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POTOMAC VEGETABLE FARMS
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Our 25th Season of Community Supported Agriculture

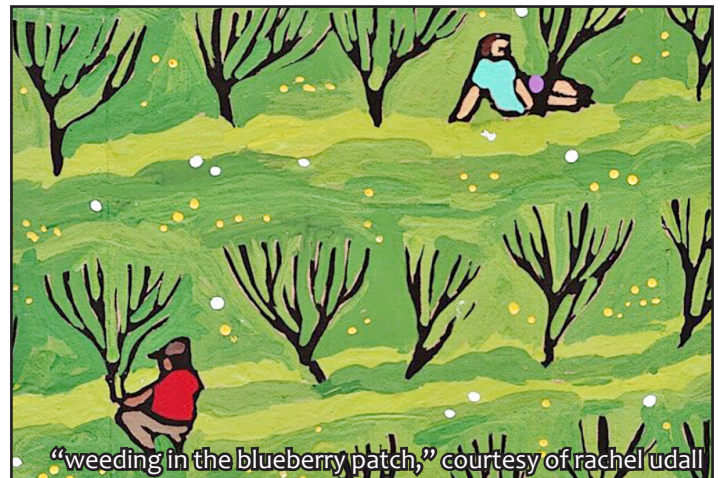
by Hana Newcomb

I visited some friends who had a CSA farm about 30 years ago, and I saw their binder that kept track of the members and some of their preferences. Who didn't like chard, and who wanted extra zucchini. This reinforced for me that I never wanted to run a CSA -- farmers markets didn't require us to remember who liked what, people could shop for themselves. I never wanted to be anyone's personal shopper.

I can't remember exactly what changed my mind, but it was

definitely an experiment, hatched by me and Karin Boyd, a longtime worker who needed a project to complete some college requirements. We decided that we could do it the way we wanted, and we wouldn't need to know about our customers' most and least favorite vegetables. We sat on a bench near the old railroad station in Herndon and came up with our plan. We cracked ourselves up so much when we came up with "Mini," "Regular" and "Robust." Now those names seem perfectly normal, but at the time we thought we were hilarious. Everyone else was still using small, medium and large. This was pre- Starbucks.

Some farmer friends of ours were leaving the area and leaving their CSA customers behind. We inherited their list and introduced ourselves to their hosts. This was before the internet. We sent postcards and fliers out by US Mail and people had to register by filling out a form



and sending a check. We kept our customer lists on legal notepads. Our newsletter was handwritten by Karin. Deliveries were done in personal vehicles. Each share was a paper grocery bag, all identically packed and not belonging to any one person. This was part of our brand. Our first year, we had 70 customers.

The folks who picked up at the farm did have a name taped on the shelf underneath a box, but we packed the boxes blind, never knowing who was getting each box. Nobody had to sign out because we knew they had come when their

box was emptied. We only did CSA on Tuesday and Wednesday, I believe. We reserved the weekends for markets.

In 2008, a food writer for the Washington Post decided it would be fun to feature our CSA share every week, talking about how she cooked her mystery collection and what her children learned to love or hate. That year was a high point for our fame as a CSA.

With the advent of the internet and databases, we signed up with a start-up company called Member Assembler, and they helped us to do



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Glimpses of the Old Loudoun: Rural Humility

by Chip Planck

George Cochran was the sole person with a vegetable farm and stand when we came to the County in 1973. Once when he was at the farm to pick up two baskets of squash we had sold him I wanted to write out a receipt and asked, “Have you got a pencil handy, George?” The reply: “If I had anything handy I don’t know what I’d do.”

On the phone with Donald Virts,

who had a beautiful big farm nearby, I asked how he was: “I dunno, Chip,” he said, “some days we’re lucky just to get down to the road.”

Robert Potts, the last of the County’s big dairymen, still running Dogwood Farm in Lincoln, saw me at the John Deere Dealer and asked, “Didn’t you retire?” I indicated I was there for parts like him and he said gleefully “Yep, still tearing up machinery.”

At the welder Bill Moore’s,

there’s the usual fella just hanging out as chorus for Bill’s work, along with customers cradling their broken parts. He commented on the saw chains I’d brought for sharpening, on what a good (and cheap) job Billy did on them, how much wood I’d be cutting later that day. Then after walking back into the gloom of the shop to offer good bye (“I see you’re busy”), he left, saying: “Well, I better go home and do something, even if it’s wrong.”



photo courtesy of oscar ruth

Three robin babies on the cusp of leaving the nest earlier this spring.

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registration and kept track of our data. This allowed us to expand our CSA without burying ourselves in minutia. Member Assembler was perfect for us – they tracked what was most interesting to us and they didn’t charge a lot of money and we knew the owner personally. Eventually he began to have bigger and more ambitious ideas and he discontinued that business model and came up with Harvie – customizing shares was now a possibility. Just before the pandemic, I decided to make the leap with Harvie. The timing was good because people wanted to get their vegetables directly from a real farm, and they didn’t really want to get a bag of unknown and unrequested vegetables. They were used to shopping, not supporting.

We had already switched over to “market style” pickup at the farm, where customizing happened every day, just like shopping at the farmers market. But it was revolutionary to be able to customize



photo courtesy of oscar ruth

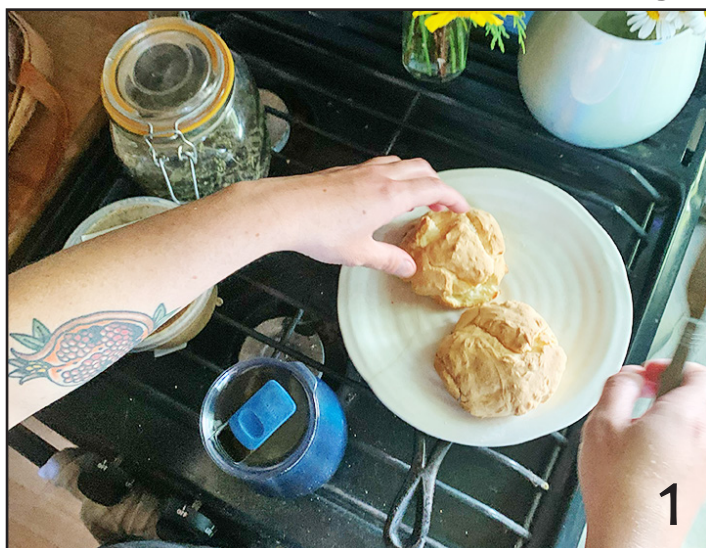
Isabel holding the flowers she picked from fields of cover crops and over-wintered brassicas.

the delivered shares. It also was more fun than we thought it would be.

Every year we make a few more tweaks, trying to improve the system. We know that the CSA is not a model that will ever attract a significant portion of shoppers. Not everyone has the same motivation for joining, and few people like the full spectrum of what we grow, but we have managed to make our CSA so full of choices that it can attract a wider variety of eaters. We are dependent on word-of-mouth as our advertising method (that, and Google) and this encourages us to keep trying to find ways to be more accessible. Now we have long pickup hours four days a week on both farms. We want to make it as easy as possible, while keeping our standards high. The food may be weird, but it has to be fresh and good.

We are always excited to start a new season. 25 years is a long time. I was 40 years old when we started this project. And some of you have been in the CSA for the whole time. It is all very satisfying and we are glad to be your farmers.

Recently Delicious



by Oscar Ruth

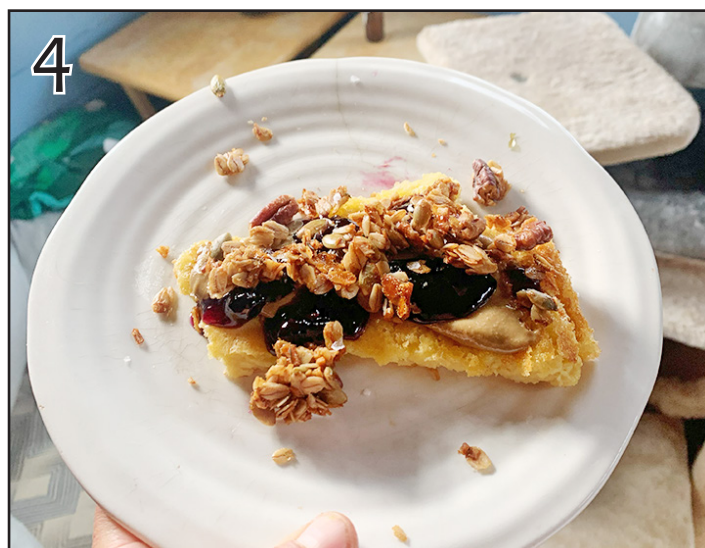
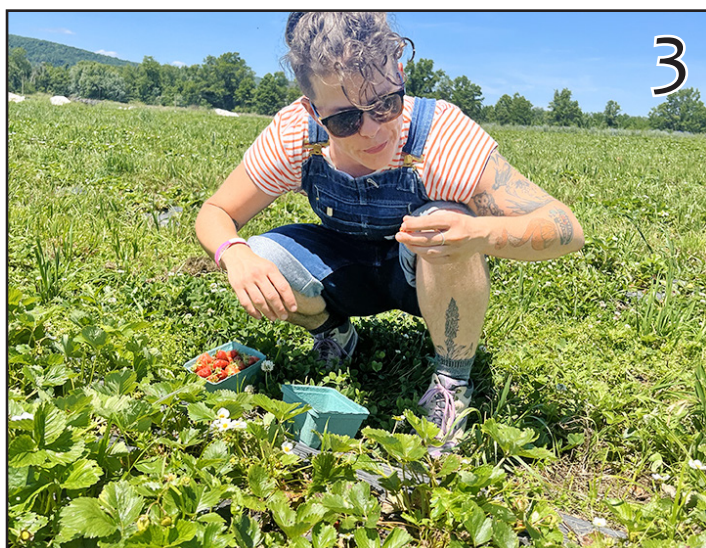
Some of my ancestors worked as caterers, others as journalists. Loreen, my maternal grandmother, kept a stack of gourmet food magazines in the corner of her kitchen. That stack grew taller as I aged and grew with it. Sometimes I wish that stick still existed in my life, so I could use the content for collage material. When I joined the newspaper team in college, I was always taking assignments to photograph the stories about local chefs, restaurateurs, and other facets of the foodie scene. Archiving deliciousness is a genetic impulse, and sharing the data is

another. Here is a short list of delicious food things I've enjoyed eating recently. The month of May was full of springtime flavors, hallelujah.

1. Biscuits baked by my beloved boyfriend for my birthday breakfast. Not pictured: the decadent coconut bundt cake he baked for after dinner.
2. Fresh thyme with George's Milk goat milk strawberry gelato while I worked at the Takoma Park Farmers Market on the sunniest Sunday of the season so far.
3. So. Many. Juicy. Fruits!

Strawberries in the u-pick field on my birthday. Mulberries from the tree branch I walked directly into right after reassuring my belly we were gonna eat lunch soon. Sour cherries in the community garden after a round of planting flowers and herbals.

4. A slice of dutch baby topped with sunflower seed butter, blueberry jam, and herbal granola. Shout out to my neighbor Maeve for inspiring me with the easiest recipe (scale down for a smaller size): 8 eggs, 1 cup (gluten-free) flour, and 1 cup milk.





Ciara Prencipe, she/they

Hi! I'm Ciara, and my best friend and worst co-worker here is Bean. This is my 7th year working full time/year round here at the Wheatland branch of PVF, but I started out working at the Vienna location when I was in college in 2013. This is Bean's 2nd year running around the farm. This winter I spent my time not farming, doing ceramics, reading (by that I mean listening to audiobooks), and playing Zelda: Breath of the Wild. Bean spends his time not

on the farm eating and sleeping, mostly. This year on the farm I'm looking forward to seeing lots of critters - toads (my favorite), foxes (so pretty), owls (saw 2 this morning!), hawks (abundant and always fascinating), crows (tricksters), praying mantises (always delightful), rabbits (wish they would stop living in the tunnels), groundhogs (cute but destructive), snakes (a little scary but usually harmless), and whoever else is around. Bean likes to see critters too, and chase them out of the fields.

Hana Newcomb, she/her

If I had an "Ask me about..." sticker, it would say "Ask me about anything. I can make up the best answers." This is because I might know more than anyone else on the farm about just about any topic -- I have been working here since I was a teenager and it became my full time job after I graduated from college. I never planned to be a farmer, but I also never went away to do anything else, as this was the best life I could imagine. I am hoping that we can grow some delicious beans this summer. That is my personal quest.



Julia Kreilkamp, she/her

I've developed an annual habit of escaping the New England mud season to spend springtime in the Vienna greenhouse and fields. Ask me about cold water dipping and swimming — one thing I love and miss about the north country. Lately I tune in every week to the Handsome podcast and also seek out old Carol Burnett and Honeymooners shows on Youtube (laughing is the best). I love poet Ross Gay's essays (noticing joy is also good). I had some luck making vegan sorrel pesto the other day.

Rachel Udall, she/they

Hello! I'm actually a hakurei turnip that resembles a human to such an uncanny degree that they had to give me a job. And now I'm back for my fourth year! What a joy to be on the farm surrounded by sun, earth, and sheer bounties of fresh, verdant, nutritious vegetables. Anyways.... Pictured here is my traditional market day breakfast of 7 types of cookies and 2 large coffees, extra sugar, modest cream. Just what this turnip needs to get her creative juices flowing! Find some of my paintings in the newsletter, at market, or strewn about the farm (if you find the 'golden painting' you will receive the deed to the farm as a prize). I hope you enjoy

all the splendors of the summer season, and as a Louisianan gal I implore you to please, please, please put basil in your lemonade! It is divinity - you simply must!

