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Welcome (Back) to our 26th CSA Season!

by Hana Newcomb

When the registration opened up on February 1, I felt dubious. There was so much economic uncertainty and people in our area were losing their jobs in a chaotic and unpredictable way. I worried that they would not be able to commit to a season of vegetables, paying for food they would not see for almost four months. It's a big ask, asking you to pay way in advance.

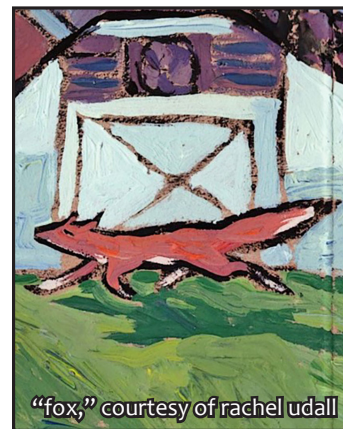
But somehow my fears did not come true. The registrations started and they kept on coming. We have as many CSA members as ever. The only explanation I have -- other than amazing customer loyalty and a lot of folks who really love vegetables -- is that the CSA represents normalcy and stability and good eating, and you were ready to support us in our work. We purchased all the seeds, we paid all the workers during a time when we had very little to sell, we hauled in two big loads of custom

blend fertilizer and we bought lots of supplies to get the season started. Thank you, thank you.

As most of you know, we start out really leafy. We started planting in late March and leaves are the only crops that grow fast. Fruits and roots take much longer. This leafy time lasts about a month, and by mid June we are all ready for something with some heft to it. "Fruits" are the vegetables that grow from a

blossom, like summer squash. The squash and zucchini start us off, and the cucumbers, and eventually the tomatoes. It is a 6 month saga of changing menus.

It works best if you don't come to pick up your vegetables with a shopping list in your hand. Just come. See what strikes your fancy. Choose what looks the most interesting and beautiful. You might be disappointed if you come with specific



expectations. The spinach runs out early, so then you have to pivot to bok choy. Oh well, it's not the same as spinach but it is tasty. And we often find things to pick at the last minute that are not on the list in your weekly email, because that's how vegetables work. So we hope you will enjoy the spontaneity.

We look forward to seeing you at the markets, at the farms, and we will send you some surprises in your packed shares on the porches. We are so grateful that you chose to eat these vegetables -- we know there are many easier ways to get your produce!



Introduce yourself by telling us about a time of year that you are most engaged/busy/glad to be working and tell us what you do and how that fits into the bigger picture.

Sam Trentham, she/her

My name is Sam and I'm entering my fourth year on the farm. I arrived in the spring a few years ago with limited farming skills but lots of enthusiasm. By now, I've picked up some handy skills and I get to work closely with Ciara for the whole year. I've even learned enough to make teaching new people part of my job. We are about to embark on this season's journey with our new crew. It's still spring, the beginning of everything, so this is the part where we really have to make the teaching count. So we take the time now to explain the silly details, to ask and answer questions, and to pay close attention.

Although it feels a million miles away, our days in early autumn are spent harvesting and transporting food that will sustain us through winter, from winter squash to sweet potatoes, to squishy tomatoes destined for canning. And by that point in the season, the crew works

together like a sweaty, well-oiled machine. The newest workers are strong and confident, just settled into the flow and routine of the farm days. They can barely even remember the days of learning how to pick kale, or wash lettuce, or load trucks.

Every job in the world comes with random specific skill sets, and at PVF, loading trucks is one of them. As a baker learns to stack layered cakes, we deftly arrange (hurriedly tetris) all the different containers of produce onto the truck just so, to make them stand still until they get home. And if everything goes well as the season progresses from spring, the loads get bigger and often more complicated. But as the size of our harvest grows, so to do the skill sets of the people who do the harvesting. Fitting a mountain of food into a farm truck is an occasion that calls for pride and gratitude. It's a celebration of the many-handed work that led to a magnificent harvest, and the time it took to all come to fruition.



Carrie Nemec, she/her

I like to be busy, so it makes sense my favorite time of year is September and October, when it feels like everything is happening all at once. The summer CSA and markets are still going at full force, and we are still planting the last of the fall and outdoor winter crops. I spend the month of September seeding and cultivating brassicas while we are still picking the last of the summer crops that are holding on – plus, the brassicas grow super-fast and are quickly ready to be picked themselves. My kids are back at school by then, so my work time is broken up by the bus schedule – I'm out early, then after the bus I'm back to farming until it is time to start collecting them back up from the bus stop (and preschool) so we can do homework and head to the various after school activities. By the time October rolls around we are putting fields to bed for the winter, planting cover crop, clearing and storing tomato stakes and hoses, wondering how many storage crops we really need to get through the winter, and then filling our secret storage spaces with sweet potatoes and winter squash. Soon it is November and life's rhythms are shifting again.

**Michael Bradford, he/him**

When I worked on this farm as a kid I was pretty much only available to help during summer vacation, and to this day I feel most useful in the summer months. Summer is chaotic and overwhelming. The weeds are like forests, stifling our productivity. All the mowing and weeding I do becomes much more essential. We pick vegetables by the ton. I can throw my body into farm work with large movements and test my limitations. When it's hot I have to find new ways to do my work as efficiently as possible so I can get back to the shade.

I've learned to do some minor building, repair, and maintenance work in between the bigger jobs, and I've picked up more tractor-related work in recent years. My role is widespread and ill-defined. I take a central role in jobs where I have aptitude and experience, and try to remain helpful for everything else as the needs arise.

Jon Groisser, he/him

My jobs are the same year round but the early spring is certainly especially busy. My primary responsibilities are the maintenance and upkeep of the vehicles and infrastructure of the farm. The vehicles include 14 on-road trucks and cars, 6 on-farm only, 15 tractors, 3 skid-steer loaders, 2 riding mowers, 13 golf carts, small engine equipment such as chainsaws and string trimmers and many farming implements, such as planters, mowers, and tillage and cultivating equipment. Infrastructure maintenance includes houses, barns, greenhouses and their systems including electrical and plumbing. Maintenance includes fixing things as they break, but also preventative.

Spring is busy, both because we are using most equipment for the first time in months but

also because much of the annual preventative maintenance is done then.

I do not want to give the impression that I do all, or even most, of the work involved in this upkeep. But I am the first person Hana goes to after she experiences or hears of problems.

As you can see from the list we have a lot of stuff. It is our philosophy that, for the most part, we buy used, inexpensive equipment, but we have redundancy so if (when) things break, we have backup. Our newest vehicle is from 2011, which we just bought and which we are loath to actually use for farm activities since it looks so good now and will not within minutes of starting to load it.

Which is to say, I am not actually a farmer at all. I know nothing of growing vegetables. I am only, somewhat, useful around the edges. Only until the next truck breaks down on the road.

Rachel Udall, she/they

Early spring is my favorite time on the farm. After many cold months spent atrophying inside, watching intellectual television programming such as "Deal or No Deal Island", and eating copious amounts of non-ecoganic Taco Bell (speaking for myself), it is hard not to love spring's triumphant return to life. In early April we undertake the odyssey that is onion planting: several tens of thousands of tiny onion slips must be shoved by hand into the dirt over 3 to 4 weeks. It's a task which tests one's leg muscles, one's perseverance, one's tolerance for the lingering smell of onions on one's hands, and over the years it has become one of my most beloved yearly rituals. I have come to enjoy being rudely thrown from

my winter stupor back into all the hustle and bustle of farm work. Over the month or so of onion planting, I find myself gradually becoming less and less sore, remembering all the little tricks I had forgotten, getting a little better than I was the year before, and feeling more and more prepared for the busy season ahead. And as an artist, it is pure joyous inspiration to be surrounded by the singing birds, the blooming dandelions, the beautifully abstract rows of upright onions, and even the brilliant chartreuse of the pollen covering every inch of my face. Planting onions, I'm thrust right back into farm life and reminded just why I keep coming back year after year to plant a couple more. Plus I really get to show off my speed to the newer workers - the true gift of farm work. Welcome (back) to all!



Ciara Prencipe, she/they

One of my main roles at PVF is as a winter grower. We built 3 high tunnels at the wheatland location in 2017 and since 2018 I've been engaged with and eventually managing the winter tunnel growing in those tunnels. Not many people work through the winter so it's a quiet and peaceful time on the farm. The tunnels are warm and pleasant to work in, and it feels good to still be engaging with

vegetables during the cold season. On the other hand, sometimes it can feel like Groundhog Day; there's only so many things that grow over the winter - kale, lettuce, chard, bok choy, etc - and only so many tasks - open and close the doors, weed, harvest, water, check the mouse traps, set up CSA. I've come to really enjoy winter growing over the years, and this year we tried growing fava beans for the first time - hopefully you will see them in the CSA soon!



Hana Newcomb, she/her

In the last 10 years or so, I have become the one who sets the schedules for two farms, puts together the daily plans, thinks of how to do things better, and decides when the soil is cool enough for spinach seeds or warm enough for tiny onion plants. I have been working on this farm since the beginning of time, and it takes a long time to learn how to make sure the soil is ready. Repetition and practice. I have been through about 50 seasons now as a fully engaged participant, but only in the last decade have I been the main person attending to all the pieces of the puzzle. I did not call myself a farmer until I was in my 50's, as there were so many farmers before me and around me and I didn't feel qualified to take the title.

I love all of it -- except for those soupy, boiling hot days of July -- and my favorite time of the season

is the beginning when we start to slowly roll into action. Sometimes by late February there is a field that is dry enough to till, and I am ready. By late April the farm is a beautiful quilt, with some fields planted, some open and waiting, and some still growing green and glorious cover crops. By the end of May, most fields are planted with all that we will be picking in the summer. My job is to get that ground ready for plants and to keep the flow going.

I don't do any of this alone. Not one single thing. It fills me with joy to be part of this experienced team of farmers who love the work as much as I do. In the early spring, we are on a flexible schedule with no CSA and not much to pick, so we just work around the weather and fill these fields with plants, week after week.

April is the best month of the whole year, but all the others come in a close second.



Becky Crouse Durst, she/her

I initially worked on the Wheatland farm part time for a full season in 2004. Come 2010 I realized I would never be happy working an office job and moved to Wheatland to work full time. I transitioned to the Vienna farm for the 2011 season, and worked and lived there through the end of the 2012 season. Since I had gotten married that year, it was pretty clear I should move in with my husband, and so I moved off farm to a house that was still commutable. I worked full time until my daughter's birth in September, 2013 and then part time until the end of the season during my second pregnancy. Since my son's birth I have worked part time on the administrative side of farming...

helping with the management of the CSA, sending out emails, and updating the website.

My busiest time of year is right now: a few weeks before the start of CSA. Combined with coordinating the spring and end-of-school activities for my now 11- and 9-year-olds, I am coordinating lists for each delivery host, sending welcome messages to all pick up sites, fielding questions, and, with Hana, making sure our administrative ducks are in a row for the start of the season. Each season brings something new. It keeps it fun, and is sure to keep us on our toes. And though I miss the fields, I am so happy to continue to be involved with the farm and keep in touch with all those people I have been communicating with for any of the past 15 years.