



# Farm Notes

CSA Newsletter

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*Tell about sleep and farming, or how you rest and re-charge in this job*

**Keesha Vaughn:**

In my previous job as a physical therapist, I found myself constantly preaching to my patients that rest is an invaluable part of the healing process. I've found that practicing what you preach is much easier said than done. Farming is so physically challenging that you have no choice but to make rest and sleep intentional parts of your routine. Working here at PVF has forced me to re-evaluate how I take care of my body by making time to stretch and sleep a decent amount.

**Leah Fenster:**

Even though I generally leave PVF at noon every day, I am certainly not exempted from the inevitable exhaustion that accompanies working outside, often under direct sunlight. Once at home, it is not uncommon to find me asleep (sometimes even on the floor, whatever is most convenient) with a timer set for twenty five minutes in order to recharge myself for the rest of my day. Even though twenty-five always feels too short at first, this brief rest makes a world of difference for both my mood and productiveness. Oh, and don't ask how many times I yawn in the passenger seat on the way home from the farm. You wouldn't want to know.



Sleeping bunnies on the farm

**Hana Newcomb:**

Many years ago when I was 22, when my father was mysteriously ill, I learned about insomnia. For a solid two weeks, I just could not go to sleep and I added to my own stress by counting down the hours until 6:00 when I had to get up to work again. It was an exhausting couple of weeks. In the intervening years, I have made a lot of progress managing those occasional nights of sleeplessness. I have learned that if I have one bad night, the next night I will always sleep like a rock. And that it is always better to rest and be relaxed than it is to worry about how many hours until work. And if worst comes to worst, I just get up and go downstairs and lie down on my favorite couch and sleep for the last hours of the night.

But in fact now that I am a senior citizen (on this farm), I am a reliably good sleeper. I go to bed too late and I wake up at daybreak, and I think that's what happens when you are older. Afternoon naps are essential. Five minutes is good, ten minutes is better and fifteen minutes is ideal. Everyone in my family of origin takes short life-saving naps. It's one of our superpowers that we got from our parents. I can't imagine a life without naps.

**Ciara Prencipe:**

For me, sleep has a seasonal rhythm. In the winter, it's easy for me to get to bed early and wake up when the sun rises - I hate to sleep through any daylight when the days are so short. This time of year, though, the number of hours I sleep in a night is a lot less, even though I'm doing more work. As the summer goes on and days get hotter, we start work earlier and earlier. There's so much to do outside of work (picking berries, swimming in the creek, walking the dog, working on projects, cooking for potlucks) that it's hard to get to bed on time! My secret: naps. I was never a big napper before I started farming, but an afternoon siesta supplements my sleep enough to get me through the long summer days. We just put mosquito netting around our porch, and I took an inaugural nap on our outdoor couch with my dog - it was divine. Thus begins the season of blueberries, dips in the creek, and afternoon naps.

**Dick Clement:**

My fourth year and I'm still motivated by interest in working on the farm, being challenged to work on new tasks, and working on a team. The morning meetings are very special and motivating for me. Greeting the team as they assemble from Blueberry Hill, commuters, other parts of the farm. Hana and Carrie have developed the tasks plan for the day. Workers are assigned to the tasks, the team disperses to various parts of the farm, to reconvene at lunch. To be a part of that picture is all the motivation I need.

**Kimberlina Gomez:**

What helps you fall asleep or relax? Is it gentle music? Exhaustion from the day? For me, it's a clear mind and a relaxed body. The thing that helps me do both? Yoga.

But the great thing about yoga is that it has a way of leading you to where you need to go. For example, in the mornings when I wake up the first thing I do is go to my mat. I start breathing, maybe moving my neck and arms, just gently waking up my body with movement saying "it's time to start the day". And slowly my body progresses and my simple movements become deeper stretches, and eventually a routine with lots of deep breaths and bends. Practicing yoga during an early morning is essential for me, even more than coffee, allowing for my mind and body to wake up and prepare for the physicality of the day. Not to mention that exercise in the morning has been shown to have effects like having more energy throughout the day, better night sleep, and a metabolism boost.

Aside from waking me up and starting my day, yoga is also how I wind down and address any areas of physical strain caused by the day's work and prepare myself for bed. Some days it's harder than others to motivate myself to come to my mat and "exercise" after a long day. But once again, after some simple breaths and stretches, I find that my body is waking up but in a different way, it's now telling me what needs attention. Working on a farm can lead to lots of ailments, such as a sore lower back, hand cramps, or all-around tiredness. If my back is sore, then I might incorporate forward folds, happy baby's, and deep breaths into my evening/bedtime practice. If it's close to bedtime, then my routine will call for child's or corpse pose to help me clear my mind and relax.

My rest and recharge come from a mindful practice of yoga that help me wake up and go, as well as unwind and sleep. Yoga is a great way to destress, exercise, and care for your body no matter your experience level.



Recharging, COVID-style

**Caroline Bond:**

Sleep and I have a rocky relationship. One of my greatest skills is the ability to match the energy in a room, so I do find that I benefit from my peers having a good night's rest. I have a very artsy active mind that I have long given up trying to calm with melatonin supplements before days I know will be important or busy. It is not uncommon for me to wake up out of a dead sleep early morning and immediately go attempt to go work on something I dreamt of. I keep a pencil and notebook near the place I sleep to jot down ideas that come to me with my eyes still closed so not to lose the thoughts captured under my eyelids.

This being said about once a week there will be a night I usually feel coming where I manage to "catch up" on all my sleep for the week that is blissfully uninterrupted by my mind. Those nights are not planned ahead of time, and physically harder days of farming are not good indicators of how well I will sleep that night. To speak to recharging, I find that farm work in itself offers a calming sort of recharging energy that only being bathed in nature can really provide.

**Isaiah Chamberlain:**

In a month of living with PVF I have fallen asleep before 10:00 all but two or three nights. I am not bragging. But I am proud.

Adopting a bedtime akin to my dad's is a newish phenomenon. In past summers when I farmed with him, I was proud to stay up well into the morning, jumping in lakes or listening to Pink Floyd while driving around aimlessly in my friend's pickup truck before a 7:00 am start. It was all in the name of Memories, Man. Neuroscientists who study sleep would probably say my motive was



Friday Potlucks – we eat so much, we feel sleepy

ironic. And I say that too. I would often catch myself falling asleep on those night rides (woken by the clocks on "Time", or my friend's scolds). And that's pretty much all the detail I can recall.

Being such an instinctual habit, it's funny how sleep refuses to be known (but what doesn't? . . .), often fighting our basic intuitions. For example, the classic "I only slept 5 hours and I feel great!" or the lingering exhaustion after a 9-hour hibernation. Or how Hana manages a farm on much less than 9 hours most nights.

It is endless discovery, tracing the factors which affect the night's sleep and the ensuing mental/physical states. I have learned sleep is dependent on a bunch of other stuff (what isn't. . .). Lucky for us, farming and sleep go together like tomato and basil. It's work that is sweaty, invigorating, and heart-pumping. One is surrounded with vegetables which likely promote that process of rejuvenation (if consumed). On the days that I work and sleep in Loudoun, electricity is not a thing,

and that can't hurt. There must also be something about sleeping in a woodsy cabin among friendly rodents and flickering leaves. My record there is 11 hours.

Before the summer, I wasn't sure I'd be able to keep up with my training for the fall cross-country season. But it has worked out. I am very tired every night and every night I am rewarded by having enough energy to tire myself out again the next day. Activity and energy and rest are all dancing.

Farming (life!) is much more dynamic when not sleep deprived. Even though I will be a useless lump by 8pm, the waking hours before that are often occupied by a Yeah! Let's Weed This Beet Patch! attitude rather than a Hoping It Is Almost Lunch attitude. The seemingly mundane things, like weeding, become opportunities for reflection, focus, and conversation. I am trying to learn to make that mindset a constant, for those days when the night doesn't go as planned.

**Megan Seldon:**

Farming is hard work with long hours in the sun. In previous years I have had many nights of quick dinners right after work (I'm starving!) and then just watching lots of TV or reading in bed until I fall asleep. It's easy to want to be as lazy as possible, but I work on a farm in part because I love its physicality and being outdoors. When I really find balance doing both in non-farm ways as well it gives me incredible energy and joy. This year I have been going on walks around the farm before work or in the evenings, I spend much more time lying at the creek or the pond instead of just in bed, and have even gotten into a regular workout routine which often leaves me with more energy than when I start and gives me more confidence in my body when it comes to getting farm tasks done during work.

**Waking Up Poems From Recent Mornings**

By Billie McKelvie

**Today**

The sun doesn't know what it wants  
The earth is throwing  
Vine rope snares to bring  
It down to light our morning  
And birds sing love songs that  
They've been writing since they  
Started building homes here  
  
All the people I love are taking their  
time  
To bow their backs before getting  
Up to drink coffee and milk  
You can hear their footsteps under  
The sweeping sound of the  
Breeze pushing everything to one side  
  
And still  
The sun hasn't made up its mind  
And I wonder what it might know  
That I don't  
That keeps it from pouring star-baked  
Honey soup all over our backs  
This morning

**Today**

The red honeysuckle is  
Pushing up over the deck and  
Weaving towards me to bind my  
Ankles to something I promised  
  
Each time I hear a breeze I hope that  
It will coat me with salt that could  
Hold me to this

**Today**

The rain has hit me  
Just a few times  
And the last guinea hen  
Is singing again with small  
Breaks in between to catch  
His breath  
  
I am climbing down the  
Rafters in my heart to pick  
His wheezing up and give  
It back to him in case  
He is trying to collect his things  
And pack them up to leave  
  
When I seal his sighs into a  
Jar he is gone again without  
Them to find another place  
To grieve his brothers in the  
Low weeds behind my house  
Where no one walks unless  
They've lost something

**Today**

The tips of the tall grasses turned  
Pink without me looking  
And I am straining my words through  
A nervous smile I wish I didn't  
Have to spread across my face.  
The blueberry patch is putting up  
Defenses against fast hands  
And licked lips that are raw from  
The blinking sky objects we don't  
Know the name of  
  
People who do not know me roll  
Me out to sit on and lay into me with  
All of their weight so I close

My eyes so the grasses can change  
Their clothes into something  
Brighter

**Today**

The world is built from paper  
And its edges are sealed with  
Glitter tape my parents bought  
For me at three years old  
  
The trees are standing in layered  
Lines like they are waiting for  
Directions from someone I haven't  
Heard of and I wish I had more to  
Say to the things I can't move  
Like the sun and other powers  
That hang over me waiting for  
Me to get the courage to look them  
In the eye.

Maybe if I could hold the hand  
Of a blueberry bush without squeezing  
I would know the harshness has  
Moved out of me and I have nothing  
Left to be afraid of. I could dance  
Through paper layers like hanging  
Laundry reflections of me  
Back to myself

**Today**

The leaves are breathing in between  
crow  
Cracks and my body is turned  
In on itself - rolled up like a dry leaf -  
To keep me warm and distant