



Harmony Valley Farm

Certified Organic Fruit Share Newsletter

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PRAGOR Cooperative in Michoacán, Mexico

by Andrea Yoder

Two years ago Rick, our fruit buyer, introduced us to the PRAGOR Cooperative of avocado producers. In the process of learning more about the PRAGOR Cooperative and their growers, we also learned more about their challenges, obstacles and triumphs and have developed a respect for these people and their product such that we will never view an avocado the same again. Now, we look forward to receiving PRAGOR avocados and know their name to represent a high quality product from a group of people with high moral standards.

The PRAGOR Cooperative is a group of 20 small producers located in Michoacán, Mexico. This is the part of Mexico known for the migration of monarch butterflies during the winter. This part of Mexico is not only a butterfly sanctuary, but its climate, soil conditions, etc make it one of the best places in Mexico for producing avocados. Thus, this region is known as “the avocado capital of the world.” The producers in this group have pretty small landholdings, with most only growing on about 10 acres of land. Some have avocado trees that are 50-60 years old and still thriving!

Growing avocados is no easy feat. Well, growing them may not be the biggest challenge for these producers, but rather getting their avocados to market and receiving a fair price for them may be the biggest challenge they face. As with so many other industries, the avocado industry is influenced by powerful corporations who have made it hard for small farmers to compete. This region is also influenced heavily by drug cartels, which pose another major challenge for the people in this region.

PRAGOR was founded in 2005. The growers in this group banded together to form an organization that would provide the collective resources and representation these growers needed to produce, pack, market and sell their product themselves. They wanted to have more control over the fate of their product, the price they were paid, as well as the standards upon which they conducted their business. About ten years ago the growers transitioned to certified organic. Sadly, many of the producers have personal stories about loved ones who battled cancer as a result of the chemicals they previously used on their avocado trees. The producers connected the dots quickly and decided they no longer wanted to expose themselves or their communities to the dangers associated with agrochemical use.

So I introduce to you, this week, the PRAGOR avocado grown by a group of individuals with a strong moral standard. Their mission is “To contribute to the care of the environment and economic progress of the state, through the production and export of organic avocados with quality, safety and sustainability to meet customer needs under the Fairtrade scheme.” Their vision is “To help preserve the environment by cultivating organic fruit with the highest professionalism and the highest quality, as well as being socially responsible.” We hope you enjoy the avocados in this week’s box and, as you eat them, consider the hard work, perseverance and dedication with which they were grown. We are happy to be able to pay these growers a premium price for their product, the real price that reflects what the producers need to receive to be sustainable. Don’t forget that everything you eat has a story. The more we know about our food and where it’s coming from, the greater the chances we have to sculpt the future of our food system in a positive manner.

Ready to Eat:
Ambrosia Apples
May Need Ripening:
Hass Avocados
Fuyu Persimmons
Comice Pears
Kiwifruit

■ Hass Avocado / PRAGOR / Mexico

Description: Please read the main newsletter article this week to learn more about this unique grower cooperative. This is one of the most common varieties of avocados known for their smooth, creamy flesh.

Storage/Preparation: Ripen avocados at 60-65°F. Eat them as soon as they give just slightly to pressure. Once at the optimal ripeness, they will continue to ripen and can quickly go from delectable to so-so. Cut the avocado in half and remove the pit before eating.

Suggestions for Serving and Use: Check out this week’s newsletter recipes featuring avocados.

■ Kiwifruit / Wild River / California

Description: These small fuzzy fruits have a fibrous brown skin with bright, green flesh with a starburst of small, black, easily digestible seeds. They have a sweet, tangy flavor with a soft texture when ripe. Kiwifruit are packed with vitamins and antioxidants and they contain an enzyme that functions as a meat tenderizer when kiwifruit is used in marinades.

Storage/Preparation: Firm kiwifruit will keep in refrigeration for as long as a few months. Ripen kiwifruit at room temperature until they are soft to the touch.

Suggestions for Serving and Use: Visit zesprikiwi.com where you’ll find a lot of tasty recipes using kiwifruit. **Double Chocolate Banana Kiwifruit Muffins** and **Kiwi Lime Marinated Chicken** are a few recipes at this site that looked pretty interesting.

■ Comice Pears / Diamond Fruit Growers / Oregon

Description: Diamond Fruit Growers is a farmer-owned cooperative located in the Hood River Valley in Oregon. Their comice pears are known to be one of the sweetest, juiciest varieties. They are most often used as a dessert pear and are excellent served with cheese.

Storage/Preparation: This variety of pear has almost no color change when it is ripe, thus you can’t use skin color as an indicator of ripeness. Ripen them at room temperature until the neck gives slightly to pressure, then eat them or put them in the refrigerator.

Suggestions for Serving and Use: These pears are a good choice for making a **Pear Crisp**, or consider checking out the recipe for **Comice Pear Clafoutis** at myrescipes.com.

■ Ambrosia Apples/ Nature's First Fruits / British Columbia

Description: Ambrosia apples originated in the Similkameen Valley in British Columbia, a region known as “the organic farming capital of Canada.” These apples come to us through Nature's First Fruits, a packing facility that handles only certified organic fruits and vegetables for the growers in this region. This apple has a conical shape with a bright pink blush over a creamy-yellow background. The flesh is crisp, sweet and juicy. Ambrosia apples are known to be a low-acid apple making them easier to digest. This variety is also slow to brown, making it a good choice to use for fresh salads. They are also a good choice for using in baking.

Storage/Preparation: Apples are ready to eat when they are picked. It is best to store apples in the refrigerator until you are ready to eat them.

Suggestions for Serving and Use: Visit ambrosiaapples.com where you will find a collection of recipes featuring this apple variety. There is a tasty recipe for **Ambrosia Kale Salad** and the **Apple Bacon Cheddar Crisp** sounds delicious too!

■ Biodynamic Fuyu Persimmons/ Beck Grove / California

Description: Fuyu persimmons are squatty with a rounded bottom and resemble an orange tomato. They have smooth skin with a wide flower-like stem on the top. Beck Grove is a unique, biodynamic grove located in Fallbrook, California and currently operated by Helene Beck.

Storage/Preparation: Persimmons can be eaten while they are still firm, similar to how you'd eat an apple. If you allow them to ripen at room temperature, their texture will soften and the flesh will become more sweet and jelly-like. When fully ripe, the skin will have a translucent appearance and will look and feel like a water balloon. If you have a persimmon that looks like this, don't throw it away! It's at its prime!

Suggestions for Serving and Use: Persimmons are naturally high in pectin, making them a good choice for use in sauces, dressings, etc. Persimmon puree may be used to make a variety of baked goods including muffins, bread and cakes.

Breakfast Burritos

Yield: 4 servings

8 oz potatoes, cut into ½ inch dice

Salt, as needed

4 (9-11-inch) flour tortillas

7-8 oz Mexican chorizo (spicy raw pork sausage), removed from casings

4 large eggs

1 tsp water

⅛ tsp freshly ground black pepper

1 Tbsp olive oil

1 cup coarsely grated Monterey Jack cheese (about 4 oz)

1-2 avocados, halved, pitted, peeled, and sliced

¼ cup fresh or bottled salsa

1. Put a rack in the middle of oven and preheat oven to 350° F. Cut four 12 x 8 inch sheets of foil.
2. Cook potato in a small pot of boiling salted water until just tender, about 5 minutes. Drain and set aside.
3. Wrap tortillas tightly in a large sheet of foil and warm in oven until heated through, 10 to 15 minutes.
4. Meanwhile, cook chorizo in an 8-inch heavy skillet over moderate heat, stirring and breaking it up, until just cooked through, 3 to 5 minutes. Add potatoes and cook over moderately low heat, stirring until tender and lightly browned, 3 minutes. Remove from heat and cover to keep warm.
5. Whisk together eggs, water, ¼ tsp salt, and pepper in a medium bowl. Heat oil in a small nonstick skillet over moderate heat until hot but not smoking. Add egg mixture and cook, stirring to scramble, until just cooked through. Remove from heat.
6. Put a tortilla on one sheet of foil. Spoon one quarter of chorizo mixture, one quarter of eggs, one quarter of cheese, one quarter of avocado, and then salsa to taste in vertical rows across center, leaving room to fold over bottom and sides. Fold bottom of tortilla over most of filling. Then fold over sides, overlapping them. If desired, fold top down; filling can be left exposed. Wrap foil around burrito. Make 3 more burritos in same manner and serve hot.

This recipe was borrowed from *Gourmet Today*, edited by Ruth Reichl. This is a good recipe to make in the morning or for dinner. Once the burritos are wrapped up, they can be taken with you to eat on the go. Have a busy night of activities with the kids? Make these to take with you on the road or have them ready, pop them in the refrigerator, and just reheat them once everyone's home and ready for dinner.

Avocado & Beet Salad with Citrus Vinaigrette

Yield: 6 servings

6 medium red or gold beets (or the equivalent if using baby or large beets)

Salt and Pepper, to taste

1 Tbsp red wine vinegar

Extra-virgin olive oil

1 large shallot, diced fine

2 Tbsp white wine vinegar

1 Tbsp lemon juice

1 Tbsp orange juice

1 Tbsp chopped chervil (or parsley)

¼ tsp chopped lemon zest

¼ tsp chopped orange zest

2 firm, ripe avocados

1. Preheat the oven to 400° F. Trim and wash the beets, but do not peel. Put them in a baking dish, add a splash of water, and cover tightly. Roast the beets in the oven for about 45 minutes, or until they are cooked through. Cooking times may vary depending upon the size of the beets.
2. When the beets are cooked, allow them to cool, uncovered. Peel and cut them into wedges. Put them in a bowl, season generously with salt and pepper, add the red wine vinegar and 1 Tbsp of olive oil, and toss gently.
3. Put the shallot in a bowl and add the white wine vinegar, lemon juice, orange juice, and a pinch of salt. Let macerate for 15 minutes. Whisk in ¾ cup olive oil and stir in the chopped chervil, lemon zest, and orange zest. Taste for seasoning.
4. Cut the avocados in half lengthwise and remove the pits. Leaving the skin intact, cut the avocados lengthwise into ¼-inch slices. Scoop out the slices with a large spoon and arrange them on a platter or individual dishes. Season with salt and pepper. Arrange the beets over the avocado slices and drizzle with the vinaigrette.

This recipe was borrowed from Alice Water's *Chez Panisse Café Cookbook*.