



Harmony Valley Farm

An update for our Community Supported Agriculture Members - Since 1993
Twin Cities Edition - Green Week Delivery

June 4, 2009

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

by Farmer Richard

Amy, a second-year CSA member, recently asked us several very thoughtful questions. "How does Harmony Valley Farm decide what to plant? Is it based on requests from members, or grocery/restaurant clients? Based on research on what's healthy and good to grow organically? Pure whimsy?" She also wondered "How do you manage it all? HVF has an amazingly extensive variety of crops that it grows over the course of the season." As we considered how to reply, we thought maybe there are other members who might have the same questions. So, here's our reply to our friend Amy.

Well Amy, you are right that growing so many different crops is complicated to keep track of. The first thing you should understand is that we *live* farming - which means we invest a lot of time and energy into making this all work. We start early and work late; including weekends depending on the weather and what else might be going on. Farming is time sensitive work. Sometimes you get just a short window of opportunity—if you snooze, you will lose.

There are several essentials to make this all work: **Management, Planning and Record Keeping.** We do a lot of planning—for the day, the season, the year, and even several years beyond. At any one time, we will be making a field planting plan, greenhouse planting plan, wash/pack plan, etc. If you have a plan, you are thinking about what is going to happen so you are ready when it's time. We have to make sure we have the appropriate equipment, supplies, seeds, compost, people, soil prepared, etc—all part of the plan. Of course, the plan is always subject to change depending on weather and other variables. We keep lots of records—records of daily harvests, CSA box contents and number of boxes packed, cleaning and maintenance records, compost application records, etc. We use these records for planning, time studies for efficiency, organic certifica-

tion, sanitation certification, and financial analysis. We have a commitment to a crew to provide full-time work, unlike the conventional and generic organic industry of California, Arizona, Florida and Mexico that can call in a contract harvest crew for a day or a week, but have no payroll obligation to them. We have to be ready with a plan for their day; otherwise, we waste valuable time with people ready to work but no direction. But management is the key. You can have every system in place, but if you don't follow through on things in a timely matter, plans and records don't happen and are not useful.

When we decide what to grow, we consider many different factors including who we are growing for. Our priority is growing for our CSA members. We have

done surveys for many years and it seems there are some vegetables that are the classic favorites. We make sure we grow these favorites including carrots, beans, tomatoes and peppers. During our peak summer season, we focus our efforts on these crops which we do not offer to our wholesale accounts. We also consider what fits appropriately in a CSA box and can be transported. For instance, we grow 4-6# personal size watermelons instead of 15-20# watermelons...which definitely would not fit in the CSA box.

We do push the envelope in favor of growing greens for our CSA members. We have found there are a lot of very tasty greens that grow well and dependably in Wisconsin at different times of the year. One of our goals is to go beyond just



Strawberry Day

Sunday, June 21

noon-6pm at the Farm

Potluck, Wagon Tour,

U-Pick Strawberries

THIS WEEK'S BOX

GREEN GARLIC: Dice it, sauté it, and mix it into mashed potatoes.

POTATO ONIONS: Green onions that grow up in clusters. Trim the root and clean carefully, as dirt gets trapped in between them.

SPINACH: Add a small handful to your morning smoothie. It adds a boost of nutrition, an interesting color, and doesn't noticeably change the flavor of the smoothie.

SALAD MIX OR ARUGULA: Add sliced apples, shredded Cheddar, and a simple dressing.

HON TSAI TAI OR PEA VINE: Both flavorful cooking greens that can also be chopped and eaten as a salad.

SWEET BABY BROCCOLI: See veggie feature on back.

RHUBARB: Try adding rhubarb to your next stir fry. Add it at the very end, so it stays crisp, or cook it down ahead of time and toss it in as a tart sauce.

ASPARAGUS: Add to a deluxe baked macaroni and cheese dish with mushrooms, Gruyere, and crispy bread crumb topping.

BOK CHOI: a Chinese cabbage that resembles a head of leaf lettuce. The thick white ribs are crisp and juicy and are good in a stir fry or sautéed and tossed with vinaigrette. The leaves can also be stir-fried, but should be added slightly later, as they cook more quickly.

BABY WHITE TURNIPS WITH TOPS: Juicy, tender, and buttery sweet! Try them raw, or cooked very lightly. Remove the leaves and use them in a salad or sautéed.

growing vegetables to grow and offer nutritious vegetables. We want our CSA members and market shoppers to have healthy options available. This is why we grow things like the super nutritious, beautiful and tasty amaranth—a hot summer green option that grows when many other greens don't. This is one of the things we grow that has little to no wholesale potential, so you won't find it at your regular grocery store.

Another consideration is what will grow!! In the 30 plus years since I started farming, I've experimented a lot with different crops to figure out what crops grow best in our climate and at what point during the season. Wanting to support a local diet, as well as extend our season of cash flow to support the upcoming year's startup costs, we have tried to find as many options for season extension as we can. We are able to offer a long delivery season because we include many overwintered vegetables in the spring and storage crops for late fall/winter. We also try to get into the fields as early as we can in the spring... which means you have to be ready to take advantage of that one dry day. This is where the plan and management come into play. Fields that get planted early in the spring need to be prepared in the fall. Equipment needs to be ready to go, seeds need to be in inventory, and the field plan needs to be made.

While CSA is our first priority, having a good reputation in the wholesale community is really a blessing to our CSA. We plant extra and if it all comes in, we have extra to sell to retail or wholesale accounts. If we have half a crop, we still have enough for our CSA and our wholesale accounts have other options! There are some crops we grow to keep a consistent presence in the wholesale market-- kale, chard and cilantro. There have been times though that we have harvested those crops for CSA because there was a problem with what we had planned to harvest for CSA. It is a tricky balancing act to project these surpluses or deficits 1 or 2 weeks out, but that is our job! Cucumbers are the perfect example of a crop we might divert to a wholesale market. We try to raise enough for 3-4 per box, but if a crop peak comes in a 90 degree week, we could easily have 10 or more per box, too many! That is when we move the extras to our wholesale accounts. And we can only do that because we have a reputation for delivering good product, on time, as ordered!

CSA only farms are much more subject to the boom or bust nature of farming and may deliver too much in that peak cucumber example. We do rely on our local food pantries to take excess, but they cannot always use all of it, in which case our little group of pigs get the benefit of the surplus and we get to eat and sell a very delicious pork. Nothing goes to waste here because even the compost pile goes back on the fields to nourish a future crop.

Thank you Amy for your questions - the inspiration for this week's newsletter. If anyone else has a question about farming, your farm, or the CSA send them our way! Either we'll answer them personally or we'll put it in a newsletter!

Featured Veggie: Sweet Baby Broccoli

Our featured veggie this week is "baby" broccoli. Unlike the pea vine and green garlic featured in previous weeks, however, this batch of broccoli wasn't planned for an early harvest. Rather, it had to be taken out of the field prematurely because it was about to bolt, or flower. It seems that four out of five years, Richard says, the spring planting of Packman or Blue Wind broccoli starts to make a head before the plant has grown big enough to make a full size broccoli head. The later plantings more reliably produce full sized broccoli; something for you to look forward to this fall!

We start the broccoli in the greenhouse and depending on weather conditions sometimes the broccoli is ready for the field before the field is ready for the broccoli. When this happens, the plant simply doesn't get enough time in the ground to grow before its biological clock tells it that it's time to flower. Day length and weather conditions also factor into the broccoli's ability to grow in size before reaching maturity. This year we had a very cool spring, perfect conditions for a very small plant to make a very small head. Although this batch of broccoli did not have enough time in the field to grow very large, we are fortunate to have the chance to eat this young broccoli because the whole plant is still tender and tasty. Ordinarily, on larger heads of broccoli, the thicker stems become stringy and slightly woody and must be peeled. The stems on our sweet baby broccoli are crisp and tasty and can be eaten just as they are. The leaves, too, are still tender enough to eat, and full of that distinct broccoli flavor.

Since the florets on these heads of broccoli are so small, you may find yourself stumped when trying to use them in your normal recipes. To make up the difference in volume, simply chop and use the whole plant- florets, stems, leaves, and all.

Sesame Broccoli Salad

Serves 2-3

2 tablespoons soy sauce
2 tablespoons rice vinegar
2 tablespoons toasted sesame oil
2 tablespoons honey
1 bunch baby broccoli
1-2 green garlic stalks
1 bunch hon tsai tai or pea vine
1/2 cup sesame seeds

1. Stir sesame seeds in heavy large skillet over medium heat until golden, about 5 minutes. Transfer to small bowl; cool.
2. Whisk soy sauce, vinegar, oil and honey in large bowl until blended. Season to taste with salt and pepper.
3. Cut baby broccoli and separate into florets, leaves, and stems. Cut green garlic into 1" pieces and discard any leaves that are tough and stringy. Steam broccoli florets with stems and green garlic until crisp-tender, about 5 minutes. Cool.
4. Chop broccoli leaves and hon tsai tai or pea vine into small pieces.
5. Mix broccoli, green garlic, chopped greens, and half of sesame seeds into dressing. Let marinate at room temperature at least 30 minutes or up to 2 hours, tossing occasionally. Transfer salad to platter. Pour dressing over. Sprinkle with remaining sesame seeds.