



Vol. 22 No. 8

September 19 — 23, 2021



POTOMAC VEGETABLE FARMS
www.potomacvegetablefarms.com
pvfnewsletter@gmail.com

Bees on the Farm: A New Day

by Michael Lipsky

Three weeks ago the New York Times featured an article on building developments with environmental accents, such as hanging gardens and resident bee hives. The article mentioned Best Bees, a Boston company with which the farm has been working.

For decades PVF cooperated with local beekeepers to host

hives on the farm. It would seem to be a natural partnership. The farm got the pollinating services of the bees. The bees got to forage for nectar from squash, beans and other vegetables pollinated by insects.

In truth, however, the bees don't need the farm. Trees (maples, locusts, for example), and clover and wildflowers are more substantial sources of nectar than

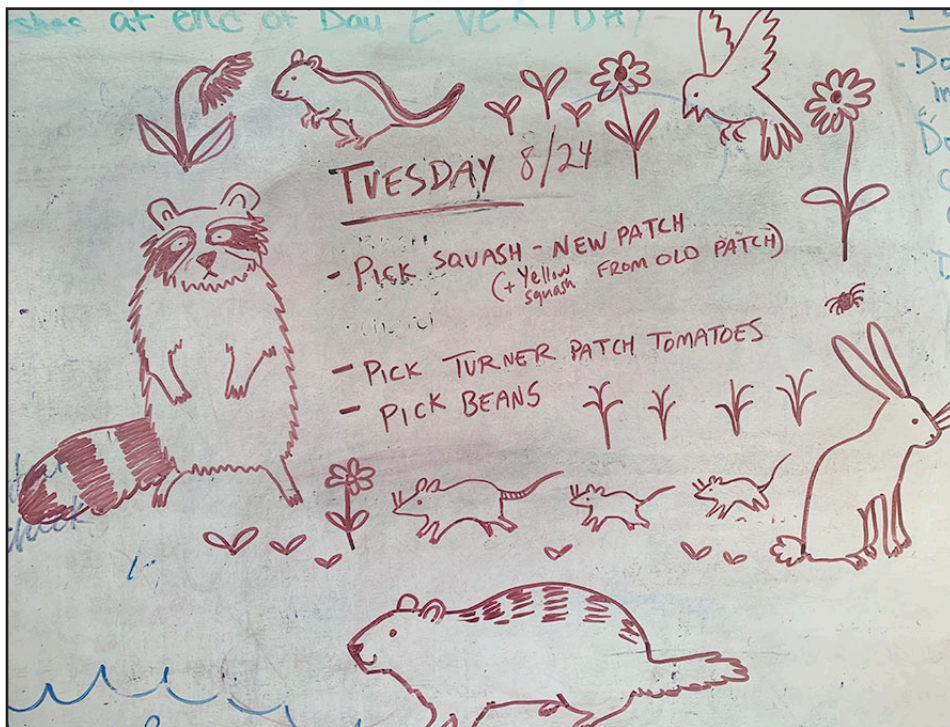
row crops. Nor do bees necessarily forage near their hives. They can travel up to five miles in search of sources of nectar.

For that matter, vegetable growers don't absolutely need honey bees. While honey bees are excellent pollinators, there are a great many other pollinators — various species of wasps, flies, and solitary bees, for example. After all, there were flowering plants in the Americas before Europeans introduced honey bees to the hemisphere in the 17th Century.

Nonetheless, bee keepers like to locate their hives on farms. It might be in part because the farm is located in a country setting. Probably more important, farm-based hives are isolated from curious people who might get into mischief if the hives were sitting on the back porch of the beekeeper.

As is well-known, recent years have been hard on honey bees. Bee colonies world-wide have been failing at an alarming rate. Scientists postulate that bee colonies have been weakened by widely-used pesticides particularly harmful to bees and many other insects, rendering them more susceptible to harmful endemic pests.

Dirt Under Our Fingernails



Animals overrunning the daily work list on the whiteboard.

"Bees," cont. on page 7



photo by leah fenster

A selfie from August 18th of Rachel, Leah and a groundhog (in the grass between their two faces.) "The little fellow was scurrying away but we got a picture just in time."

The Scourge of Groundhogs

by Hana Newcomb

Groundhogs are finicky about their living space. They like it to be very clean. They also make sure to have at least two other exits so as not to be unpleasantly surprised. But their multiple entrances and exits are always quite close to each other — they aren't trying to be too tricky, or maybe it is just a lot of work digging all those tunnels.

Groundhogs like to live right near the breakfast buffet so they don't have to travel very far. There are historic residences, long established, on the edges of many of our fields. There's the condo up next to the Route 7 Field in the woods — about six or eight active holes. And another complex on the steep slope behind the cider press, just a few feet from the Driveway Patch. The parsley in that patch has been meticulously chomped. And in Loudoun, there is a two-hole abode smack in the middle of the bean patch, and

those beans have been nibbled into oblivion. You can always tell it's a groundhog because they eat straight down the row, moving further and further from their holes. The hole in the middle of the butternut squash patch is surrounded by squash with just one bite out of each one. It's like they keep forgetting they don't really like winter squash.

In the old days, we tried everything. We hired a man with a small dog that went down into the holes to drag the groundhogs out (that ended sadly when one day the dog never came back up). We hired a professional varmint control guy who set traps and even created a potion that he swore would get rid of them forever. We tried smoke bombs: first you plugged up all the exits and then you lit a smoke bomb and rolled it into the last hole and filled that one. We have caught dozens of raccoons and groundhogs in a Havahart trap, but we don't have the will to drown them, so we have

transported them illegally to other habitats. This is illegal because they might die if you move them away from their home, but if you kill them they die anyway, and that is perfectly legal.

You can get rid of them for a while, but someone always moves into the good real estate. Apparently the biggest and baddest groundhogs get the best holes. We have some of the biggest and the baddest, for sure.

In recent years, I have devised a groundhog discouragement system which works pretty well. I make a regular practice of dumping rotten vegetables into their holes. Over and over, they dig it out. Over and over, I dump more stinky tomatoes and disgusting onions. Eventually they move away. I don't care where they move as long as they move further away from my bean patch. And I feel like it's fair — they want to eat vegetables and they get home delivery. They just don't get to choose the menu.

How to Win Friends and Influence Squirrels

by Rachel Udall

At home and on the farm, I am very fortunate and very grateful to be surrounded by a number of animal friends who all greatly enrich my life — dogs, cats, birds, bugs, you name it. However, in the last year there is one type of creature who I have found myself most drawn to; an animal who is perhaps unjustly overlooked by the majority of the population and even considered a slight nuisance — the squirrel. I likewise paid little mind to the antics of these scruffy neighbors until one day I sat outside in my backyard to eat lunch. I looked up to see that a quorum of squirrels had amassed, each one eagerly eyeing my movements and hoping to score a piece of whatever I was eating. Being a sucker for small, beady, hungry-looking eyes, I tossed a few crumbs towards the group. No one stepped forward — perhaps a stinging critique on my cooking skills? I decided to leave the squirrels in peace and retreated back inside, and as soon as I did so they happily ate up what I had left. Having gotten my first taste of human-squirrel camaraderie, I was hungry for more. For the next few weeks, I tried to show the squirrels that I was not a threat, which took more sitting



Rachel, Leah, and some sale chickens on August 18, 2021. They were all being camera shy, but we got this picture with a couple chicken butts and a full rooster.

still and shutting up than I had done in my entire life. Each week I got to know them and their behaviors a bit better, finding myself more and more enraptured by the strange world of squirrelkind. One squirrel in particular, who I nicknamed Cornear (sounded cool), was so outgoing that she boldly ventured within a foot of my person to retrieve food. I felt that it was time to make the jump to offering her food from my hand, so the

next time I saw her in my backyard I decided to risk it all. I walked over to her on the fence and offered a small pistachio held shakily in the palm of my hand. Every anecdote I had ever heard about rabies flooded back to me as I watched her warily approach, though we seemed to be equally anxious of each other's presence. Suddenly, I felt a slight tickle of whiskers on my palm and the nut was gone, Cornear sprinting off to stash it somewhere. A great

sense of joy filled my heart — I was actually buddies with a squirrel, plus my fingers were all still accounted for! We became close chums after this first encounter, spending many afternoons together in the backyard. I even got a few other squirrels to trust me, but none so much as my dear friend Cornear. She has sadly disappeared within the last few months, though new squirrels have popped up in her place (friends? cousins? lovers?). Still, each individual squirrel holds a special place in my heart, and when one really gets to know them one finds them to be just as diverse and funny as we humans. Feeding squirrels reminds me that we are not so separate from the natural world — all we are and all we have come from the Earth, same as the squirrels. We needn't be enemies with our squirrel neighbors, and in fact if we extend a hand (or paw) towards them we may find our lives to be enriched by their friendship. We are all just living out our short lives as strange little beings on this planet, so why not be friends while we're at it? (P.S. Remember not to feed squirrels or other animals overly processed foods or foods that will make them sick, and to feed them sparingly! They also are known to prefer local, Ecoganic produce.)

Honest Love: Interview with Jess Rice

As told to hc. This interview was edited for length and clarity.

Can you tell me about your history with Potomac Vegetable Farm?

I've been here for three years. I heard about PVF on a podcast. I was out in California, studying ag at a subsect of UC Davis. I thought it couldn't be real, so I did some research and emailed Hana, "I love your farm, I love what you're all about. You should hire me." *laughs* It was history from there.

We are currently surrounded by a cat and a dog. Can you tell me about all of the animals in your life?

I live with two cats, Smokey and Riley. They came about this past January, after living here and realizing I had mice. Looking at the shelter. Ten-year old bonded pair of cats. Everyone wants kittens and no one wants cats, so I thought "Alright, I'll take 'em." Showgun I've had in my life the longest. He came in last July when I was looking for a friend for Dionysus, who passed in March. He's been an amazing sweetheart of a dog. He's this big dumb noodle. He was a street dog in Texas, which I don't understand, because there's not a vicious bone in his body. Jazzy came into my life about late May as a foster dog. She is very sweet, gentle, and very stupid. She's definitely the dumbest out of the three of 'em. She'll give you all of the love, she's just dumber than a bag of rocks. Minerva came from a rescue that I volunteered to foster for. She was supposed to be adopted, but her family backed out because she wasn't a boy dog. They needed somewhere for her to go that night. I picked her up at six weeks old. Her personality started to come out, and I was like "this is my little t-rex." So I called them and got the paperwork to formally adopt her in mid-July.

Okay, so those are the animals that sleep in the house with you. And then there are the animals who sleep outside.

So the outside animals are three horses. I'm looking to adopt a mini pig, who would live outside. Pan is my youngest horse, but the one I've had the longest. He's a thoroughbred and was bred for racing. He's big, gray, and he keeps growing. He's going to keep growing because horses grow until they're seven. He's already big, and he's going to be gigantic. He has 65 percent vision loss in his right eye, so he was never a racehorse, never on a racetrack. Which is good because horses who are on racetracks are really



Jess and her horse, Pan.

hot, which means they go. They've been trained to go, it's what they do. Getting them out of that habit is hard. It takes a lot of patience. Then Zeus and Belle came into my life at the same time. A few months ago, my neighbor Melissa who has two horses and I were hanging out and watching the horse auction up in Thurmont, Maryland. Saw these sweet horses and we decided that these were the two I wanted. I placed a bet on them, as long as they're under my retaining number, then I'll get them. Belle was \$150. Zeus was a whopping \$950. So a little over my budget, but not too bad. Zeus is amazing, he's very beginner safe. He's neck trained, Western trained. He jumps. He's fearless. I don't understand how that horse ended up at the auction. So someone's discard is a blessing, a gift. You couldn't pay for the personalities these horses have. Some horses are assholes, and when you have a horse that's an asshole, that's 1,200 pounds of asshole. So, I'm really grateful these two aren't assholes.

There's a horse barn up on Route 9 in Hamilton called Chase Run Stables. That's how Pan came

"Jess," cont. on page 5

"Jess," cont. from page 4

into my life. My first year at PVF, halfway through the season, I was feeling comfortable and wanted to do work-trade for riding. I started doing that with the woman who runs the barn named Jess. Unfortunately, Jess has been dealing with cancer over the last two years, and I've taken on the farm management with another person named JR. So we care for and maintain 19 horses, most of them are field-board, which means they can go in and out of a run-shed but don't sleep in the barn. Some of them are brought into the barn, so they get brought in at night, put out in the morning, fed inside. Their stalls get cleaned. They all have different personalities, and they're hilarious. They're split into different fields, and each herd has a different herd mentality. I do a lot of exercise riding, maintenance, and care for the horses and the property. JR has taken on the bush hogging and

fence repair. I do basic animal maintenance, vet set-ups, holding for the ferrier. The ferrier puts the shoes on their feet, which has to be done every four to six weeks. None of my horses have shoes right now, because it's expensive, but I am going to start putting shoes on Pan because I want to start competing and it's better for them, more comfortable.

Competing in what?

Hunter jumper and eventing. Hunter jumper is when you're in a ring and there are cute frilly jumps. Eventing is when you're in a big field and you jump over fallen logs, through water, down hills. Two different events.

Who was your very first pet ever?

When I was a child, I had these goldfish that lived for seven years. It was really cool. They were Flotsam and Jetsam. Inspired by Ursula the Sea Witch, my personal favorite villain. One of them passed away, and my mom flushed it while

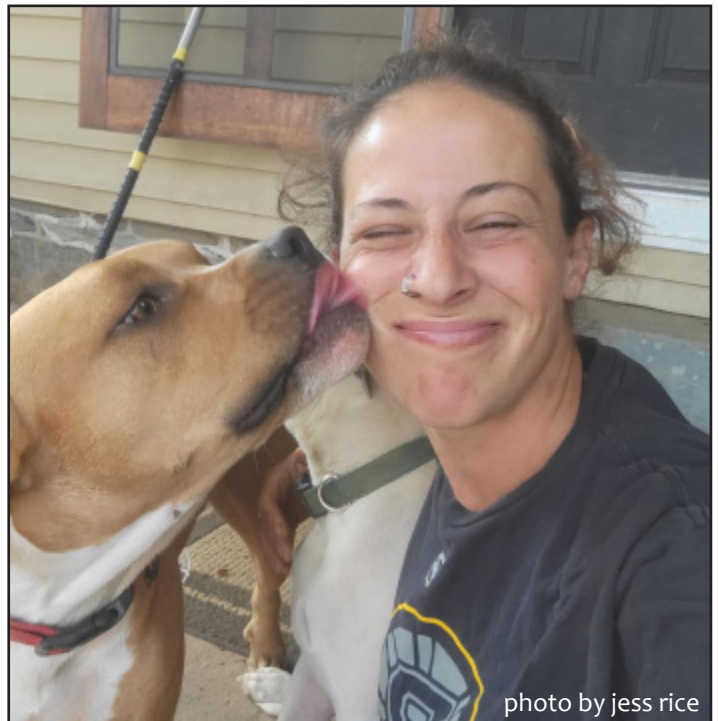


photo by jess rice

I was at school. I was in second grade and had a meltdown when I got home. So when the next one died, a month and a half later, my mom wasn't home. My grandmother, remembering the conniption I had, put it in the ice tray and froze it until I got home from school. Then popped this fish out of the ice tray like she was making a cocktail. Puts it in a cup to take it to the bathroom, then we flushed my fish down the toilet. Bless that woman, bless Joyce,

who hates all animals.
laughs

How did you get into horses?

I was eight years old when I started officially taking horseback riding lessons. My mom and I were living with my grandmother and grandfather at that time. I crawled up everyone's butt and made a nest until I got pony lessons. They told me I could do two things — ballet and horseback riding. Oh, and my mom wanted me to keep doing Girl Scouts, so those were my three things. So I show to the barn for my lesson, and the instructor looks at an eight year old girl and says "you know how to do this, right?" I said, "Uhm, I've ridden a pony." She handed me a bridle to put on a horse, and it lunged at me, so



photo by jess rice

"Jess," cont. on page 6

"Jess," cont. from page 5

she put the bridle on. We were riding around the ring, without a lunge line at first, and there was someone else riding in the ring. When they went by me, my pony tried to kick hers and I went flying off. Getting up, seeing my mom's shocked face, the woman caught the pony. I asked her if she even knew what she was doing. She wasn't there for my next lesson.

So your first riding lesson, you fell off, and you were like "I'm hooked. I want to fall off more horses." How do you go from the earth to deciding "this is for me"?

You ride, you're having a magnificent time, and you're not realizing what's happening. You get thrown on the ground. It wasn't my first time meeting the ground. It was from horseback. Not my first time meeting the ground as a child. I tried skateboarding, I climbed many trees. I was very familiar with gravity. I got back up, and it was a powerful moment. *pause to let whining dogs outside*

Okay, intermission from doggos over. Let's talk big picture, your visions for working with animals long-term.

Big picture is to board horses here and do training for young horses or horses off the track,

like Pan. Take the time to train them for different disciplines. Whether I buy them myself, train them, resell them or board and train them as a package. I want to do that to support other things, like rehab horses and to be able to offer this land and access to horses to people who wouldn't normally access it. Especially young people, set them up to trade work time for ride time. Barn hands around here make an average of \$15/hour, and if you're a high school kid around here and you're getting into being a barn hand anywhere in this area, you're going to make money. So, trying to help people access the money that exists

around here. I want to share information with people, have them take what they will from the experience.

If you could be any animal for a week, a month, and a year, which one would you be and for how long?

If I were an animal for a week, I'd like to be a wild horse. Life is hard, and it's dangerous, but I'm sure they feel a pack unity that you don't get with a herd in captivity. It's survival. For a month, I'd be a house cat. It's the epitome of life. I pick a house cat instead of a house dog, because as much as I love dogs and relate to them, personality wise, I'm much more of a cat. I

really love attention and physical contact. I want you to touch me, pet me, and rub me but only when I want it. I love to lay in the sunlight. I love things that smell good, I like soft surfaces, but I'm also an asshole. If this plant is in my way in this stream of sunlight by the window, sorry. I could do that for a month before I got bored. If I were a creature for a year, I'd like to be a jungle cat, I think a panther. They swim, they're not nocturnal, and they're actually very friendly with other animals. They've been friends with chimps, birds and other large cats. They're social. As one of the medium size cats, they can hide better. They're mysterious and also social butterflies.

Is there anything else you would like to add to this conversation?

If ever anyone has the opportunity to bond with an animal, no matter the point you are in your life, if you feel drawn, you should follow that. Some of the best love I have received or been able to give in my life, the most honest love, is to something that could never speak my language, tell me it loved me back. There's something about that no human relationship will ever give you. So anyone who has the opportunity, should really follow that. It's only gonna hurt when they're gone.



photo by jess rice



photo by hc

Best Bees' back-up hives on the Loudoun farm.

"Bees," cont. from page 1

The increased failure of hives and the difficulties beekeepers experience in keeping them going may partly explain why in recent years beekeepers have walked away from their hives and left it to the farm to clear out the abandoned boxes and cement blocks they left behind.

In short, until recently the prospect of bees on the farm was not particularly promising or joyful.

Three years ago, that prospect took a turn when we received an inquiry from Best Bees, which was looking to expand to the D.C. area. The question: would the farm be interested in hosting some of its hives during the summer? Actually, a lot of hives.

We learned that the company's business was to provide beehives to suburban homeowners and businesses that might like to host beehives without needing to take care of the bees. For a fee the company would provide and maintain one or more hives.

The customer would have the satisfaction of observing the bees and supporting an environmentally-friendly enterprise. At the end of the season the customer would receive the hive's honey production, less the amount necessary to sustain the colony over the winter.

Where did we come in? The company needed to maintain a store of healthy hives near its customer base so as to be able to fulfill its promise to replace any hive that failed.

Best Bees was started in Boston in 2010 by an MIT researcher. When Best Bees contacted the farm it had been in business for about eight years and was beginning to expand to other cities. It now operates in fourteen metropolitan areas.

Best Bees offers customers an opportunity to participate in or demonstrate one's commitment to an environmentally constructive enterprise. The opportunity is not available to everyone. To provide, maintain and harvest honey from a single hive at

a residence in the D.C. area this past year cost on average \$3000.

But it wants to be more than that. Best Bees has an impressive research agenda based upon a capacity to conduct genetic analysis of the honey it collects from all over the country. It aspires to provide leading-edge analysis of the factors affecting the health of bee colonies nation-wide.

From the farm's perspective we've enjoyed working with Best Bees staff. They have been friendly, cooperative and knowledgeable. They have been respectful of the farm's priorities. So long as the business thrives we should be able to count on them to maintain the hives and look after their welfare.

We also like that at the end of the season a box arrives with jars of honey. We like to think the honey was surplus from the hives at our farm, but if not, we enjoy it all the same.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/25/business/return-to-office.html>

Meet the Neighbors

McCutcheon's

Jams, Jellies, Preserves, Marmelades & More

Made in Frederick, Maryland

McCutcheon's was founded in 1938 in Frederick, Maryland. It has over 30 full-time employees, including 16 family members from 4th and 5th generations, all working together to bring you the world-famous McCutcheon's homestyle taste and quality you've come to enjoy.

GRILLED APRICOT PORK TENDERLOIN

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 LB PORK TENDERLOIN
- 3 TBSP McCUTCHEON'S APRICOT PRESERVES
- 1/4 CUP MUSTARD

DIRECTIONS:

1. IN A BOWL, MIX TOGETHER THE PRESERVES AND MUSTARD.
2. PREPARE THE MEAT WITH SALT AND PEPPER TO TASTE.
3. GRILL THE MEAT UNTIL CRISP AND THE INTERIOR REACHES 160 F. (THE GRILL SHOULD BE OPEN)
4. IN THE LAST MINUTES OF GRILLING, COAT LIBERALLY WITH THE SAUCE AND CLOSE GRILL COVER FOR 1-2 MINUTES, OR UNTIL THE SAUCE CARAMELIZES).
5. SLICE THE MEAT INTO MEDALLIONS AND SERVE IMMEDIATELY.

McCUTCHEON'S PRESERVES CAN BE PURCHASED AT PVF
RECIPE FROM WWW.McCUTCHEONS.COM

ROASTED BUTTERNUT SQUASH

INGREDIENTS:

- 3 CUPS CUBED BUTTERNUT SQUASH
- 1 CHOPPED APPLE
- 1 SMALL ONION, CHOPPED
- 3 SPRIGS THYME
- 2TBS EXTRA-VIRGIN OLIVE OIL
- 1/4 TSP KOSHER SALT

DIRECTIONS:

1. PREHEAT OVEN TO 450 DEGREES
2. TOSS INGREDIENTS IN A BOWL
3. ROAST UNTIL TENDER & LIGHTLY BROWNED (30-35 MINUTES)

RECIPE COURTESY OF NUTRITION ACTION



photo by hc

Michael Bradford towing a trailer stacked with crates of butternut and butterkin squash on 9/10/2021.