenly, Leopard Pepper Woman came prowling into our tent, wearing a floor length, skin tight leopard print dress. After smoothing her long hair with her talons, she cut through the pastel, squash-fondling shoppers like a hunter. Her eyes set on our hot peppers. Unbeknownst to the rest of our comparatively feeble

and indecisive shoppers, all other vegetables immediately assumed secondary status.

After this woman had gathered every basket of our hot peppers, she came to me to buy them. "How much?" she said, with a voice that should have made Spanish-Guitar Kid's strings recoil and retire in humble defeat. "Well..." I stuttered, "um, I have to count them." Starting to count, I lost count, and then I dropped a pepper. Somehow I managed in my muffled foolery to come to a price, which was at least \$75. Who buys that many hot peppers? Who is this woman, and why did she come? Is there a spicy leopard print goddess in me which she was sent to kindle? Well I have nothing to report, two years later I'm still a

confused, burgeoning kid-woman.

I won't ever be a spicy leopard woman with a voice like the Spanish guitar; frankly, nor do I want to be. Just as peppers come in all shape, colors, spice levels and sizes, so do women! That's the beautiful thing! Perhaps I was just floored by the sight of a woman, or a person for that matter, who owned how they chose to express themselves, and who did it in a way that seemed true to themselves.

So rock on Leopard Pepper woman! Rock on grungy metal people, hairy armpit people, curvy-confident people, sporty jock people, queer people, gender nonconforming folk, trans people, people of every size, color and creed.. Whatever shape your seed. Rock on!

The Entirety of Farming: It's Kind of Hard

by Sarah Waybright

Nothing about farming is really hard...but when you combine all the things you need to do to farm successfully, the entirety of farming is really hard. There are about 8 constantly fluctuating systems to balance and work within - CSA management, planting, harvesting, staff schedules, market schedules, how to market, planning around weather, general maintenance and protocols...not to mention that you'd probably like to maintain some sort of personal schedule on the side! It's

the ultimate business model, where the owner needs to wear lots of hats and understand everything from budgets to soil health to customer service. One of the reasons I wanted to work at PVF was the longevity of its operation. I knew that farming takes a lot of juggling, but I wanted to see it firsthand, from people who know how to do it in a way that's sustainable (ie, profitable long term) and who love pulling it all together. There are times when it seems like there's no way everything will get done, but Carrie and Hana know just how to move people to the right tasks,



Sarah realizes we still have 15 more tubs of zinnias to bunch.

prioritize jobs, and pour out a little extra energy from the last corner of their beings to make it happen. We aren't always as fast or adept,

but carrying a team with spirit and confidence - and making it look enjoyable - is something I have new appreciation for as a secretly hard job!