

Farm Notes

CSA Newsletter

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Potomac Vegetable Farms
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The Spirit of Entrepreneurship

By Susan Maneechai

Sometimes farm work is solitary. Other times we are assigned a buddy. It is during these times that we can learn more about each other and that is how I discovered the four entrepreneurs in our midst.

Dick was one of the first people I worked with during my beginning days on the Vienna farm. We mulched blueberry bushes. After collecting two wheelbarrows and shovels, and devising the plan of where to start, Dick began talking. Soon the conversation turned to what we enjoy doing in our free time. I mentioned the French classes I had been taking and Dick recounted his first Chinese watercolor art class in 2004. Dick never imagined how this class would spark his interest in creating art cards, which spread into being a business.

While many scenes and subjects inspired Dick to create sketches and watercolor paintings, he focused on making blank cards for personal use. Some card covers reflected Chinese styles while others depicted the Amish way of life in Lancaster, PA, which Dick is an admirer of. In 2016, he gave one of his Amish style cards, *Hollow Road*, to Lydia, the manager of Cameron's Coffee and Chocolates shop in Fairfax. She expressed an interest in selling his cards. So Dick worked with his wife Lyn to scan and print his original artwork with consistent color and form. His art cards are displayed on a 48 card rack and 150-200 cards per year are sold!



One of Dick's beautiful cards: Chokecherry

Dick continues to produce new cards and now has 70 different ones. He's learned that customers have a very broad, unpredictable interest in styles and subjects, which keeps Dick motivated to "have an eye out for new subjects." He recently decorated a kohlrabi at the PVF farm stand! But Dick's real satisfaction with his art cards business comes from being a part of Cameron's non-profit cafe success story, where meaningful work for young adults with intellectual disabilities is provided.

My next buddy was Caroline. We planted lettuce, lots of lettuce. I asked about her college studies and she described her Environmental Re-

sources engineering degree and her desire to work at a waste water treatment facility or in environmental remediation on Super Fund sites. Then she said she made rugs from recycled materials which surprised me. A scientist and an artist! Actually she calls it upcycling textiles, which she began doing in 2017, first with t-shirt yarn found in her home. Caroline is passionate when it comes to our environment and planet, and the fast fashion movement is creating more textile waste than ever, which greatly disturbs her. So in 2017, she founded Cozy Floor Coverz, selling on Etsy.

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Caroline states that the true value in her rug creations (besides their beauty and function) is that 5 lbs. of textile waste are kept from entering landfills. Now she sleeps easier knowing that in a small way within her control, she is slowing the rate of methane production entering our atmosphere. "I'd love for my business to no longer have a source of materials one day because we have found a municipal way of sorting and dealing with textile wastes."



One of Caroline's upcycled rugs

In the meantime, consider what she has learned: one plain cotton t-shirt weighing 1lb has 400 gallons of embodied water while the average human drinks only 58 gallons of water per year; and that the average DMV dweller discards 80 pounds of clothing annually.

Blueberry harvesting paired me with Leah and provided the perfect time to ask questions. She had been wowing us at Friday potluck lunch with her various bread creations before I learned of her business while picking green beans with another farm worker, who was raving about the Country Sourdough loaf she had recently bought from her.

Wholesome Soul Bread Co. officially launched this past January to

fund a trip to San Francisco in June with her best friend. (Unfortunately, the trip was canceled due to Covid-19). But Leah's interest in bread making began as a 2019 New Year's goal at the age of 14! By that June, after reading about "the simultaneous scientific and mysterious qualities of baking with wild yeast," Leah experimented strictly with sourdough. Then a family friend with an intolerance for commercial yeast was having difficulty finding true sourdough bread in north Reston and became Leah's first customer. Her customer base remains small due to her limited weekly production capacity- 4 total, baking 2 breads at a time- and consists of people she knows and sees regularly. From each loaf sold Leah donates \$2.00 to the NAACP.

"Baking bread has changed my life, in the most rudimentary of ways. It has changed the way I structure my days, my sleep schedule, and nighttime routine (I can't go to bed without 'feeding' my sourdough starter), but what a gratifying process it is....I feel bound to this process; I feel needed." Leah has also learned the value of taking notes. She writes *everything* down now in a notebook, from recipes and percentages to schedules, in order to avoid the frustration from repeating the same mistakes. But in the end, only a wonderful feeling exists for both the creator and those of us fortunate to know her.

One of my last buddies was Kathryn, and while we have planted lettuce and harvested green beans and tomatoes together, I learned about her business during potluck lunch. Three bottles of homemade kombucha (fermented tea) had been gracing our table for a couple weeks and I never saw how they got there. Kathryn's journey began five years ago for health

reasons. She discovered that drinking kombucha boosted her immune system and aided in gut-related issues. While living in Blacksburg, she met Marilyn Griffin of Griffin Farms who hooked Kathryn on her green tea-based brew (versus black tea). With the inspiration and added advice and insight from additional brewers, Kathryn now ferments 10 gallons per week. She hopes to increase production to 100 gallons over the next year after turning her hobby of sharing her brew with well-connected friends into a monthly subscription-based business, KC Kombucha.

"I like to think of my kombucha as a true elixir of love." Only organic and fresh ingredients are used to flavor the raw kombucha, which reinforces her "focus on the nutritive value of everything consumed without giving up variety and flavor." Kathryn has learned though that information from kombucha brewers is vast and varied; but as the business expands her "labor of love" will remain rooted in "preserving health and vitality."



Kathryn with her Kombucha

Beyond the lovely CSA displays of produce, farm workers continue chatting between rows of much lettuce, berries, and other crops, to learn more about each other, encourage new design ideas or flavors and support those among us with the spirit of entrepreneurship.

Flower-Picker Reminiscing

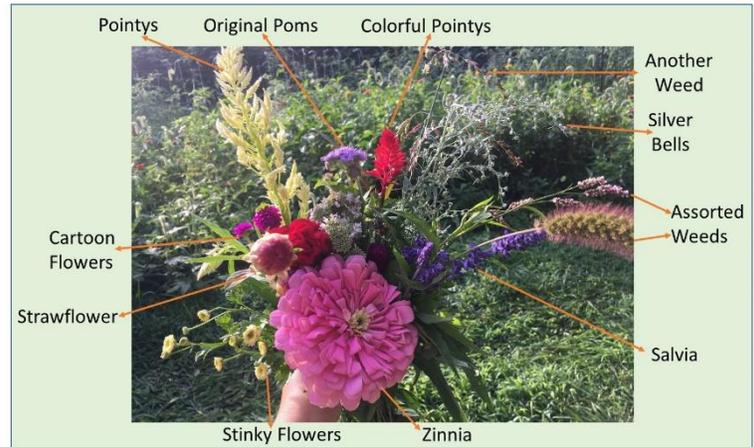
By Emma Knoke

I'm writing this article on the eve of the eve of my 10 hour roadtrip heading back to college for the fall. I'm one of the "Blueberry Girls" (coined by Caroline) who live in the Blueberry Hill neighborhood with the Newcombs and grew up working on the farm (or actually running around the CSA wreaking havoc). Becca taught me how to work the stand, set up a tomato table, and keep our veggies looking bountiful. I remember anxiously anticipating my 14th birthday when I would be allowed to work the stand alone.

I worked Summers and some Falls at PVF through high school though it has been a bit more on and off during college. This summer I was slated to live and intern overseas but found myself back here under pandemic conditions. And it has been such a blessing! In some ways the most *fruitful* farm summer I have had. I finally learned to cook/bake and have actually been a contributor to farm potlucks, started working farmer's markets again, and as always, have gotten to know some really cool people who happen to also work at PVF.

One of the most delightful things about this summer: I am now a member of the flower -picking and -bunching crew. Not in all my years here have I done this. There is not a lot that I will voluntarily wake up an extra hour early for, but flower-picking is one of those things. There's something really magical about the newness of the morning and the dewy plants. This is one picking job completely based on aesthetic appeal. It feels so indulgent! You just decide what looks beautiful to you and cut that stem and skip anything not exciting. The frou frou (more filler type plants to mix in with the zinnias) we grow is such a wide range of beautiful. We have also been known to pick some nearby weeds that were looking cute.

As the people who will later make bouquets, we certainly develop preferences for what we must pick first and have the most of. For a while, we really liked having lots of the stinky flower around, because it is so easy to fit into a flower bunch and white goes with everything. We all are a little obsessed with the brain flowers because they are so mesmerizing in their extreme size, color, and resemblance of the human brain, although I think it is mostly Leah who wants to figure out how to fit the ridiculous ones into flower bunches. My favorite frou frou is salvia, beautiful sprigs of indigo petals that seem to only add to any flower bunch. I'm sad to leave, but happy to get out before I have to see the end of flower season!



Flower dictionary:

Zinnia This is the foundation of our flower bunches. Wide variety of colors!

--orange and red combo: "Firework" "Sunset" or "sunburst" flowers

--very pale pink and pale green: "sophisticated flowers"

--petals curl naturally, making it look wrinkly: "grandma flowers"

Feverfew Nickname: Stinky flower. This is cute and easily bunch-able, but we think it smells like feet.

Straw flower Nickname: Straw flower. Petals feel straw-like, never wilts even after it has been cut. Good to use in homemade jewelry for this reason!

Gomphrena Nickname: "Purple Pom Poms" "Gumballs" "Cartoon flowers." The silliest, most Dr. Seuss-looking flowers.

Ageratum Nickname: "Original Pom Poms." I think these look like snowflakes. So tiny, delicate and intricate!

St. Johnswort Nickname: "Silver Bells." These will always remind me of the shade of icy blonde hair I wanted to achieve this summer. Leah thinks they smell like bananas.

Celosia Nickname: Brain flowers. These grow huge, and their huge stems twist and turn in weird shapes. When you cut these, as Isabel put it, "it really feels like you are snipping a brainstem/spinal cord!"

Salvia My favorite. Perfect for every bunch. In the sage family.

Pampas Plume Celosia Nickname: "Pointies." These come in so many colors! The hot pink and light pink look like sea anemones to me.

Mountain Mint Good old mountain mint! Native plant, easy to use, great to add some green to any bunch.

Seeking Respect for the Humble Rubber Band

By Leah Fenster

This farm is bound together
by rubber bands.

Among other, more profound things.

At PVF, rubber bands are underappreciated
and heavily relied upon.

And they are everywhere.

Their red, stretchy selves can be found
perched inside empty crates,
nestled in cup holders on golf carts or trucks,
peppered on floors underfoot,
and somehow,

they sneak their way onto my wrists,
only to be deposited on the bathroom sink
beside my toothbrush.

Rubber bands hold bunches together—
beets, scallions, chard, flowers, basil,
as a single stem

is nothing without its rubber banded mother bunch.

They also teach us about life,
about resilience and resistance,
how sometimes, it is okay to break
when you have been forgotten.

Like us, they too can fly through the air
if provided guidance and support,
and if gently tugged at first,
they can stretch further than ever imagined.

If rubber bands have such an indispensable role,
why then, do we toss them aside
like they simply don't matter?

We cannot afford to take them for granted
just because they are plentiful.

I could fill one hundred black crates
with all the things I have learned this summer,
and despite their perceived insignificance,
I have learned to give rubber bands
the respect they deserve.

How to Make Wearing a Mask Slightly More Bearable While Working in the Heat of Summer

By Caroline Bond

Last week while working in the
fields of Potomac Vegetable Farms, I
asked a small focus group of my
fellow workers about any struggles
they have faced so far while wearing
a mask every day to work at the farm.
The top complaints were, it is too hot
to wear a mask, hard to breathe while
working, and that masks create
conditions for really bad "maskne"
aka mask acne.

A personal hack that I have
developed over the especially hot past
few weeks has been to wet mine with
water to refresh myself and cool down.
Additionally, I recommend masks
made with lighter colors that will
absorb less heat. Due to the nature of
our small farms work conditions where
we are often spread out in fields and
not in close quarters, I feel comfortable
making these recommendations. It
should be noted that it is probably not
wise to wet down your mask on market



Flamboyant flower team in face masks
– Emma, Leah, and Keesha

days or when you are in close quarters
with other humans because it may
affect its filtering capacity.

An important detail to remember
for breathing with a mask is that the
more you wear a mask the more "mask
stamina" you develop. Also, definitely
experiment with different mask shapes
and styles until you find one that fits
your nose and mouth best. You should
feel some resistance when you breathe
or else the mask has no purpose. The

whole point is to protect the
coworkers around us from ourselves.

Maskne is difficult especially on the
farm. Every time I personally adjust
my mask or take a break for water, I
cringe knowing full well I am wiping
dirt onto my skin that the mask will
keep there for the rest of the day.
Along with this suggestion if you are
struggling with maskne and are self-
conscious about it may not be the best
idea to try to hide it with foundation or
other makeup is likely to just make it
worse. The best tips I could find to
combat maskne on the internet
include washing your mask every day,
having at least one mask per day to
wear until your next laundry day,
washing and exfoliating your face, and
also taking probiotics. Luckily at this
farm, we all have access to probiotics
each Friday that Kathryn brings her
kombucha to our Potluck.

