



Farm Notes

CSA Newsletter

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POTOMAC VEGETABLE FARMS

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Prompt: Tell about a task you enjoy and why this task suits you so well.

Meredith Graves

I admire the planters – like a farmer’s metronome, they fold at the waist and back up again moving down beds in parallel lines. But I have a cranky lower back from multiple soccer injuries that yells at me when I bend up and down repeatedly. This is one reason I’m a weeder. Moving on my hands and knees, I get a good look at the wily weeds that mimic the tender baby spinach or carrot leaves. If one isn’t careful, one can pull the rightful resident—the tiny seed that began in a Johnny’s packet, that flew to PVF, that woke up in a warm tray, that was lovingly watered every morning, that hardened off under the night stars, and that was finally tucked into this very bed. I’m very careful. I also like weeding because I’m close enough to see my worm friends and sometimes the malicious looking spider who bit me on the bum three years ago and is the reason I rarely wear shorts on the farm anymore. Sometimes I’ll come across a cool rock and save it for Rachel’s rock contest, only to find out she hasn’t held those in 2 or 3 years. I’m such a part-timer, darn it! When my wrists start to hurt from crawling, I’ll flip and scoot along backwards like a crew rower, weeding happily as I go, knowing that I’m keeping my back happy while doing my small part to contribute to the success that is PVF!

Sam Trentham

Picking sweet potatoes on a gorgeous fall day with an efficient and lighthearted crew is nothing short of an ecstatic experience. We’re digging, we’re laughing, and slinging ponies of sweet potatoes like there’s no tomorrow. How lucky are we to experience such joyful bounty! Crawling around and rooting through the soil enlivens the kid in me who never wanted to stop playing in the dirt. Planting sweet potatoes, too, feels like hope. While the high temperatures and humidity of the main sweet

potato growing season could get a snake to sweat, this year we planted sweet potato slips on a lovely afternoon when the sun was shining and a nice cool breeze blew through just at the right times. Hana drove the tractor while Ciara and I planted 4500 or so slips over a few hours. Sweet potatoes are something we thankfully tend to grow in abundance, and so every part of the job feels like a promise of nourishment and gratitude. Thank you, humble sweet potato, for keeping me fed at home and happy in the field.



Aubrey Clendenin

God blessed me with a supportive family who values teamwork. I am so very glad God blessed me in 2025 with a job with Potomac Vegetable Farms. PVF prioritizes teamwork, too! I have learned to care about my coworkers as we go about the farm work. Many hands make light work, and even more so, many hands bring about learning opportunities that help create responsible stewards and people. I like how PVF values teamwork because farm work is super strenuous. There is a lot to learn from working at PVF about plants and people. I have learned that on a farm, it is okay to slow down and ask others before making decisions. It is good to check and double-check with a boss about a certain significant task that needs to get completed within a certain window of time. I have also learned about plants and herbs in a deeper way. Teamwork does make the dream work, and at Potomac Vegetable Farms, there is definitely an emphasis on caring for everything living and breathing.

Picking mint leaves and all of the herbs is one of the best tasks for me on the farm. I grew up on a historic farm estate with mint growing wild by the big red barn. Everyday I would delight in the mint, just finding it to be a fascinating herb. Several times we would eat the mint, or make tea or water with it. Just smelling it is worthwhile. Talk about aromatherapy! I use mint products in my home, mint scented and mint flavored; everything you can think of is mint. PVF has an abundant mint garden that I enjoy picking from for CSA customers and markets. I hope customers will love mint as much as I do.

Rachel Udall

On the Vienna farm, we have begun the annual and ancient task of stringing up cherry tomatoes in a process colloquially known as “twirling”. Christian, Anne and Carrie spent several grueling days building long wire structures above the rows of cherry tomato seedlings, and this week we have begun diligently pruning and tying each plant to the wire above, in order to keep the young plants upright and growing towards the sun. The task of twirling requires a great deal of concentration, and attention to detail, and tender, gentle hands to deal with the delicate young plants, which tend to snap at the lightest wrong movement. Each plant must be treated as an individual, and no two plants are exactly alike in their size, or fortitude, or shape, or amount of “suckers” (superfluous shoots) that need to be pulled off. It is also a slow, repetitive job - the cherry tomato vines will continue to grow and need to be pruned and re-pruned and re-strung for weeks and weeks, until the weather turns cold and the plants begin to die.

But I absolutely love twirling tomatoes, just as I love all of the other slightly boring, slow, meticulous jobs on the farm - which is a good thing! I have learned, now six years into the job, that a great deal of farm work is slow and repetitive and meticulous. In some minds (including my younger self's), there exists a romantic, heroic idea of farm work, with the days consisting of Herculean efforts to drive huge tractors across acres and acres of plowed earth, and



throw giant bales of hay, and build giant wooden structures and pound steel posts into the ground and use enough power tools to power the greater DC area. Fear not, reader - these things do happen! But more often, our days consist of picking the same squash patch over and over, carefully weeding little beet seedlings, washing dirty tubs and buckets, making lists, peeling the layers off of rotten onions, and bagging crates and crates and CRATES of lettuce mix.

Farming, just like life and love, is not all grand gestures, but more consistently about showing up in small, caring ways over and over and over again. Our work more readily prefers fine motor skills over sheer strength, and an attentive eye over physical force and muscle. All these skills have a place and a time in farm work, but I have found that what has called to me the most are the jobs that force me to be stiller, and quieter, and focus on (efficiently) tending to a small, individual part of this large farm. Maybe that's because I like other still and quiet and meticulous tasks, like writing and painting and cooking. But there is also something very sacred about carefully twirling a thin piece of twine around an incredibly delicate young tomato shoot, over and over again, in the hopes that it may grow stronger, and taller, and slowly build into the healthful, lush plant we know it can be. May we all learn to twirl each other, and to twirl ourselves, day after day, with patience and care and diligence, so that we too may rise to meet the sun (and rid ourselves of suckers!).

Rachel McCormick

One of my favorite tasks at PVF is stringing cherry tomatoes. Partly, it may just be due to a process of elimination. As an older worker, it is a little less strenuous than some other farm activities. It is easier for me to do, for instance, than scuttling along a row bending over and trying to plant flats of lettuces in the ground...as fast as I can. Of course, there are quite a bit of up and down movements, tying the strings to the bottom of the plant and then tying that string to the wire at the top. Stringing is very tactile. In my home life I enjoy making twine trellises for vining plants on our deck. It kind of feels like that. A bit like weaving, with a purpose of giving plants a place to grow. The results are beautiful too. It is art and agriculture combined. Two strings to each plant; hundreds of plants each summer. I feel grateful I can



manage that and grateful that during this time of year I can get my exercise this way. It can be very meditative if one lets it be, which I do.

If I were my younger self I don't think I'd have the patience for this task. So, while my stamina for what I think of as younger persons' tasks may be waning, I've acquired a mental stamina that I didn't have before for something as methodical and slower moving as stringing. If I let myself pay attention, there can be peacefulness in the field and sounds and sights and feels of nature that I am lucky to be a part of. It is usually hot and sunny during stringing days and with a good hat and a long sleeve shirt you can carry your shade with you. Because as much as I love stringing tomatoes, it still can be very hot indeed. It's just a matter of weeks now, until they arrive. Like usual, a wonderful time of year. Tomato time.

**Alf Dirosa**

It's the end of Thursday, and we've just finished washing and loading a bounty of beautiful produce that will soon be on its way to farm markets and CSA members. Our team spends so much time and effort getting these lovely veggies to this point where they're being spritzed, rinsed, or dunked in cold water, so it's always satisfying to see those stacks of crates standing tall in the back of van headed for Vienna. The departure of freshly washed vegetables means the end of the work day is near, but still one task remains to make the washing process complete, and it happens to be one of my favorite tasks on the farm: squeegeeing the barn floor. Sure, I love planting, weeding, and harvesting (especially picking garlic scapes), or even the less glamorous task of mulching. However, it's my first season of farming, so I'm still building my confidence in doing these things consistently well, but I know I'm already really good at wiping a floor clean and dry with a squeegee. I never held a squeegee before joining PVF, but I have always enjoyed sweeping floors, and have made it my niche for any clean-up effort I've been called to join. From cleaning up after Boy Scout meetings in high school to closing community meetings in my 30's, I have always been fast to grab a broom, fix my eyes to the floor, and apply my awareness into every pass of the broom to punctuate the end of the day. I have always liked sweeping, but I find that I absolutely love squeegeeing. No mere push of a broom beats applying the downward pressure necessary to pin the broad squeegee blade to the barn floor, steadily pushing the water towards the grates beneath our sinks, and watching the water glide across the smooth floor as it gets dryer. Above all, it's a chance for me to reflect on all the work we did throughout the week to get our produce to this final stage before sending them off, and to imagine all the possible ways our customers will use everything we just picked and washed.

Lova Andersson

Springtime is incredibly exciting on the farm, full of hope and belief. There is time - time to let seeds germinate and plants grow, time to do things again if they fail the first time (or the second time). There is hope and belief that life will come back, we wait to see what has survived the winter. So, you can imagine it was hard to pick just one particular task I am enjoying at the moment. With that said, I have found that I am particularly fond of picking sage. Sage is a noun, both in the plant sense and the philosophical sense. If you are a long time reader of the newsletter (or maybe even if you are new) you may have noticed that we often speak in metaphors here. One particular planting of sage that we have on the farm is in its 8th year now (I have been told at least that it has existed in its current state since 2018). So, I think it is fair to say that the sage is... sage. Many crops that we cultivate require a lot of thought and attention to detail when harvesting. During a spring that has personally been a quite difficult and heavy one, I find great solace in picking sage.

Rose Ramey

Two weeks ago Sam, Eoin, and I planted hot peppers in Tunnel 3. After mapping out where they would go based on how similar they look to each other to avoid confusion while harvesting, we started planting in hay mulch that was about three times as tall as the plants. Sam and I laughed about the mulch to plant size ratio and assured ourselves we would be thankful later when we could harvest without a thistle in sight. Jumping into my first season at PVF in August of last year, I was enamored by our hot pepper selection that was just starting to really kick off at that time. I was excited to learn about the nuances in flavors between varieties I had never heard of. We grow the classics such as jalapeños, cayenne, and poblanos but the two peppers that particularly caught my attention were the sugar rush peach and chocolate scotch bonnet. Sugar rush peach peppers have a wonderful medium spice level and some sweetness with floral and fruity notes.

Sage asks very little of us, really only requiring your presence and a gentle hand. All you have to do is let the plant tell you where it wants to break off. I find it to be an easy task, and not too time consuming (this is excellent when efficiency is something we strive for). When I'm in the tunnel with the sage, I am embraced in its warm and earthy scent, soothed by the softness of its leaves, and assured by its abundance that continues to provide week after week. Sage is happy to be picked, and eager to grow to fill the gaps where we harvest. It also blooms gorgeously, sending out beautiful purple blossoms. If you get the honor to spend any time with sage, it is easy to understand why many indigenous cultures of Turtle Island (the term commonly used in place of 'North America') consider sage to be one of four sacred medicines. May we all become more sage.

Side note: highly recommend watching the documentary 'Saging the World' to understand both the traditional importance of sage, as well as the current problems created by commercialization and appropriation of white sage.



Chocolate scotch bonnets have a full-bodied earthy, smoky heat. This pepper also gets bonus points for being brown, like me. The bounty of hot peppers I saw growing inspired me to give lactofermentation a try at home. I wanted to make my own gut-balancing hot sauces. The most colorful hot sauce I made was a vibrant orange carrot and habanero. My favorite hot sauce I made included chocolate scotch bonnets, garlic, white peppercorns and apples. I made a batch last October and just finished the jar last week. I put the hot sauce in everything from scrambled eggs, to soups, to greens, to chicken marinades. I just love how much flavor is in those peppers. It felt special to take part in planting the hot peppers this year because I got to contribute to the growing of something that gives me so much inspiration. As I was planting I started to remember and reimagine recipes I've made. I look forward to experimenting with the hot peppers more this year. Don't be surprised when I hand you a glass of Sugar Rush Peach lemonade is all I'm saying.