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What I Did on My CSA Vacation

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Welcome back, CSA! I am writing this dispatch from Montpelier, Vermont, where I have spent the last two weeks visiting my partner Kate. August in Vermont is just as you would imagine - highs of 75°F, baby blue skies, languid clouds, rolling green hills, and plenty of maple “creemees” (the awkward regionalism for “soft serve”). I have spent most of my time eating said ice cream and reading, with many thoughts drifting back to the ecoganic homeland - how many ponies of rotting seconds did my coworkers have to weed through today? how many mosquito bites did they have to tenderly apply cortisol cream to? how many sweat droplets dripped down their sweet, lovable faces? - followed by a sigh of relief and the contented grin of someone who caught the lifeboat off the Titanic. I kid, of course (partially)! And I will be returning to the dirt very soon. As wonderful as this trip has been, it has also taught me, painfully, the lesson that farm fitness absolutely does not transfer to any other situation. On the farm, I take on the persona of a strapping, robust young woman. Readers may have seen me gallivanting around pushing half-ton haybales (or doing the brave work of

delegating the task to others), carrying 50 lb ponies of tomatoes across daunting distances of several yards, and other feats of personal physical prowess so well-known that I really shan’t waste time repeating them once more. So when Kate and I decided to take on Camel’s Hump Mountain - the state’s second tallest peak, at 4083 feet - I thought that surely my cherry-tomato-stringing muscles would allow me to simply

glide to the top. Not so. It quickly became clear that in Vermont, “trail” can mean anything from dirt path to vertical rock face that one is supposed to “scramble” up. The only scrambling I have done in my farm career has been scrambling to finish bunching all the flowers on a Friday afternoon, so that I get to sleep in til 11AM on Saturday morning. This is not the background of someone who was ready to hike the entirety of a mountain previously known as “The Crouching Lion”. But, we did! We arrived at the peak victorious and in pain (me more so than Kate, an avid runner who also had the arcane wisdom to stretch beforehand), and made our way back down the mountain, through thick spruce forest, until we were safe in her sedan’s AC. I couldn’t help but think of all the times I’ve complained about pushing hay bales up 2° grades on pleasant spring days. Or how, despite 6 years on the job, my musculature has yet to move an inch in the direction of being “toned”. There is so much more sitting down in farming than you would think. I will be returning just as bean season heats up, and will celebrate my return by using my hardy farmer build to once more sit on a pony and gossip with coworkers, as we pick bean by bean by bean.





Farmers Market – Hana Newcomb

Maybe 10 or 15 years ago, who can really remember, we started to do a market style CSA on Sundays in Vienna. Before that, I used to go to the Takoma Park Farmers Market,, for almost 30 years of Sundays. My children and nephews grew up going to Takoma Park with various adult family members. It was a family event because back in those days, we didn't really have a work crew on Sundays. Sundays were quiet on the farm.

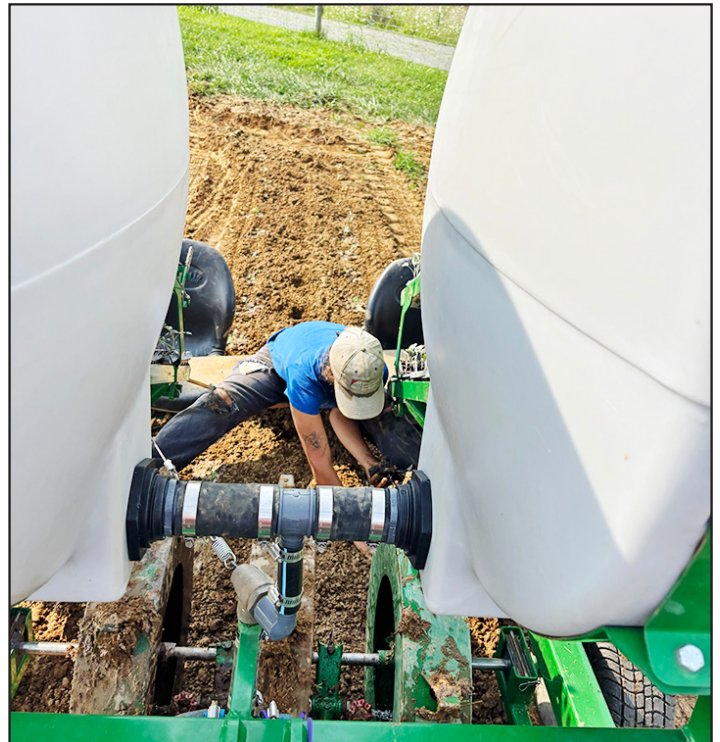
But the market style CSA changed that pattern for me. I stayed home from market – which was fine because I really had gone to enough markets in my life by then, starting in 1980 at Arlington, back when we opened at 7 AM (putting tomatoes on the table in the dark, wondering if they were pink or red).. The market style CSA continued to evolve and grow, with Sundays quickly becoming the biggest day of the week. All of the good things about market happened right here at home, and it was so much simpler.

But during the CSA hiatus, a lot of people went on vacation and it became clear that it was time for me to go back to Takoma Park for a whole market day. I braced myself. We start loading at 6:15 in the morning, we drive a big truck around the Beltway, we unload it all in the parking lot at 7:30, we scurry around setting up to be open at 9, and then we sell steadily until 1 PM when it is time to pack up, load up and drive home on the now-crowded Beltway. The hardest part for me, honestly, is standing on a hard surface for all those hours. My feet get tired. I am not young anymore.

This particular Sunday was an off-and-on rainy day, which added to the challenge. Not only were we standing on pavement, our clothes were increasingly

wet and heavy, and our socks were eventually soaked. But bless those Takoma Park customers, they came out anyway. We didn't sell all our vegetables, but we sure sold a lot of them. My job, historically, is to determine the layout, make new signs as needed, set up the tomato table, and do the restocking. The market crew let me have my old job back, without batting an eye. I did not have to relearn how to use the current day technology with credit cards (back in my day, we only took cash), and I didn't have to stand still. I just kept filling the tomato table and reconfiguring the displays and chatting with the customers.. The hours went by quickly.

The next day I felt like I had bumped down a hill on a sled with no snow. I was so tired and sore. I don't know how they do it, week after week. It took me a day of lounging around to recover. But it was fun to go back to something I absolutely know how to do, and to see so many familiar customers, older but still doing their Sunday shopping at the market. It was a great way to spend one day of our CSA vacation, returning to a much-loved market. You usually can't go home again, but going back to Takoma Park is going home for me.



Planting Two Rows At Once – Sam Trentham

It was the end of the day, and we knew those plants needed to get in the ground. The trouble was: only Hana and I were still at work, and it usually takes 3 of us. Hana had a brilliant idea to make it easier (a board held up by the two seats). Planting two rows at once made me laugh, grit my teeth, and get dirty up to my elbows. Isn't that what life is all about?

Field Trip – Lova Andersson

We have been getting up to some interesting things while on this CSA vacation. In the early morning of Monday, August 10th, I drove the unwieldy Dooley (one of our awkwardly tall and skinny trucks) out to Next Step Produce in Southern Maryland. 90 empty crates clattering in the back, hungry for potatoes. The rising sun possessed an intense red glow as Dooley zoomed down 495 through the thick, humid air (glad to have heeded Hana's advice and

brought a change of clothes). Only one window down because it is the only one that rolls down, radio spitting out the morning news on whatever channel the last person left it on. Before I know it, I've arrived. With our Dooley full of crates we head out to the fields, to start our one and only task. POTATOES. With the sun beating down on our backs we crawl on our knees through the freshly dug beds, sifting through the lush soil. I don't know if you have ever dug potatoes, but I have found that it is something many otherwise very,

very different people all enjoy. It is an incredibly grounding task. It is a delicious cherry on top when the potatoes you are digging are also very beautiful and bountiful, and these were. And as if it could not get better, we only had to pick what was easy. After 4 hot and sweaty hours, our job was done. We hosed ourselves down and cooled down (read: attempted to) with a pleasant lunch in the shade. On our journey home, we stopped for an ice cream treat. All in all a very good day, and an excellent way to start the CSA vacation.



Left: potato diggers taking a break. Right: digging potatoes at 95 degrees.

Transplanting at Dusk – Rose Ramey

There are few better ways to spend a summer night than transplanting brassicas with Hana and Sam. Last Sunday, I got to see the farm in a different light as the sun was setting and Hana and I loaded up the back of the transplanter with kohlrabi, Brussels sprouts, and a few bok choy seedlings. Usually, all farm work is

done in daylight hours for obvious reasons but 7 pm on a Sunday was best for everyone's busy summer schedules while keeping the plantings on time. Sam and I planted deep into golden hour, after the sun had dipped past the tree line and sank into dusk. After cleaning up, Sam and I stood and watched the fireflies twinkle in the field, relishing in the last few bits of sweet sweet summer.

The Good, the Bad, and the Lucky! – Rachel McCormick

I went to Indiana to visit my daughter, Bon. I have very fond memories of driving out there as a kid...all of us, 4 siblings, sprawled out in the back of our family station wagon (no ac. Wide open windows so the kids in the way back didn't get roasted). Our excitement of spending a week with our cousins would intensify as we became surrounded with endless corn fields and sunny blue skies. We knew we were close!

It is a small world, indeed, that Bon met her boyfriend and he lives in the very same place of my childhood memories! The good part of the trip was spending time with my daughter and seeing 4 of my cousins! The lucky part was finding 7 four leaf clovers! We were walking in a nature preserve and not a few seconds after Bon said "I really wish I could find a four leaf clover" did she look down and find one!. This led to more findings of more 4 leaf clovers!

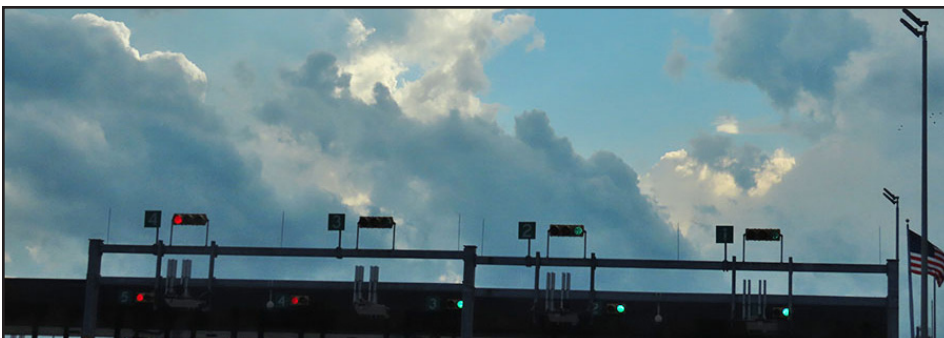
The bad part of this trip happened on the way home. It started off just fine. I saw my dear friends in Oberlin where I spent the night going to Indiana and coming back from Indiana. The day was beautiful. The skies blue and filled with extraordinary clouds. I took many photos of clouds on the way back. I remember that as the good part of the trip. Only 6.5 hrs to go says internet...knowing it would be more like 8 for me back



to Virginia. Cut to many hours later...It's Breezewood where things went South. Or, not South depending on how you frame it. By this time after many hours of driving...it was raining and I was tired and I somehow missed the Very Huge sign telling me exactly where to go. I am an old person. A not so techy person. I don't drive with any navigational tools. I wrote all the directions down the night before. What could go wrong? Well, my phone got disconnected and I had no service and when I realized I was going the wrong way and I turned around something bad happened...I just couldn't find my way back to Breezewood. This is after many stops at gas stations. No one sells paper maps. Friendly people showed me maps on their phones and tried to help. Here I was getting deeper into the woods of PA.

Finally, after 8 or 9 hrs on the road I found a gas station and a

customer who was so very nice and he helped me out. I paid for his junk food at the counter as a small token of this desperate woman's appreciation. He fiddled with my phone and put in an app that talks to me while I drive but then (most importantly!) he let me follow him to the closest, very expensive, hotel. Because there was no way, I was going to be able to get home that night as I somehow found myself near Pittsburgh. The nice front desk ladies saw my plight and printed me out some directions for the next day. I still hadn't figured out how to connect my phone. Even the landline in my hotel room was on the fritz. Would my family even notice I was not making it home? Hooking up my laptop to wifi was a crucial event. I was able to send some emails. Hana luckily saw my urgent email! She was my portal into the world. She notified my husband. I finally figured out that I could turn off and then on my phone to get it to reconnect. Yeah, it's that bad. Finally, after way too many hours on the road I made it safely home. The Good part of this trip was seeing loved ones and meeting kind strangers and knowing I have friends that look at their emails late at night, the bad part was a getting lost nightmare and the Lucky part is just making it home to appreciate it all!



Top: Four leaf clover field in Indiana. Bottom: PA Turnpike tollbooth before getting lost.