



Vol. 26 No. 5

July 13 - 17, 2025



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# August Hiatus

by Hana Newcomb

I am guessing that most of you will be surprised when we remind you that we are planning to take a two-week break in August. This idea started to emerge last year when we had a long stretch with virtually no tomatoes -- after a really long stretch of incredibly hot weather in July. The heat affected the tomatoes and peppers and eggplant: the blossoms fell off or failed to make fruit.

It seemed prudent to make a plan, and try to avoid feeling so sad about the tomatoes. The summers are getting hotter and more intense and no amount of wishing will change that. The trouble is, there is no way to predict when we will have those 80 degree nights that knock off the blossoms. There is no way to know when we will feel bereft.

So, we are just going to try something new after 25 years of CSA. Right now, we are planning to start our two weeks off on August 10, and return to our normal CSA rhythm on August 24. We will continue to go to the farmers markets because we play by the rules, and the rules say we can't



July 2024 before the tomatoes pooped out.

just take a vacation in August.

If we do end up with a mountain of tomatoes, we will not let you down. We will figure out how to let you share in the bounty. That's the beauty of making up our own rules.

When I told a room full of farmers at a conference last winter that I was thinking of doing this, they all loved that idea. The topic of this session was climate change and what we are doing about it, as vegetable growers. Many of them talked about sequestering carbon, or farming without tilling up the soil, or finding ways to conserve water. I wanted to talk about adapting to the heat by

staying out of it.

And, as a side benefit, for the first time in all my years on this farm (which is all my years), I am planning to leave Northern Virginia for at least one whole week in the middle of August. I have always wanted to see summer in another region. I know it is beautiful up north.

So, mark your calendars in pencil -- you will need to shop at the farmers markets for the two weeks in the middle of August. Or you can shop at our stands. Or you can take a vacation because what is the point of staying in this area if you can't stuff yourself on amazing field grown tomatoes?



# What were you imagining before you came to work here and what have you found? Do you have a favorite/least favorite task?

**Laura DePasquale**

People have been telling me for years that I should do yoga “for peace of mind.” I think I’d rather pick squash. What I have found most satisfying about working at PVF is that the work takes me out of myself and my fears about the future. It has reminded me that the times when I feel most right; least afraid—present, connected—and moderately hopeful, are those when my ego is diffused, and I am serving a tangible purpose. Trimming my grandmother’s nails; cooking dinner, pulling potatoes, walking dogs: I’d like to live more of my life in these moments, when my particular ambitions, resume, and history don’t matter, and I have a part to play.

I have been very impressed by the thoughtful, purposeful, and intelligent nature of my coworkers, who each seem to have a unique impetus for being here. In light of this year’s news, and the grim path

it portends, I have been thinking—lately, that maybe ‘rebellion’ in 2025, looks more like a day of work at PVF, than like protests and vitriol. I think that choosing company over isolation, purpose over ambition, tangible activities over abstract ones, work over fear, is the way through.

I am going to graduate school in the fall, to study city planning, and I am gathering my hopes and enthusiasm—and as much optimism as I can find. In the evening I go for walks, and try to build a dream for the future (because I don’t like my old one anymore). I have found that PVF offers so many examples, small and large, of what a place looks like when it serves people instead of things, when work is used as a medium to connect and to teach people, as much as to make food, and that’s the kind of world I want to build. This is a philosophical response to Hana’s prompt more than a vegetable related one but this is what comes to mind when I think of Potomac Vegetable Farms.



Laura (right) and Carrie unload a van.



**Molly Cox**

Hi! My name is Molly Cox. My pronouns are she/her/hers. I started working on the farm in the middle of May 2025. Before coming to work here I imagined picking lots of vegetables and getting my hands dirty. Upon arriving here, I found that it is picking lots of vegetables while also cleaning a lot of vegetables and yes, getting my hands dirty. I’ve also noticed that when farming you are left with your thoughts, and I have a lot of ear worms playing in my head throughout the day. One of my first tasks here was putting eggs in cartons, and after my second task which was spreading compost in a field my lower back and biceps were sore. Some successes of mine since starting work here would be bunching flowers, spreading garlic, spreading hay, weeding, planting lettuce, and picking squash. One mistake I’ve made is bringing my phone into the field while picking vegetables. Note to self; keep phone in the golf cart not your pocket. I am getting better at bunching flowers and cleaning vegetables. And lastly, my favorite task so far is picking squash and my least favorite task is planting scallions because I’m afraid I am going to misplant/crush the scallions because they are so small and delicate. But overall, I am enjoying my time on the farm and the people here are lovely, hardworking, and great people to work with.



## Shakira Mills

There weren't many preconceived notions that I had for farm life, other than that food would be grown. As a community gardener for the past three years, I felt very confident in joining the PVF crew with at least the basic knowledge of plant care. And though my experience served me well, I also discovered that many aspects of gardening and farming are as different as apples and oranges.

Here are my lessons thus far:

1. Just get it in the ground, it won't die! Plants want to live as much as anything else in this world and aren't as fragile as people think. Handling them won't kill them. When getting your plants in the ground, the key is to just do it.

As a gardener, it was my instinct to be extra gentle with transplants. And that may be fine for a day's work in a small garden but on 20+ acres of land, you have to shake a tail feather. Get your plants in the ground, cover them with dirt and move along. I promise they'll be fine and thank you later.

2. Weeding vs. plucking. I thought I knew what weeding was...I really did. But what I have realized is that in gardens, what we do is more of a pluck. We pluck unwanted plants and grasses out of our fruit and vegetable beds. Real weeding is crawling on your hands and knees pulling thistle plants out of a row of onions that refuse to defend themselves. The 5-15 minutes we spend weeding gardens is a mere warmup compared to the bushes

that come up in cucumber beds. I don't know if the lesson here is gratitude or "just pull it up, there's too much to lollygag". So I'm going with both.

3. Those without purpose will plop. The one thing gardeners and farmers have in common is that a lot of manual labor is needed to grow food. The one thing that has kept me from collapsing physically and spiritually is the purpose I carry with me daily. This is meaningful work we do and it is that very sentiment that keeps me from complaining and giving up (I still complain, I just don't give up). I love this work regardless of what scale I do it on and as long as I have hands, I will grow things. My time at PVF has been absolute heaven. Why? Because here I am fulfilling my purpose.



Cristina in her happy place.

## Cristina Miller

I am extremely thankful to Hana for the opportunity to be a Potomac Vegetable Farms (PVF) volunteer this year. I was introduced to PVF through my beginning farmer training program at Future Harvest where I overheard some farmers rave about their experiences working at PVF and how much they learned. From the first moment I arrived at the Wheatland farm, I felt so welcome, included as a member of the team, and supported when I didn't know how to do a task. Every week, I look forward to my "farm FriYAYs", because I have the opportunity to be outside, learn as much as I can, and work hard. So far, my favorite thing has been to ride on the back of the transplanter and plant squash seeds! You see,



Shakira (right) and Blaze load a different van.

number 1 on my bucket list is to ride in a combine, so on the transplanter I feel like I am one step closer to the goal!!! At the farm, I have the chance to meet inspirational people involved in various aspects of food production and outreach. The common denominator among everyone I talk to is their passion for growing the best quality vegetables and herbs. The farm is full of intellectual curiosity as well. While harvesting herbs, the conversation could range from our favorite female characters in Shakespearean plays to the variations in taste profiles of locally grown potatoes to the health benefits of drinking basil flowers steeped in cold water overnight. I leave the farm filled with joy...and some pain...but most importantly, with a happy heart. To me, that is priceless!



## Matthew Gunning

When you think of working on a farm, you think of hard, labor-intensive work. But without first hand experience, it's hard to imagine the specific tasks that a farm worker might be doing. Are you harvesting one crop for 8 hours a day? Are you on a tractor that's plowing through the fields? Maybe you think of a farm worker that's rolling hay with his bare hands? That was my exact mindset before my first day at PVF. I knew that I would have some challenging tasks ahead of me, but had no idea what exactly I'd be doing.

Fast forward to my first day on the Loudoun farm, and my very first task was picking spring onions with Ciara, Sam

and Gracie. It was a cold, rainy day in the middle of spring and my feet were covered in mud. After just a couple of minutes my back started to hurt from all of the bending over. As time went on, the pain grew and in my head I thought, "OK, when are they going to take a break?". Because of my athletic background, I was incredibly cocky in my physical ability

and thought that my coworkers were experiencing the same level of back pain if not worse. Boy was I wrong. Sam and Ciara were having casual conversations, picking onions at twice the speed as me and showing no signs of fatigue. Meanwhile I'm on the opposite side of the row desperately trying to keep up with excruciating pain. We

continued picking onions for another 30 minutes before we switched tasks. Thankfully, I survived.

I've been working on the farm for a couple months now, and my body has been able to adapt to the type of work we're doing. One thing (of many) that I love about PVF is that there are so many different things to be done. It seems like I've been put on 100 different tasks, whether that's picking various fruits and veggies, weed whacking, rolling hay, loading trucks for the market, cleaning out a barn, and many more. It's never boring at PVF, and I'm thankful that I'm able to contribute to this wonderful operation, all while gaining tons of experience on a farm.



Matt (right), Michael, Paul, and a vanload of garlic.

## Jami Burgess

My least favorite task to do on the farm is anything involving leeks. Picking them can be a struggle because I will pick a whole bunch and get into a flow, and then one leek comes along and just will not budge. I'm talking about using two hands, with my feet planted, and I'm really pulling on this guy, and just nothing. Or better yet, I'm using all of this force and effort, and then my hands slide up the leek. No purchase, nothing. However, this is just a few leeks in the patch. Typically, you can pick them very quickly, and they aren't bad. It's just when you are tired, it's hot, and then this leek is just not giving you the time of day. After that, when it comes to processing them, my hands smell like leek or onion for the rest of the day. It's under my nails, and it is not

a smell that washes out. However, I've heard that lemons help with that aspect. So there is hope for my nose.

My favorite task, on the other hand, is picking the rainbow chard. I'm not quite sure what it is about getting to pick chard, but I think it's a blast all around. I'm sure some portion of my love for it is because I get to use a small knife, and my brain associates using a tool with the task I'm doing being cool or exciting. I love how pretty the chard is. After staring at green all day, getting to see colors like pink and yellow in large amounts makes me happy. Furthermore, something is calming to the process of collecting the bunch of chard in my hand, rubberbanding it, and then making my little crates of 10 bunches. It's interesting because I've heard not many like it; however, I get a little excited whenever I see it on the agenda.

