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POTOMAC VEGETABLE FARMS
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Extracurricular Activities at PVF

After the Fire: A Trip to Next Step Hana Newcomb

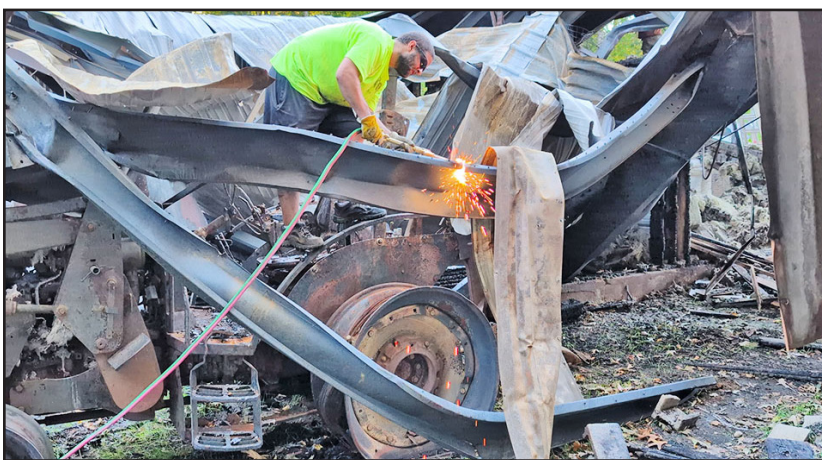
One week after the fire that destroyed the entire grain operation at Next Step Produce, a crew of five went from PVF for a day to help with clean-up. Stephen, Paul, Blaze, Michael and Nick (from Fireside Farm) took with them one of our skid loaders (the one with the foam tires that can't go flat) to help to move big pieces of sheet metal into dumpsters. They sent pictures and texts (see below), describing the day. It was a shocking scene. As so often happens with fires, water damage was as significant as fire damage. Community members and past workers have come to Next Step to help. The task is monumental.

"He used so many fire proof materials and the barn still went down. Huge steel beams buckled in the heat. Taking all this sheet metal off is difficult because most of the screw heads melted. A lot of full bags of grain intact but probably got heated and soaked. Who knows if it's any good for anything."

"Everything goes much faster when the loader is involved."

"I guess we're just going to do what we can today. Feels like not a big dent."

"Long, long day. I think Heinz will need help beyond a human scale – someone with a full size excavator. I've never seen steel beams warped, melted, twisted, and collapsed like that before."



“Farm Follies” – A Review

Isabel Hulkower

Phrases like “the literal event of the century,” “3 hours of pure unadulterated joy,” and “a theatrical tour de force” get thrown around pretty liberally, but if you were in the greenhouse next to the tractor barn last Monday, you know you simply had to be there to believe it.

If you didn’t happen to be among the 100 audience members you might only know Rachel Udall as the brilliant mind behind our hand painted vegetable signs, or the green haired employee setting up your CSA. However she is also the auteur behind the “Farm Follies,” a theatrical revue featuring Broadway tunes rewritten to be about agriculture. Of course that description does not begin to cover the magnitude or tone of the work. The experience was actually more akin to appreciating one of those iconic signs- whimsical, thoughtful, transportive, and incredibly specific. They depict a sort of gay ecogonic fantasia, and attending the Farm Follies was like the scene in Mary Poppins where they jump into the chalk drawing. We were all invited into that fantasy world for a few hours.

The show opened with eerie synth notes that can only mean one thing- and that promise was more than delivered when the cast slinked onto the stage in full facepaint and body suits to perform the Cats parody “Vegetable Songs for Vegetable Plants.” This perfectly grounded us in the dreamscape we would be inhabiting- irreverent, funny, odd, and beautiful. The lyrics were so undeniably clever that it didn’t matter whether audience members were familiar with the source material or not. (“Do you grow on a bush?/ Are you good in a quiche?/ Do you grow in the spring?/ Are you sold by the pound?/ Can you say of your taste/ It’s acquired and niche?/ Do you prefer to be / In sandy-loam ground?/ Because vegetables are and vegetables do”) The pure delight of the crowd was palpable from the moment they took the stage, oscillating between hysterics and awe as we experienced something so raw, specific, and entertaining.

From there the performance was off to the races. Each number was a new delight- punctuated by Olivia as the emcee wearing a full tuxedo and doing some of the bravest crowd work of the 21st century. It was a whirlwind, from Lani and Sam wearing shmatas dreaming of new crop varieties in “Seedsaver, Seedsaver,” to Raymond embodying the quintessential romantic frenemyship between Fireside and PVF in the Wicked parody “What is this feeling?” And who could forget the incredible stagecraft of “The Tractor Song,” during which Rose and Storm orchestrated an intricate crash while

Rachel sang the rewritten legendary Judy Garland hit (“I turned the wheel/A bit too much/I couldn’t tell you what my colleagues meant by “clutch”/I smelled the smoke/And held my breath/And had a tiny premonition of my death).

The show reached its dramatic peak with “The Parasitic Wasp Larva”- a parody of the Phantom of the Opera. Dripping with every ounce of the twisted dark romance of the original, Udall seethed as a wasp who lays their eggs in caterpillars, ultimately killing them. The song crescendos with the signature operatic soprano notes, getting higher and higher in a range that makes Broadway performers sweat- and Lova screamed out the tune in a way that was both hilarious and haunting. The audience was beside themselves- cackling as they experienced the melodrama interwoven with complete absurdity.

Act 2 featured an incredible change of pace when Yael, a professional theater performer and teacher sang “As Long As He Needs Me” from Oliver. Everything we had seen thus far were campy parodies – extremely heightened. She took the stage with full presence wearing an enormous paper mâché hand hoe costume and delivered the number completely straight – savoring the dramatic beats and building slowly to a brava belted finish. Unbelievable.

Clearly I loved this show. I loved everything about it and it will go down in my personal history as one of the most sublime evenings I’ve ever spent at the theater (or in this case in a greenhouse). But the final thing I’d like to praise here is specificity. It’s obvious that Rachel wrote this revue for her own joy, and was channeling pure creative energy for this to take shape. Some of these songs are DEEP CUTS, parodying shows from Broadway’s golden age that would undoubtedly be lost on most viewers (notably from composers like Cole Porter and Stephen Sondheim who are specifically known for word play and intricate lyrics). But it didn’t matter because the language of sustainable agriculture is so rich and immersive. We as farmers share such wonderful commonality around this insane work we do together, and having our daily grind expertly lampooned on this scale struck a visceral chord. The clarity of the point of view and the milieu of the work made it incredibly effective. Because of the masterful understanding of the intricacies of farm life this work spoke to the audience without pandering to them, never dumbing itself down for fear of alienating the crowd.

I left that night buzzing- bubbling with joy and alive with gratitude that 99 of my best friends and I had just collectively experienced something so creative. Look up culture in the dictionary and I honestly dare you to find a better example.



Thank You

Paul Huddleston

The Farm Follies was a beautiful example of what community actually looks like. It is more than just proximity. It is more than occasional conversation or waving hello. It is even more than a support system for when things go bad. It is, in this case, a concerted effort from a small group of people in the community doing an unbelievable amount of work to bring joy into other people's lives for no other reason than that. The amount of work that went into this is hard to understand because every conversation I had with the people in this production beforehand seemed to deliberately belie and diminish the scale, the difficulty and the commitment required to perform it. I thought this performance was going to be

watched by those who work and are close to the farm and we would be able to watch some of our friends sing and dance in the dirt while we sat on a mulch pile. What I was not expecting was a fully constructed stage, sound equipment, enough dinner and dessert for 100, what must have been 50 costume changes, emceeing of the first variety, and songs that were hilarious and original and beautifully performed. In hindsight, I should have known better given that Rachel, our indefatigable, creative supernova was running it but I think it was more than anyone expected. This was utterly and unquestionably a tour de force from my coworkers and friends and especially Rachel. Twenty-five years from now there will be tales of legend about that night and we all ought to sign a document proving we were there.

It's hard for me to overstate how moved by it I was. It wasn't just the lyrics, it wasn't just the performances, it wasn't even the group rendition of



"Tomorrow" (farm folly edition), although that did, indeed, get me. It was to be in a converted greenhouse surrounded by extraordinary people watching other extraordinary people. I remember thanking Hana at the end of it to which she replied "what for" and I said "for assembling us." It may or may not be her, but someone on this farm must have magical powers to be able to gather a group like this. People who put in time and effort to plan things like our Museum of Farm Arts, our Summer Series and now, delightfully, Farm Follies. I remember that after feeling joy and pride that night, I felt grateful. I feel grateful to be a part of it and I feel grateful they put on this show. I will never forget it. So, to Rachel, Lani, Sam, Raymond, Lova, Yael, Rose, Eoin, Joanna, and Storm; thank you, you made my year.





Summer Series

Katherine Collins

Summer Series is a skillshare workshop series that we hold annually during the hot and heavy time of the season. The idea to launch the farm Summer Series was born out of a realization of the wealth of knowledge and skills that exists here in the farm community. I also wanted a way for some of the newer farmworkers to have more touchpoints for interacting with other folks from area farms and Wheatland community members. After all, there are sourdough bread bakers, candlestick makers (literally!), clothing menders, crocheters, professional geologists, and more in our midst!

A fellow PVF worker, Oscar, and I decided to host the first Summer Series in 2022. The structure is around 13 different workshop topics held weekly (or sometimes every other week when things get crazy in the fields!) on Tuesday evenings. The presentations and hands-on instruction is always followed by a potluck meal afterwards.

2025 marks our fourth season

of organizing and putting on a Summer Series skillshare. Some of the logistics have changed, but the overall idea is the same: gather together a group of folks from the community who each have a passion or skill to share and give them an evening to present their ideas, knowledge, abilities and allow us to learn from them. It has been a true delight!



Top left: Don teaching tapered candle making workshop.

Top right: a typical potluck post-workshop.

Bottom right: Stephen teaching reuse carpentry.

