



Harmony Valley Farm

An update for our Community Supported Agriculture Members - Since 1993
Local & Madison Edition - Green Week Delivery

July 3-4, 2009

Food Safety Bills

by Richard de Wilde

Recently, there has been a flurry of internet activity over the seven food safety bills that are under consideration in congressional committees. Fears and rumors that Monsanto is working behind the scenes to force organic farms to use chemicals or that most small farmers would be forced out of business abound. Many CSA members have asked us about it and even my mother is sending me alarming email accounts.

So here is what we know to date. The many food safety bills under consideration are obviously a response to the increase in sickness and deaths from food products contaminated with E-coli O 157, salmonella or listeria. There are new mutated strains that are more deadly than they used to be, and are showing up in the conventional, industrial food supply more often. Something needs to be done, but what? And how will that impact the small producers who to date have not been part of this problem and may in fact be part of the solution?

In the mid 1990's, Good Agricultural Practices, or GAPs, were developed. Much work was done by Cornell University to develop training materials for farms and farm workers. Harmony Valley Farm took the initiative from the beginning to adopt GAPs to our farm and several years ago gained certification for GAPs and GHP, "Good Handling Practices" from the USDA and a private certifier who helps more with education and improvement of practices. What's involved? A lot! The basic premise is preventing food from being contaminated with harmful microbes. (We think prevention makes more sense than irradiating already contaminated food to make it safe to eat). Bad bugs are associated with manure or feces and can be found in humans, animals (both wild & domesticated), bats, birds and are also carried by flies, wind and water. So preventative practices must be very extensive and do require considerable time. Here is a partial list of things we have learned and preventative practices we have in place:

THIS WEEK'S BOX

SALAD OR SAUTÉ MIX: Try adding fresh fruit or fresh herbs. Or both!

GREEN TOP RED BEETS: Remove leaves from the root bulb within a day; cut the stems about an inch from the root. If you don't plan on using the greens immediately, loosely wrap in a plastic bag to keep them from drying out and going limp. The leaves are very similar to chard and can be cooked in the same ways.

FENNEL: See veggie feature on back.

PURPLE OR WHITE SCALLIONS: Use in place of onion in any recipe and reduce cooking time.

FRESH GARLIC: The first bulbs of the year! Unlike the cured garlic bulbs available year-round, fresh garlic is right out of the ground and has not been dried for preservation. We always leave a bit of stalk/stem on the fresh garlic and trim the cured bulbs. If you don't use it right away, store it on your counter to dry. Its fresh flavor is slightly less potent than the concentrated flavor of cured garlic, too.

SUGAR SNAP OR SNOW PEAS: Delicious in a stir fry; remove the strings and cook quickly over high heat, just long enough to blister the skin a little. Both varieties have edible pods!

STRAWBERRIES: Slice over yogurt, cereal, or oatmeal.

RED CHARD: Chop and sauté with a bit of olive oil, garlic & a splash of vinegar or lemon juice.

SWEETHEART CABBAGE, BROCCOLI, KOHLRABI OR CAULIFLOWER: Holy brassica variety party in the boxes this week! The season has just begun, you'll get your chance to try each item this season. Enjoy whichever selection you receive.

ROMAINE: Top with sliced steak and blue cheese.

CHOICE: BASIL Help yourself to a handful – not enough for a big batch of pesto, sorry! One portion per share rather than per household.

- Regular/scheduled cleaning of all surfaces: Ceiling to floor of packing areas, coolers, and storage areas.
- Daily cleaning of harvest wagons, harvest totes and harvest tools.
- Harvest totes cannot be used for anything other than harvesting produce
- Vehicles and trucks that transport food are cleaned regularly and not used for hauling animals, manure, chemicals etc.
- Boots worn when feeding animals must be cleaned and sterilized before entering food areas.
- Birds, bats, and mice are excluded from all food washing storage, coolers and the box storage areas (we use traps and barriers to prevent infestation)
- All staff is trained in proper hand washing
- Sick employees are not allowed to handle fresh food
- Light fixtures are covered
- Production areas are screened in
- Etc, etc, etc!

There is a lot of time involved with

learning, writing a training manual, training employees and keeping the proper activity logs (if you don't write it down, you didn't do it!). The same small farmers that whine about the "paperwork" required for organic certification will cry like babies if they are forced to go down the path of sanitation certification. GAP's and GHP's are voluntary now, but the fear is that they will be required for all food producers. Frankly, it would be a huge burden for small, new farmers, struggling to have a viable business. Yet I can't seem to find a legitimate argument to exempt small farms from learning about preventing contamination other than that they will affect only a small number of consumers.

Organic certification has always required a trace back system. Most conventional farms and food processors do not have trace back and that is why it is so hard for them to find the source when there is a problem.

The food safety bill that is closest to

a vote on the floor is HR 2749. You can read it, with comments from the Farm-to-Consumer Legal Defense Fund, online at <http://www.farmtoconsumer.org/news/news-15june2009.htm>

This bill would exempt most farms, but is criticized for not condemning industrial scale food production. The fear is that the rules can be changed to include all farms at a later date. Watch for further developments. In the meantime, we will continue to do our best to prevent contamination, law or no law!

Friendly Reminders:

*If you paid by post-dated check dated July 1, it will be deposited this week.

*Be mindful when picking up your CSA shares. Check your name and only your name off the checklist at your site, and only pick up the shares that are listed with your name.

*If you can't pick up during open hours on delivery day, make arrangements with your site coordinator ahead of time. Your site coordinator's contact info can be found in the CSA calendar/manual –pick one up at your site and keep it handy all season long!

Fennel, Beet, and Orange Salad

2-3 medium beets
1 head of fennel
2 oranges
1 Tbsp balsamic vinegar
Olive oil
1 tsp Dijon mustard
Salt and pepper to taste

1. Preheat oven to 400 °. Remove beet tops and set aside. Trim stems to 1", scrub beets, rub with oil, and roast until tender, about 1 hour. Cool.
2. Thinly slice fennel bulb crosswise and sauté slowly with a small amount of oil over low heat until it is nicely browned. Remove from heat.
3. Zest one orange. Whisk balsamic with orange zest, Dijon, 2 Tbsp oil, and salt and pepper.
4. Cut peels and white pith from oranges. Cut crosswise into thin slices.
5. Chop fennel stalks and reserve fronds.
6. Peel cooled beets and cut into 1" chunks.
7. Toss browned fennel bulb with orange slices, beets, fennel stalks, and dressing.
8. Sprinkle with chopped fennel fronds to taste.

Serves 4

Veggie Feature: Fennel

If, like me, you are a black jelly bean hater, then you may have trouble liking fennel at first. I remember the first time I tried fennel, and being absolutely amazed at its similarity to anise, the familiar licorice flavoring. I thought, what is this black jelly bean doing masquerading as a vegetable?

Luckily, after the initial shock wore off, I began to appreciate fennel for its own merits and the subtle differences in flavor of the different parts of the vegetable. If you give fennel a chance, you will definitely be able to find a preparation that you like.

Fennel is most commonly paired with fish and seafood, although it is also great with poultry, egg dishes, soups, and salads. It is popular in dishes around the world, particularly its native Mediterranean, and the Middle East and India. Fennel is an interesting vegetable because all parts of the plant can be eaten, and all have a slightly different flavor and character. The white bulb has the mildest flavor, and a thick, crisp body that lends itself to a wide variety of preparations. The green stalks have a fresh taste and crunchy texture similar to celery. The fluffy fronds at the end of the stalk, resembling dill, have by far the most concentrated "licorice" flavor and can be chopped and used as an herb. Once the plant flowers, the pollen and then the seeds can also be harvested and used as a spice.

The bulb is the part of the fennel plant most commonly called for in recipes. It can be sliced and eaten raw, or just about any cooking method you care to try. It is particularly tasty roasted and caramelized or in the traditional Italian dish Gratinati (baked fennel with white sauce). The stalks make a great addition to salad, or can be steamed or sautéed to mellow their flavor a bit. The fronds, though lovely to pet, are usually a bit much to handle due to their super-strong flavor. A little goes a long way. If you find that you have more fennel fronds than you can use in a meal, try drying them, or making fennel broth and freezing it for later.

Fennel will keep well in the refrigerator for up to a week. Be sure to keep it in a bag if you intend to hang on to it for very long, or the bulb end may begin to dry out and lose its lovely crunch.

To keep your produce as fresh as possible this summer, pick up as early as you can on delivery day and transport your shares home in a cooler.

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Summer Barn Dance
Saturday July 11
2pm-late, at the farm
Everyone is Invited!
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