



# Farm Notes

## CSA Newsletter

Vol. 27 No. 1

May 24 - 28, 2026



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## Rainbows and Unicorns

by Hana Newcomb

That’s how I feel about the CSA these days – like rainbows and unicorns, the CSA is magical in its ability to keep us hopeful, living in a world where all goes well. In the midst of the current storm of economics, politics, injustice, war, and lots of unhealthy food, the CSA holds us steady and grounded. We are connected to you all who care about your food and your farmers and you followed through by investing in a CSA share. From our perspective, it is amazing that this continues to be good for all of us.

This year we have 115 new customers, and our return rate at the moment is about 80%. That is extremely high for a CSA. We are so grateful.

Welcome to all of our new members and welcome back to the rest of you. On the first Sunday of the season, I was restocking the shelves late in the day

and two of our most dedicated customers walked in and gave me a warm hello. They asked how the CSA sign-ups were going, and I said I had been nervous at the beginning because of the raging economic uncertainty of the last year – but that people have been signing up in spite of it all. They said, “we would rather spend our money here than at Amazon.” That made me laugh. “Our business is about as far from

Amazon as it gets.”

Our CSA started in 2000. We inherited our first list of customers from some farmer friends who were moving out of the state. In fact, we inherited their wonderful hosts as well, which made everything go really smoothly as they knew what to do and how to manage things better than we did, for sure. Back in those days, one thing that identified a CSA house (these were in Arlington and Falls Church) was

the wild yards and the cluttered porches. One of our beloved hosts even covered their entire driveway with a thick layer of wood chips so the driveway could absorb water and no water would run off the property. They had rain barrels at every downspout. Nowadays our hosts seem to be a little more mainstream and it is pretty easy to get on and off the porches without wading through wood chips..

Before we started the CSA, I was reluctant to do it because it was my impression that we had to learn the likes and dislikes of all of our customers, and try to accommodate them. That seemed too hard to me – this was before computers were so universally accessible and way before there was registration software to purchase. We sent out flyers in the mail to street addresses and everyone answered by snail mail. All of our



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# Prompt for our newest workers: How did you get here? How is it going?



**Halie Ebert**

I've been managing farmers markets for four years now and currently work for FRESHFARM. I manage local sourcing and conduct farm visits for the vendors in FRESHFARM's network. After visiting farms throughout 2025 I wanted to start farming myself. I want to learn more about seasonality and the background work that goes into growing the produce that comes to markets as well as be able to talk more confidently about the growing practices of eco-ganic produce.

**Annika, she/her**

Hello! I have been working (mostly in Vienna) for about a month and a half now. I recently moved back to the area after living in Boone, NC (shout out to the High Country) for the past 6 years. I left Boone with a degree in Sustainable Agriculture, several years of an assortment of farm experience and love for working outside. I was really not expecting to move up here and work on a farm again, but I am so glad I found PVF. I have loved my experience so far and absolutely cannot wait to see how the farm will change through the seasons.

Now, here are some facts and things about me. My favorite flowers are celosia and yarrow. My favorite time on the farm is before 9 am. I've been watching Jeopardy and Secret Lives of Mormon Wives. I've been reading Comfort Me With Apples by the food critic, Ruth Reichl but my favorite genre is psychological thriller. And, I've been listening to a podcast called Normal Gossip (I think for the second time through). I have an older brother who is a baker in San Francisco and two younger sisters still nearby and they played a large part in my decision to leave Boone. One of my goals for the summer is to make stained glass, I have no idea where to start, but I'm including this to hold myself accountable.

## A Farmer's Home Garden

by Ciara Prencipe

This spring, my husband and I moved into a house where we intend to stay for many years. One of the biggest projects in my mind is establishing a home garden. One would think that a home garden would be unnecessary for farmers, and in a sense, that's true. For me, there are some things that are easier to grow at home than to remember to bring back from the farm all the time, some things the farm does not grow, and some plants I just don't want to live without. So first, we gave everything overgrown in the yard a good pruning and set up some tarps where we hope to put raised beds in the future. Then, we transplanted all our herbs from our old house in a bare patch of ground that had a trampoline sitting on it for years. In the herb garden we have sage, oregano, bronze fennel, sorrel, thyme, and mint. Herbs are something I love having at home because

they are so potent when fresh, so easy to grow and often hard to remember to bring home. We also planted some strawberries, borage, lavender, celery, dill, cilantro, and nasturtium. I try to grow nasturtiums in my home garden almost every year, and they almost always fail, but I love them, so I'll keep trying. We're also creating some bed space for raspberries, asparagus, rhubarb, several fig trees, a few blueberry bushes, and a pomegranate tree. In terms of non-food plants, we're putting in ferns, may apples, and mosses in the shady spots in our yard. You'll notice that our yard doesn't really include vegetables - no squash, tomatoes, or onions. Those we grow in such quantities on the farm that it would feel like overkill to have some at home, and I would definitely do a worse job growing them than the farm does. But flowers, herbs and fruits I feel like I can never have too much.



## Alf Dirosa

I arrived at PVF in April after doing various types of social work over the last 15 years, starting as a drug counselor in Charlottesville before moving to Pittsburgh. I helped nonprofits in community organizing, workforce development, and harm reduction. Part of my work also included helping residents without easy access to grocery stores build community gardens. I was lucky enough to partner with residents who had years of farming experience, and together we raised money for gardening tools, storage, and irrigation. They let me help build raised beds and sheds, as well as assist with weeding, tilling, and planting. I found that I really enjoyed working outside and looked forward to getting pulled out of the stream of emails, phone calls, and office meetings that took up most of my day. Now back in my home state of Virginia, I'm excited to be working at PVF to learn the basics of regenerative farming. I started visiting the farm stand in Wheatland last July, and I'm thrilled to now be a part of the passionate and hard working team growing such amazing produce. I eventually hope to partner with a longtime friend to grow our own medicinal herbs on a small scale to support a healing center she recently started, and I'm grateful to have the chance to get my start in farming at PVF.



## Nathan, he/him

My journey to this farm began last summer when a universal call came from within me to find purpose in the dirt, cultivate community, and seek alternative settings of work which confines most us in modern society. I did some research and found and messaged a few farms that share similar farming practices and beliefs as me and aligned with my interests in many ways. I was lucky enough to get a tour/work day with PVF in the fall which was a small glimpse of my future here, and it made me more hopeful and connected to that inner calling as my reality was shaping to my desires. There has always been something special about the intimate connection I can have with nature and it depends on my mental fortitude, the ability to have varying perspectives,

and my willingness to learn and put in the work needed. Being on a farm is rough work sometimes, but I believe it is beneficial work to the mind, body, and soul. I am always open to alternative ways to farm from what I may have learned, seen, or done first hand, but particularly I am interested in a clean and natural connection to the land, plants, and our community. I am usually against anything that harms or interrupts nature as it was intended. I only started at PVF this May, but I can already tell that I have found a place that I can call home and that accepts everyone for who they are, and where our commitment to the plants and land is equal to our commitment to each other as they are both our lifeline and our purpose from which we derive our motivation and some understanding of this big world we share.

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accounting was done on paper.

We decided that we would not worry about what people liked. We would pack every share the same, except that we immediately decided to name our share sizes Mini, Regular and Robust because those names entertained us so much. For years we did it that way – we packed everything the same, and there were no names on the shares. Super egalitarian.

After 10 years or so, I started to think there must be a better way. I asked some CSA customers what they thought of trying market style (something I was just imagining, and had not seen in a CSA yet). They all said they didn't like the idea – they were afraid everyone else would take all the good stuff and there would only be undesirable vegetables left for them. I thought about it some more.

Meanwhile, we were going to farmers markets every week, and our customers there got to pick out whatever they wanted. Certainly all the good stuff went first, but this was a very easy way to move vegetables. I decided it was time to make a change, and that we had to make sure to have enough of the favorite foods to keep people happy. At the markets, we only sell what we grow ourselves



The PVF CSA circa 2011.

and selling the whole load is the goal. But at the CSA, we have the opportunity to collaborate with other like-minded growers and we can expand our offerings beyond what we are able to grow ourselves. Before we started working with other farmers, we had to close the CSA when we got to about 300 customers. Now that we have access to more excellent vegetables from Sassafra Creek Farm and Next Step Produce and Fireside Farm, we can feed more households and we don't have to turn people away. Market style turned out to be a very popular way to distribute CSA shares.

Also, the technology of CSA marketing was getting more sophisticated and we could now allow our delivery customers to have the same privilege of choosing as those who came to the farm. It's not the same as standing in the CSA area, looking at all the colors and shapes, but choosing is better than getting something you will never eat.

I really believe that these evolutions over the years have helped to keep our CSA alive and healthy. We are growing more normal foods that we know people like, and fewer of the fringe crops (but we still want everyone to learn to love kohlrabi and cutting celery). We are not as didactic as we were 25 years ago – getting older has mellowed us some, and we like potatoes and carrots more than dandelion greens, we admit it. 26 years ago we didn't know how to grow carrots and potatoes. Now we do!

We are very glad that there are still plenty of people who like to cook and eat vegetables, and who are willing to support our farm. It's not really rainbows and unicorns, it's really good sense and good growing, but there is magic in the connections we all share.

