



Vol. 13 No. 10

October 8, 2012



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

## All the Work's A Game

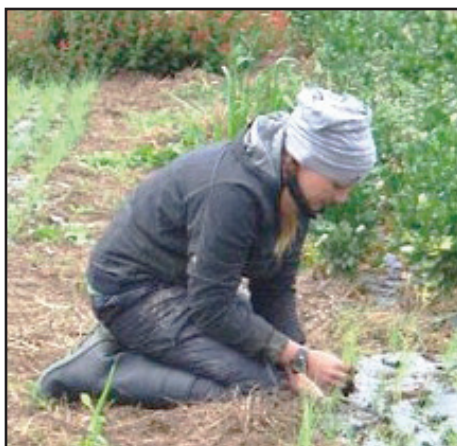
by Colleen McManus

All work, in the end, is just a game we play, with and against the world, day after day. (Sorry to break the hearts of the young and ambitious among us.) We bring our skills and knowledge to the table, and then encounter problems to solve and setbacks to endure, all in the hope that when the day is over, we've found solutions for "the client" and we all get paid. Hooray?

Farming is no different, but our "clients" are mother nature and the general public, which adds a serious layer of unpredictability. (Perhaps you've noticed, when that butternut squash that you were expecting in your CSA bag became....yet another 2 pounds of potatoes. Nature has her own timeline and quotas.) Hana and I were discussing how our farming lives routinely became a series of games.

- Jenga: Offload 80 ponies of tomatoes from PVF West and stack them into a space designed only to fit 50. Wait two hours. Return to said space, and attempt to retrieve the only pony of orange tomatoes we received. Hint: it's on the bottom. In the middle.

- Tetris: It's Thursday. Hana is out of town. Colleen doesn't work Thursdays. Becky is around but can only work the A.M. Carrie can only be down at the stand between 11 A.M. and 2 P.M. Rachel leaves at 1. Amelia doesn't arrive until 4. Logan has a doctor's appointment between 2 and 3. Hiu will be delivering until 2:30 but could possibly get back earlier. Fit these pieces together to create the 1-4 P.M. stand shift.



- Concentration: You have been instructed to pick 2 bushels of green beans by 10 A.M. You remember seeing one patch in the Rt.7 field, but you're pretty sure those are done for the season. Yesterday you saw lush green beans ready to be picked on your way back from the Beulah Rd. patch. ....where did you see them?

- Gin-Rummy: From your current holding of vegetables, you must find eight items for CSA. Three must not have been offered last week. Two must come from PVF West stock to reduce the amount of cooler space being used. Three must be green. All eight must total 10 pounds. (first person to use all their vegetables WINS!)

- Solitaire: Match the vegetable backstock to the market outlet where it will actually sell / be eaten (CSA, Farmers Markets, Farmstand, Restaurants/Wholesale). When you run out of vegetables, you win / the season is over.

- Super Mario Brothers (for the younger among us): CSA bag packing runs late for unpredictable reasons. You battle some of the worst traffic you've ever seen and finally arrive 20 minutes late at the address of the new host for the Fairfax pick-up, only to find out you've been given the wrong address. "...but our princess is in another castle!" Sad trombone music plays.

Sometimes it can be amazing how the things we do in our free time are just a spin on what we master to make a living. Next time a co-worker cancels that important meeting with the sales department, enjoy a game of Tetris at your computer, on us.

## PVF History — We Start a CSA: Tenth in a 12-Part Series

by Hana Newcomb

I have a distinct memory of my father coming home from the bank one winter day looking very pleased with himself. He had walked in and said he needed a \$25,000 loan. They gave it to him without asking any questions. They knew that he had paid off his loans on time for years and the business was dependable if not lucrative. I also remember that every year sometime in the middle of September he would say, “from now on, the money we make is ours. We have paid off the loan.” Of course, in those days, the season ended about one month later. There was not a lot of wiggle room. And there were many years when all we did was pay back the loans and make mortgage payments.

When the Community Supported Agriculture concept first came to this country in the 1980s (from Europe, of course), it was a revolutionary idea. Also idealistic and purist, a huge paradigm shift when thinking about how to run a business. Basically, the community would support its farmer by participating in the farm economy from beginning to end. The farmer would sit down with a Board of Trustees, essentially, and they would create an annual budget together, including all of the costs of running a farm. The planning group would calculate how much each CSA member needed to pay in order to pay all the expenses for the season, the CSA members would contribute their fair share, and everyone would get a portion of the bounty. Everyone shared equally in the risk.

Here in the United States, farmers and communities began to



Karin Boyd, circa 1998.

experiment with the arrangement. When I first heard about it, it didn't interest me very much because I couldn't quite imagine how we would give up our farmers markets and our roadside stand and our wholesale customers. Also, on a visit to some CSA farming friends in Vermont, I saw the 3-ring binder with all the notes about what each family liked (no zucchini, lots of Swiss Chard) and I shuddered at the thought of taking responsibility for so many people's vegetable preferences.

But then Paul and Martha of Newburg Vegetable Farm started a CSA and they seemed to enjoy it. They didn't give up the farmers markets – instead they established a hybrid arrangement, more of a subscription service. They made deliveries to people's porches in Falls Church and Arlington once a week. Their CSA members loved it.

After about a decade of farming

(including seven years of running a CSA), Paul and Martha decided to close up shop and pursue other careers. They sold the Maryland farm back to us and moved to Alabama where Martha's family lived. Their CSA members were crushed.

But in the end what really got our CSA going was not the need for early season cash and it was not the need for sharing risk with a community of supporters, it was one worker of ours who needed to do a project for college. One day in the middle of winter, I met Karin Boyd on a park bench in Herndon so we could brainstorm about what she might be able to do for school and we decided that starting a CSA for the farm sounded fun. We didn't know much about it, but we thought we would start small. I remember sitting on that bench and laughing a lot about the names of the share sizes we concocted – especially the “robust” share. It amused both of us mightily.

We asked Martha if we could have her list of members (who had suffered without a CSA for a whole year by now) and Karin sent out letters to all of them. This was before the farm had email and computers and everything was done using the US Postal System and a notebook.

In 2000, our first CSA season and our 38th year of growing vegetables, we had 70 customers. Karin did all the deliveries and handwrote all the newsletters and recipe cards. Little did we know that the CSA would turn out to be so important to our future.

Thirteen seasons later, we have over 550 CSA members and we never have to go to the bank for a loan in the winter. And I do not keep a record of who likes zucchini.



## From Urubamba to Falls Church: the Joy of the Farmers Market

by Madelene Elfstrom

It seems each time I come back to work at PVF, I have just returned from Latin America. In 2009, I got back from 5 weeks of teaching English and researching the merging of traditional and modern agriculture in Ecuador two days before starting at the farm. The next year, I spent 5 months in the capital of Nicaragua studying at the public university before returning to the farm. Just a month ago, I was leading American high school volunteers in the small town of Urubamba, Peru. I love travel, but I also enjoy coming home to some of the seemingly simple pleasures that are only available here.

Food has long been a big focus in my life and so it often becomes a large part of how I experience a different culture. I'm always eager to try the local hot sauce, root vegetable and unusual meat (guinea pig in Peru) but I have learned the hard way to be wary of certain foods. In Peru, one is constantly told to avoid raw vegetables and fruits that have not been peeled for fear of harmful bacterium and parasites. As someone who grew up with her mother's garden and weekly trip to the farmers markets, this is a tall order for me. To make sure we stayed healthy, we washed our vegetables and fruits in a diluted bleach solution. When the tap water is unreliable both in availability and cleanliness, this secures a safe product but makes me miss eating a bush bean or carrot straight from the field at PVF.

Our options for places to purchase produce are very different

here and abroad. While not every town has a supermarket, almost all Peruvian communities have a daily market. Here in the US, we have grocery stores, CSAs and farmers' markets. In the first, we have piles of the standard variety vegetables all polished and prepped. On certain days of the week, each suburb or section of the city has a farmers market. All of a sudden it starts feeling a little more like Peru. The number of types and varieties of vegetables rise and so does the freshness of the produce. Each vendor has a tent, piles of produce and a niche market. While there are some overlaps between sellers of fruit, vegetables, baked goods and meat vendors, people are pretty much divided by their areas of expertise. Here is where the similarities stop. Peruvian markets are not grower only, as many American farmers markets are, but pull produce from all over the country so that they can have mangoes and avocados next to the apples and kale.

One of the most fascinating

parts of a Peruvian market is the potato section. Here in the US, we know our fingerlings, small white potatoes, yukons, red russets, purple heirlooms and sweet potatoes. In Peru, the potato holds down its own section of the market, separate from the vegetables. There are ones of every shade from golden to perfectly white to deep purple brown and in size they range from tiny fingerlings up to that of the biggest GMO one you can find in the supermarket here. And if you are worried about them keeping, you can buy freeze dried potatoes, an ancient Incan method of preserving them.

While in August I can't find a perfectly ripe pineapple, or any pineapple for that matter, at the Falls Church Farmers' Market, I know I'll find some incredible tomatoes and sweet corn (a variety that hasn't made it to Peru yet). Falls Church is not exotic like Urubamba, but the food at the market always welcomes me home – and keeps me happy in the kitchen until my next adventure.



# What's Happening in Becky's Kitchen?

## *Dilly Beans*

Adapted from the Ball Complete Book of Home Preserving

Makes six pint jars

- 3 tablespoons pickling or canning salt
- 3 cups white vinegar
- 3 cups water
- 4.5 lbs green beans, trimmed and cut into jar-length pieces
- 30 whole black peppercorns
- 6 sprigs fresh dill
- 6 cloves garlic

I also add:

- 3 teaspoons mustard seed
- 6 bay leaves
- 6 hot peppers (I like cayenne)

In a large, stainless steel saucepan, combine salt, vinegar and water. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat, stirring to dissolve salt.

Place 5 peppercorns, 1 sprig dill, 1 clove garlic, ½ teaspoon mustard seed, 1 bay leave, and 1 hot pepper to each jar. Pack beans into hot jars to within a generous ½ inch from top of jar. Ladle hot pickling liquid into jars to cover beans, leaving ½ inch of head space. Remove air bubbles. Wipe rim. Center lid on jar. Screw band down until resistance is met, then increase to fingertip tight.

Place jars in canner, ensuring they are completely covered with water. Bring to a boil and process for 10 minutes. Remove canner lid. Wait 5 minutes, then remove jars, cool and store.

## Autumn: There's Still Time for Pickling

by Becky Crouse Durst

Some of my favorite pickles have nothing to do with cucumbers. Frankly, I find it hard each season to coordinate the cucumber and dill medley. The dill comes in early and then comes back later. In fact, pickles don't, by definition, have anything to do with either dill or cucumbers. It's a way to preserve vegetables in vinegar/salt brine. The additions to that brine in combination with herbs and spices are what create the powerful and unusual flavors that pickles often provide.

Dilly beans have become one of my yearly staples. I'll eat them on burgers, on tuna or hummus or cheese sandwiches, as a side... they do the pickle trick for me. I like mine with a little extra garlic and a hot pepper thrown in each jar to give them a little punch.

A new favorite is savory pickled beets. Stop thinking about salad bar beets. These are not salad bar beets. With onion and coriander, these are earthy and vinegary and not at all sweet. Absolutely, surprisingly delicious. They use dill seed instead of fresh dill (though you could substitute) so seasonal coordination is not an issue.

Pickled daikon radishes are also delicious, and are a refrigerator pickle for those not yet ready for the canning experience. With rice vinegar and mirin, they're a completely different taste than what you've come to expect from a pickle.

Once you get away from that

'pickles are made with cucumbers' mentality, a whole world of experimentation opens up. What about cauliflower and carrots? I preserve jalapenos every year in a plain vinegar brine with no additions. Squash! Okra! Green tomatoes! A simple Google search or taking a look through the Ball Complete Book of Home Preserving, Food in Jars, or Canning for a New Generation will get your creative juices flowing. Have fun!

## *Savory Pickled Beets*

From Coconut and Lime, <http://www.coconutandlime.com/2010/07/savory-pickled-beets.html>

- 3 lbs peeled, cooked beets cut into 1/4 inch slices
- 3 teaspoons yellow mustard seeds
- 2 teaspoons dill seed
- 2 teaspoons peppercorns
- 1 1/2 teaspoon coriander seeds
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 3 bay leaves
- 1 1/2 cups white vinegar
- 2 cups water
- 1/2 cup apple cider vinegar
- 1 onion, sliced thinly (about 3/4 cup)

Place all of the ingredients in a large pot and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer for 15 minutes. Prep your jars. Pack the beets into the warm jars and ladle the pickling solution over them. Leave a 1/4 inch headspace. Process in a water bath for 30 minutes.