

Farm Notes

CSA Newsletter

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POTOMAC VEGETABLE FARMS
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Who Grows Your Food? A Survey of PVF West

by Maida Ives (Spirit Vegetable: The Red Beet)

The questions:

- What is your Spirit Vegetable?
- What is your story?
- What would you cook for Friday Dinner?
- Farming is an act of environmentalism, spirituality, commerce, education, health, activism, and community. Which of these resonates with you and why?

Stacey:

Spirit Vegetable: Head Lettuce, crisp, easy to prepare, beautiful, challenging in the summer.

Story: I am from Strongsville, Ohio. I first heard about PVF when I was working at Waterpenny Farm in Rappahanock County, VA in 2006.

Friday dinner: Salad. Some version of salad.

Farming: Environmentalism and community. I like to work outdoors, using my body to make something that we all need - food.

Casey:

Spirit Vegetable: Peppers take the cake.

Story: I'm originally from the Annapolis, MD area. When I started farming in Virginia, PVF often came up in conversation as a well run, profitable and long standing business.

Friday Dinner: I will make a rich mole including pasilla, anaheim and poblano peppers to be smothered over Whifletree chicken or veggies. Stuffing peppers is always fun and topping them with a red sauce made out of tomatoes, red chiles and cilantro sounds pretty awesome.

Farming: I wanted to figure out how to have an occupation that allowed me to live a bit lighter on the land...Eating is something we all do numerous times every day and the choices we make about food have far reaching effects. Being able to offer an



The well-fed crew at PVF-West.

option for our community that is not only nutritious but also grown close to home, on land managed with concern for the environment, and by people that are treated fairly is something that resonates with me.

Stephen:

Spirit Vegetable: Purple Kohlrabi. Looks like a crazy space monster, but really it's just peasant food.

Story: I'm from Potomac Vegetable Farms. My mom told me about it.

Friday Dinner: I'm making myself very hungry!

Farming: Farming as family fun for everyone!
Farming as radical revolution.

Katherine:

Spirit Vegetable: Garlic

Story: I'm from Washington, DC but have bounced

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Notes from the Farmer's Messy Desk: Bean Patch

by Hana Newcomb

Bean patches provide a unique space for a farmer. It is the one crop that takes so much time to pick that you just have to sit down. And sitting down changes the whole dynamic of working. I have had some momentous and memorable conversations while picking beans. I have also listened to some great audio books.

In the fall, the bean patches are always at their best. Summer beans are unpredictable – often they are ravaged by Mexican bean beetles and sometimes they drown in a thunderstorm. But by late August and into September, most of the time the bean plants are beautiful and healthy and green: the perfect place to plop down between two rows and pick for a long time.

Thinking way back to the beginning of time (over 40 years ago), I remember that I hated picking beans with a passion. The summer that I was 12, I somehow managed to avoid picking beans even once and that seemed like a major victory. Then the summer I was 13 we had an amazing worker named Saroj who loved picking beans more than anything else and her incredible enthusiasm

was powerful and magnetic. That summer changed my relationship to bean picking, and changed the course of PVF history.

That may sound like hyperbole but it is not. There was a beanpatch conversation in October, in the field in front of the Moutoux Barn, between me and Ellen that was unexpected and life-changing. She was visiting her mom in Reston and came to see us for an afternoon (she had worked on the farm for several summers and had moved on). She bemoaned the fact that she could not figure out how to start farming, with no capital and no land. By the time we got off our knees, a new plan was hatched and Ellen was preparing to move back to Northern Virginia to learn how to manage the Loudoun farm.

I have had myriad opportunities to talk about major life issues, along with the other everyday conversations that happen every day. The question of marriage and commitment used to be a big one when we had a crew of 20-something women. I honed my views on that topic through multiple opportunities to tell those young women why I believe in marriage. Later, because of one of those conversations, Adria asked

me to officiate at her wedding. And coincidentally, I was picking beans in Loudoun one afternoon when I got a call from Seattle from my friend Laura asking if I would preside over her wedding. Beans are now linked with weddings and marriage, in my mind.

Once I was reeling from upsetting health news about one of my kids and I called my friend Nell, who came to pick beans with me at dusk and comfort me. It was only an hour, but I remember those plentiful, gorgeous beans and that feeling of being cared for. Bean picking can be therapeutic, if both the beans and the company are good.

Most recently, my nephew Stephen and I have been talking about “truth” (because he had to write a paper for grad school) and the purpose of religion (because that is a natural offshoot of truth) and living your values (because we both think about that a lot). We can talk and still each pick 3 ponies an hour of round beans, the slowest kind.

But perhaps the best use of my time while picking beans has been sitting in silence, alone. It is difficult for most normal people to imagine, but real thinking is facilitated by steady work that does not require a lot of help from the brain or the body. Before my knees got to be so bothersome (probably from all those years of kneeling on the ground), I could forget that I even had a body. My hands just reach to the bottom of the plant, pull the leaves up, one hand holds the plant in place and the other grabs as many beans as it can, over and over. You might think this was a job for someone with limited intellect, but you would be wrong. This is the job that makes it possible to run a complicated farm, be a mom, have my own long and happy marriage and still be a pretty calm person. Everyone needs a bean patch.



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back and forth between DC and the San Francisco bay area. I heard about PVF from a mutual friend of the Newcombs.

Friday Dinner: Thai-inspired veggie dishes (Green curry and spicy peanut sauces, mmmmmmm!).

Farming: I could write a whole opus about this!

Matt:

Spirit Vegetable: Heavy on roots and bulbs I guess.

Story: I lived in Silver Spring and Takoma Park, MD. I heard about PVF through working for neighboring Wheatland Vegetable Farms in 2000.

Friday Dinner: Jerk chicken, jerk tofu, roasted root veggies, black eyed peas, and a coconut custard pie.

Farming: It's nice to walk around a farm and not worry about stepping in soil with my bare feet or digging in it with my hands and worrying about if there's poison in it. It's nice to walk in the stream for similar reasons. It's nice to breath from the cool clean breeze that's often blowing through the farm. It's nice looking out over the rolling fields and hills, and looking at the sky. It's a healthy environment, and it feels clean and refreshing. It's nice to pass some of this on to those who enjoy our produce.

Brianne:

Spirit Vegetable: Red russian kale, sweet, healthy, sturdy, soft.

Story: I have lived in VA for almost 2 1/2 yrs...which is how I heard about PVF. I was a customer before I came out here.

Friday Dinner: I'm teaming up with someone else and learning to cook something new!

Farming: I spend a lot of time in the field thinking about life...I love being a direct part of the change I'd like to see in our food system.

Cassandra:

Spirit Vegetable: It could be different on any given day and definitely changes with the season.

Story: I grew up in a little farming town in Willcox, Arizona. I grew up on a large-scale vegetable farm in a family of nine. I chose a career vastly different from farming for the majority of my 20's and realized, this year, that I wanted to get back to my roots. I called my sister (who farms here in Virginia) and she told me about a great farm in Northern Virginia. A few weeks later I packed up my car and drove across the country to join the farm crew at PVF!

Friday Dinner: [Editor's Note] Cassandra made the most incredible Persian meal using our fresh herbs and greens, and delicious late spring vegetables. I hope she makes that again.

Sara:

Spirit Vegetable: Rainbow chard!

Story: Born and raised in Hamilton, Virginia. I was finishing up a Master of Public Health program in New York City and yearning to reconnect with my place of origin and with the earth. I remembered going to the "secret stand" when I was young and knew I wanted to be a part of this farm.

Friday Dinner: Something that accommodates the dietary restrictions of my wonderful colleagues....and something with bacon.

Farming: Health is present in all facets of non-industrial farming. The goals are to grow using practices that maintain or potentially even improve the health of the land, and nurture healthy vegetables that will then promote health in the bodies that consume them. Healthy people are subsequently the foundation of communities and educational efforts. They are the conductors of commerce, the activists and the defenders of the environment.

Ashley:

Spirit Vegetable: A shishito pepper.

Story: I hail from the Oregon Coast. PVF came to me through the online grapevine of job hunting while I was living in California.

Friday Dinner: Something requiring a barrel full of greens and lots and lots of garlic.

Farming: I find my driving reason behind why I farm to be activism -- for our bodies, for our planet, for each other. The ability to a live a rich, fulfilling life where I experience connectedness everyday doesn't hurt either.

Recipes:

Stacey's Field Snacks: These taste great raw: hakurei turnips, carrots, cucumbers, tomatoes.

Casey's Tip for Hot Sauce: Make sure to balance the four important 'S' flavors when cooking: sweet, spicy, sour, salty and then you will be on your way.

Stephen's addition to my cookbook, Sauteed Whatever: Onions, squash and cheese. And Blueberries. Yum.

Katherine's Ketchup: Uses roasted red peppers. Full recipe in Put 'Em Up! by Sherri Brooks Vinton, a book highly recommended for all of the little homesteaders out there!

Matt's Roasted Veggie Seasoning: Rosemary, a little cayenne powder, fresh garlic, some salt.

Brianne's Healthy Snack: Veggie tacos and egg whites.

Cassandra's Pumpkin Pie: Uses Kabocha and Butternut squash for the filling!

Sara's Zucchini Bread: Way more zucchini than the recipe calls for, brown rice flour, brown sugar, coconut oil and plenty of cinnamon, cocoa powder and chocolate chips.

Ashley's Vegetable Gifts: I now shower everyone I love with pickles!

Notes from the Field

Opportunity Knocked - and I Answered

by Lindsay Holmes

My journey to PVF began with me moving to Virginia because, well, I could. I graduated from the University of Arizona this past May and was volunteering at the Reid Park Zoo in Tucson, but did not have a job and did not want to wait six months for an apprenticeship to open at the zoo. When the opportunity presented itself for me to move, I finished up my summer in Tucson, said goodbye to my family, and moved here without a job.

After a week or so searching for jobs here, and turning down a few, I ended up at PVF after Hana essentially handed me a job. Having always been a little interested in agriculture, growing up with stories of my great-grandfather travelling the world to teach agricultural techniques to developing countries and after taking basic agriculture classes in college (though more focused on the animal side), I figured it was too good an opportunity to pass up so I said sure. I showed up the next day ready to learn!

Since then, I have learned so much more than I thought I would. I've learned how a CSA works, the intricacies of working on a farm, the different options for selling produce, and so much more. Probably the biggest and most important lesson I have learned is where my food comes from and the work put into producing what I eat. The University of Arizona exists because of its agriculture education, though it does a lot more now, and one of the large campaigns during the school year was to teach and explain

to the students that the food you buy does not just magically appear. Having now been on the production and the consumption side outside of a little backyard garden, I appreciate the food production process even more now. By working at PVF, I have connected my studies to my life and job. Though I still do not know what I want to do with my life, I'm enjoying my time working and, more importantly, learning here until something comes up. It's been a lot of fun and I'll be here until the next thing pops up!

Note from Hana: I hired Lindsay within 10 minutes of meeting her

because she was clearly up for a challenge – she had agreed to babysit her cousin Addison Lester, age 2 3/4 (son of Zach and Georgia of Tree and Leaf Farm), sight unseen, for an evening at my house. Zach was speaking on a panel in DC and they thought that their little boy would be more comfortable on a farm with a stranger than at a strange house. Lindsay was so good with Addison that I knew she would fit in on this farm, even though this job has nothing to do with babysitting. When you find someone who is flexible and calm and smart and nice, you need to act fast – those are the ones who are easy to teach.

