



Harmony Valley Farm

An update for our Community Supported Agriculture Members - Since 1993

December 16-17, 2011

Fall Improvements and the Dam Story by Farmer Richard

A long standing motto at Harmony Valley Farm is that "if you are not making improvements, you are actually going down hill!" Well, we definitely prefer to move forward and that motto has had many applications around here this year. Here's the report on just a few things we've accomplished.

Earlier this summer we decided to put new thermal pane windows with storm and screens in one of our employee houses this summer....home to Benji and his relatives during the summer and his brother Ezequiel during the winter. The previous windows were in pretty poor condition. One of our talented CSA members, Ron, installed the windows in exchange for next year's CSA boxes. A winning trade for all of us as we enjoy a more energy efficient house and Ron and his family enjoy vegetables!

We have also spent some time improving some of our pasture and field landscapes. We have pulled, cut and trimmed trees that are invading our pastures and infringing on the perimeters of our fields. Most of the trees are low quality prickly ash and box elders. Captain Jack likes to ride in the cab of the bulldozer as it moves the trees and debris. We pile them up and then come back later to burn the pile when it is dry. This is what our small crew does now that harvest is done and fields and machinery are "put to bed" for the winter. (...don't worry, Captain Jack's bulldozer work is supervised)

A major "improvement" project we started earlier in the spring was to maintain the dry dam above our home farm. The dam was built in 1950 to protect the farm yard from flash flooding from heavy rains. We were aware of the dam and its purpose, but had taken it for granted until we discovered that the basin had filled with silt and trees and the inlet pipe was on the verge of being plugged with debris. We sought advice from our county NRCS (Natural Resources Conservation Service) and found that the trees that had grown up on the dam and behind it were on the verge of destroying it. We cut and piled all the trees, dozed out the silt and built a new screen box around the inlet. This fall we burned the massive piles of box elder trees. We utilized controlled grazing by the goats to manage the new tree shoots... which they love to eat. We seeded new grass and clover on the dam and once again it is a

THIS WEEK'S BOX

CHIOGGIA BEETS: How do you tell this beet from a Sweet Scarlet Turnip? These beets have dark shoulders, turning a duller rose at the root end. The turnips are a bright fuchsia, almost hot pink color. In addition, these are candy striped red & white on the inside!

CARROTS: Just like the other root veggies in this box, if they lose hydration in storage and get a little floppy, just soak them in water to crisp them up once again. Or use them in a soup or stew as is.

CELERIAC: Peel the knobby outside bits and freeze with other veggie scraps for your next homemade stock day. Cut into cubes and boil with potatoes. Mash together for a rich, tasty variation of winter comfort food.

SCARLET TURNIPS: See this week's article/veggie feature.

BEAUTY HEART RADISH: A mild radish, perfect to add a splash of color (pink!) to your stir-fries, slaws and sandwiches. Store in a plastic bag in the fridge.

BLACK RADISH: A radish lover's radish; nearly as strong and pungent as horseradish! Grate into salads or slice thin to top a roast beef sandwich. Can be cooked and added to soups, stews, omelets and stir-fries.

SWEET POTATOES: Blends well with cinnamon, honey, coconut, nutmeg, cumin, chili powder and lime and is great alongside pork, ham, and poultry. Shred and add to hash browns, cut into wedges and bake into fries, bake and mash, steam in cubes and add to a black bean quesadilla.

RED ONIONS: Slice thin and cook over low heat in butter & oil until tender. Add to your favorite quiche recipe and bake for breakfast!

PORCELAIN GARLIC: Make aioli for your next party platter. Cut carrots, beauty hearts, even parsnips & rutabagas into sticks for dipping!

GREEN SAVOY CABBAGE: Blends well with carrots, onions, potatoes, bacon and sausages. Remember, coleslaw is tastier if allowed to sit and get acquainted in the fridge at least 30 minutes before serving. Plan ahead!

PARSNIPS: Shred and combine with apples, parsley and a lemon vinaigrette for a great side salad!

RUTABAGA: See this week's article/veggie feature

BUTTERNUT SQUASH: If you notice some surface wrinkling on your squash, it is normal to see this sometimes in storage. The squash is still good to eat, but should be cooked soon. All squash should be stored in a cool but not cold place. To preserve, cook & puree, then freeze in recipe sized portions.

KABOCHA SQUASH: Add to sweeten muffins or bread.

FESTIVAL, SPAGHETTI OR DELICATA SQUASH: Last taste of 2011!

BRUSSELS SPROUTS: Steam until tender, then finish with butter or cider or bacon!

beautiful and massive earthen structure. To stand on top and see it in its restored glory is awe inspiring. Today it would cost \$1,000,000 to build this dam! I think it would be wise for us to continue to take care of it.

Dams have definitely been on our radar this summer. The much larger dam on the Bad Axe River, called the Runge Hollow dam, was built in 1974. It was damaged in the floods of 2007 and 2008 and is still in need of repair. Our Hammel Lane farm is approximately 5 miles below that dam and the county of Vernon, who owns the dam, is trying to save money on the repairs that have been mandated by the WI Department of Natural Resources. If they can remove the danger to human life in the event of a dam "breach" (i.e. the dam fails and all the water comes flowing into our valley at once) then they can repair the dam only to state standards, not the more expensive federal standards. We are told "the repair is the same, but without the federal mandate to

pay inflated prices to out-of-state contractors" --\$60 per hour for machine operators vs \$20 per hour for local contractors. Inflating the repair costs from several million to an excess of \$20,000,000? How can this be to repair only one side of a dam that cost \$812,225 to build originally? Strange politics at work here.

This situation affects us in several ways, but specifically we are dealing with the fact that our Hammel Lane house is in the dam's breach zone. We are trying to find a way to preserve a fine home for 10 of our employees. We are currently negotiating the possibility of a fairly massive cement wall around the house, raising the house 4' higher, moving the house or building a new house on higher ground. The "powers that be" have been fairly unresponsive and there is the ominous cloud of "Eminent Domain" in the background. We take care of our dam, we hope the county will take care of theirs!

It feels good to look back on the year and

see the improvements we've made to our farm, land, housing, equipment, etc. We will go into the New Year with a sense of accomplishment and optimism as we make the never-ending list of improvements we want to make a priority for 2012. In the meantime, we'll soon be putting the bulldozer in the shed and before we know it the ground will be covered with snow. Maybe we'll take a little time and relax.

Rutabaga & Pear Salad Serves 2-4
1½-2 cups shredded rutabaga (about 1 small or ½ of a medium rutabaga, peeled)
1½ Tbsp Rice Wine or White Wine Vinegar
1 tsp honey
1 tsp dried thyme
¾ cup pear, cut into chunks (about 2-3 pears, peeled and cored)
3 Tbsp olive oil
Salt and Pepper, to taste
1-2 oz Blue Cheese (optional)
¼ cup almonds, toasted and chopped (optional)

--Put the shredded rutabaga in a bowl, season with salt and pepper and toss to combine. Set aside.

--In a food processor or small blender, puree the pear with the vinegar until smooth (it will look like applesauce). Pour the pear puree into a small bowl and add the honey, and dried thyme. Drizzle in the olive oil and stir to combine.

--Toss the pear mixture with the rutabagas and refrigerate for about 10-15 minutes.

--Prior to serving, taste the salad again and adjust the seasoning with salt and pepper to your liking.

The salad is delicious in its very simple and basic form, but can be dressed up with the addition of almonds and/or blue cheese. Add the almonds just before serving. If you are using the blue cheese, crumble the cheese into small pieces and stir lightly into the rutabaga salad.
**Be careful not to overdo the blue cheese or it will go from being complementary to overshadowing.

Vegetable Feature: Turnips and Rutabagas

Nature has a way of giving us what we need in its appropriate season. As we move into the winter months, we no longer have the luxury of eating fresh veggies out of the field. Instead, we turn to foods that store well and in preparation for the long, cold months we stock our root cellars full of vegetables that can survive the winter. Not as many people these days have a root cellar, but you can use your crisper drawer for a similar purpose. Turnips and Rutabagas are two of the best storing root crops.

Turnips and rutabagas go way back in time to the prehistoric development of agriculture. While they are related to each other, they are not the same vegetable. In our experience, the word rutabaga has somehow come to mean "any root vegetable I don't know what to do with." Rutabagas are generally larger than a turnip. They have a beige/tan colored exterior with dark purple coloring on top and a thick neck. They are thought to have been named by the Swedes and its name means "thick root." When you are ready to use the rutabaga, trim off the neck on the top. Cut the vegetable lengthwise in halves or quarters so it is more manageable to handle. Trim off the exterior skin using a paring knife. You'll find the flesh to be a beautiful golden color, firm and crisp. Farmer Richard raved about the flavor on the rutabagas this year—he was eating them right out of the field! I gave them a try and he's right! These are possibly the best tasting rutabagas we've ever grown! They are sweet and flavorful—pretty mild this year as opposed to being strong flavored and pungent.

We grow three different colors of turnips including the classic and familiar purple top, a mellow golden turnip and the stunning Sweet Scarlet turnip. In the previous CSA box, you received the golden turnips. Sweet scarlet turnips are the bright pink veggie in your box this week. We think these two varieties are superior in flavor and appearance to the purple top turnip, so seldom will you see a purple top turnip in your box. As with many other fall veggies, the cold weather increases their natural sugars giving them a natural sweetness.

Both of these veggies should be stored in a cold environment with moisture to keep them from dehydrating. If stored properly they can be preserved for months. If you notice your roots starting to get floppy or soft, just soak them in a bowl of water in your refrigerator and they'll spring back to life. I mentioned that rutabagas should be peeled, but turnips have a thin skin and don't have to be peeled.

As for preparing these two vegetables, they can be eaten raw, boiled, stir-fried, roasted, baked and braised. Elizabeth Schneider wrote, "There is really just one way not to cook it: in lots of water for a long time---the method that is common in many English and American kitchens." Perhaps this cooking method is responsible for turning up many noses over the years. If you overcook turnips and rutabagas, they will quickly go from tender, sweet and delicious to mushy, strong flavored and stinky. They are often used in soups, gratins, roasted root mixes, and root mashes, but can also make a really nice winter salad or stir-fry. Farmer Richard's favorite way to enjoy a rutabaga is to simply boil it in salted water just until tender. Then, drain off the water and allow the veggies to rest in the pan in a warm place off the stove burner for about 10 minutes to let the steam dissipate. Next, mash coarsely with salt, cream and butter. This makes a beautiful golden mash that you'll find to be a sweet and simple side dish for any meal.

Rutabagas pair well with butter & cream (big surprise), ginger, lemon, nutmeg, parsley, sage, thyme, apples, pears and other root vegetables. Turnips are often paired with bacon, apples, cheese, cider, cream, garlic, mushrooms, onions, potatoes, and lemon. Both vegetables make a delicious addition to winter soups, stews, and pot pies. They pair nicely with pork chops and ham, but also complement beef and poultry dishes equally as well.

Don't let them shrivel up in the crisper drawer this year, give them a try! You just might find you like them and will miss them come spring!

Pan Seared Pork Chops with Turnips, Apples and Cider-Cream Sauce

Serves 2

2 center-cut pork chops
3 slices bacon, cut into ½" pieces
1 medium onion, small diced
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 medium apple, peeled and small diced
1 cup turnip, small diced (approximately 1 medium or 2 small)
1 tsp dried thyme
1 tsp dried rosemary
6 ounces apple cider or apple juice
4 ounces cream
Salt and Ground Black Pepper, to taste

--In a medium sauté pan over medium-high heat, brown the bacon until crispy. Remove bacon pieces from the pan and set aside. Drain off any excess grease and set aside. You can add a little bit back to the pan as needed throughout the remaining cooking process.

--Pat the pork chops dry with a paper towel, season with salt and pepper on both sides and carefully put into the pan with the bacon drippings. You should hear a really nice sizzle when the pork chops go into the pan. Sear chops on the first side until nicely browned, about 4-6 minutes. Turn the chops over to sear the second side. Go ahead and add the onion and garlic to the pan with the pork chops and sauté for about 2 minutes. Add the turnip, apple, bacon, rosemary and thyme and sauté for about another 1-2 minutes. Remove chops from the pan.

--Add the cider to the pan and return to a simmer. Using a wooden spoon, scrape the bottom of the pan to release any bits of goodness on the bottom of the pan. Check the degree of doneness of your pork chops. If they need more cooking time, add them back to the pan now. Allow everything to simmer until the cider has reduced by about half. This will take about 4-5 minutes.

--Reduce heat to low and stir in the cream. Simmer for several minutes until the sauce lightly coats the back of a spoon and the vegetables are tender. Adjust the seasoning of the sauce with salt and pepper to your liking. Remove from heat and serve the pork chops with the cider cream sauce and turnips on top.