



Vol. 23 No. 8

September 4 - 8, 2022



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

In Praise of Pests

by Rachel Udall

I know that as a farm worker whose life is made tangibly harder by their presence, praise is just about the last thing I should have for pests. But truly, my heart stirs when I see a little yellow bean beetle eating away at my means of living. And somehow I still have a smile on my face when I see a groundhog dashing away from the now-chewed dandelion greens I just finished planting. Pests are the tricksters of the land - they mess up our plans, they ruin our crops, they create obstacle after obstacle - but likewise, they create the opportunity to think and act differently, to change our worn-out routines, and they bring the joy of the unexpected to our days. How boring a world it would be if there were no maggots or caterpillars making their tiny homes inside tomatoes and onions. How colorless a life if there were no hornworms or bean beetles or cabbage



photo courtesy of helen roades

moths hiding among the endless greenery. How empty the farm would feel without the sheer abundance of life that exists here - flying, scurrying, creeping, and crawling over every inch of this Virginia soil. There is such a joy in being constantly surrounded by other forms of life, however tiny and obnoxious and blood-sucking they may be. It is nice to be reminded that we are not really

the owners of this land, but merely some of its stewards, and that there's not one right way to exist in this space or to live a life. There is beauty and goodness and joy in picking squash, planting seeds, hoeing rows, and living as a person might live. But there is also beauty and goodness and joy in chewing potatoes, living inside tomatoes, digging tunnels underneath strategically-placed

fences, and living as a pest might live. Perhaps a few more seasons of rotten, insect-chewed produce and hard-to-install groundhog barriers will cause me to rethink this position, but at the very least, it's always reassuring to know we are never really alone as we scratch out our meager living on this small acreage. Give me gnats in my nose and beetles in my tomatoes any day!

In Praise of Water and Sun

by Annie Manville

If I take a scroll back through my farm photos, there are reliably a glowing few that jump out – those of beloved colleagues (not to be discussed here), and those of vegetables basking in sunlight, or bejeweled by water. The realization that those moments tend to be when I find a vegetable worthy of being photographed – no small feat given I have to pause whatever work flow I'm in and decide to be unproductive in my task for that one photo-taking-moment – is worthy of a brief reflection. In other words, if it makes me pause, it must be a mighty fine looking piece of produce. And the conditions which engender such fine-looking-ness are often as simple as the following.

Sun/light: When full sun hits a vegetable – a tomato or pepper for instance – we are being shown this plant at its absolute best – it has its finest attire and most fetching attitude at this moment. It is a revelatory moment for person and plant. Drop the tomato down into a shadow to photograph it, and you may as well be looking at its uglier cousin. The sun makes produce sparkle, pop, beg to be consumed. It makes us recognize vegetables as the little sculptures they are. The sun reveals the pepper's vibrancy, its flourishing, its absolute glamor as a shining piece of edible art.

Water: water is a leafy vegetable's best friend. As these plants are meant to be waterproof, they find themselves creating delightful scenarios once water droplets come into contact with them. Dew in the morning or water droplets after a fragrant drizzle



photo courtesy of rachel mccormick

In praise of Purple Hyacinth Bean Flowers and the Hummingbirds that love them.

help us appreciate the contours and undulations of a chard leaf. Its bumpy hills and tiny valleys of green provide a lush landscape for surface-tension and its playmate water to really shine. The leaf sparkles, it has a verdant sheen. The pinnacle of water's accentuation of a leaf's beauty is its full submersion in a tub of water. All we really wanted was to clean the dirt off the cabbage, but instead we are given a heavenly display of pearlescent gems and flashing rainbows, a multi-faceted vision of leafy loveliness.

And so, praise the sun and the water that allows us to recognize the full beauty of vegetables we encounter everyday.



photo courtesy of rachel mccormick

Praisefully [a poem]

by hc

Simple recipes, antique cookbooks, meal prep, leftovers, lunch break, chilled cooler bag, creamy coffee, hot tea, fizzy kombucha, meta novels, RAIN. Shared perspective, shared understanding, shared resources. Folded paper, paint markers, glue stick, scissors, ZINE. Team work, alone work, take a break. Dangling grapevine, pawpaw delivery, wreath portal, visceral groan, curly willow, CLOVER. Watermelon, cantaloupe, melon jokes, plums. Cover crop, winter squash, irrigation, fence line, bee hive.

The Craftsman Relic

by Michael Bradford

About 50 years ago Chip Planck built a shed in the middle of our farm in Loudoun County to serve as the all purpose space out of the weather. It's about 20 by 20 feet, with a tin roof held up by 5 used telephone poles and one post cut from a locust tree. It used to have red paint on the wood siding.

My brother Stephen and uncle Jon turned it into a temporary workshop five years ago. Stephen then used it as a staging ground to build a large pole barn right next to the shed, including a bigger, fancier shop.

That was a couple years ago, and since then the old shed has fallen out of use, becoming a home to whatever is not useful enough to move to the new shop. Last week it became time to put the shed to use again, so I began the process of cleaning it out.

It's a tedious process we are all familiar with, being so inundated with things. Cleaning off the kitchen table at the end of the day requires a Sisyphean endurance. Putting things in their proper place takes a lifetime.

Little pieces of wood: What is useful? What should be burned? What is trash? Little pieces of metal: what are they? When is a bolt too rusty? Is it worth it to take metal to a scrap yard? What is useful? What is trash? Plastic: so many mysterious shapes. Which shapes are useful? How much micro plastic is acceptable to leave behind?

There's a frilly lampshade, but I don't know of a lamp within a mile of this shed. Three cummerbunds and two bowties from someone else's barn that Jon, Stephen and I scavenged. A box of old hand tools my brother probably got at a farm auction for a couple dollars. What is useful? What is trash?

There's a metal case that looks like an old toolbox, but when I open it up there's just one tool inside: a Craftsman "electric handsaw" that was made 70 years ago. It is bulky but elegant, and fits perfectly in

its case. These things would never be packaged like this today, they are so much less special. We just call them "circular saws" now and we have about ten lying around our shop.

The electric handsaw is in the shop because it's a tool. Though it still works, we would probably never use it. It's a relic. I open the case and I'm living in another man's memory, spending his hard earned money on this precious labor saving device from a Sears and Roebuck catalogue, grateful with the ease and efficiency of each cut, greasing it as directed, cleaning and stowing it carefully after each use. I won't use it, yet by comparison every other circular saw we have feels like trash. What is useful? What is trash?



photo courtesy of helen.roades

Meet the Neighbors

EcoFriendly Foods (Bedford County, VA) was founded in 2003 by Bev Eggleston, a vegetarian & new dad. Not wanting to force his dietary choice on his daughter, he sought out environmentally friendly & humane meats, only to discover the dark side of modern animal agriculture. EcoFriendly Foods was born as Bev deepened his understanding as a former vegetarian & conscious carnivore.

EcoFriendly Foods prides itself in providing pasture raised and humanely harvested livestock to its customers. They manage a network of sustainable family farms in central & southern Virginia. They operate a USDA Inspected processing facility in Moneta, Virginia which gives them complete control not only over the safety & quality of their meats but also the care & treatment of



their animals.

www.EcoFriendly.com

from Mika

In Praise of produce! Blueberries off the bush, corn on the cob, melon eaten rind first, figs off the tree, cherry tomatoes inhaled whole, cauliflower pickled or raw or roasted, watermelon running down my face and belly, nectarines consumed from top to bottom, peaches eaten rapturously, green beans with garlic, cucumbers one in each hand.

Mika came to visit for six months, starting as a seven month old and leaving as a 13 month old. In that time she lived the life of a fruit and vegetable princess. She appreciates fine produce.

from Jon Groisser

In praise of the places that sell farm supplies. Tractor Supply is the closest but it's corporate and appeals to the lowest common denominator. By comparison, Green Tree Hardware in Lancaster County has one aisle that is a hundred feet long with cubbies with every size and type of hardware that you could possibly want. Stainless steel and galvanized and metric and carriage bolts and lag bolts and fine threaded. Hundreds of cubbies. They have a room of hand tools and another with all the electrical supplies you could want. They have a really big section of Milwaukee cordless tools for their regular Amish clientele. They only take cash or checks, no credit cards. I only get there about twice a year but I look forward to it.



photo courtesy of rebecca groisser



photo courtesy of yael rennert

from Hana Newcomb

In praise of heavy dew in the early morning, and thunderstorms in the late afternoon. One way or another we mostly avoid the stress and bother of regular watering. We watch the weather forecasts to see when rain might come, and then we rush to prepare the soil for plants or seeds.

In the middle of August we got a substantial reprieve from the sticky summer heat. We planted thousands of kale and broccoli and cabbage plants, and then we got nervous because it got really hot. We wrestled the water gun into action and gave the whole field a drink. And then a gullywasher came through in the night. You just never know.

We are lucky to live in a region that mostly provides what vegetables really need — plenty of moisture, plenty of heat, and soil that grows really tasty food. We feel blessed to have all this free water when so many other regions are frighteningly dry. We do not take our blessings for granted.

from Yael Rennert

When asked what my favorite part of living on the farm is- first thing that comes to mind is usually this- there's always something that needs to be done. This speaks to my sensibility as someone who is obsessed with creating, with making good use of the time we're given and of the desire to be helpful. The farm is so good for me and for so many people wishing to be of use- to be a part of something bigger than themselves- to belong. It's not often that one becomes immersed in a world so different than their own and yet feels so wanted and so needed. How lucky we are.