



News  
from

# Harmony Valley Farm

An Update for Our Community Supported Agriculture Members - Since 1993

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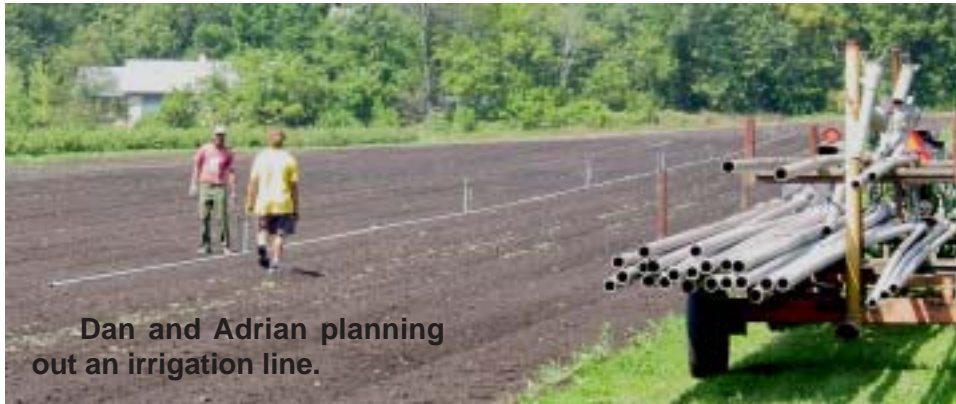
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## Beyond a Dry Spell

The amount of precipitation that has fallen on Harmony Valley since January now lags a full 10 inches behind an average year's rainfall. That's only 58% of the moisture we expect in a usual year. The dry weather has been lurking since late last fall. Richard keeps a weather diary. November reads, "Continued cold and dry." A later entry, "No snow cover until late January. Dry until March 21." By the end of May we were behind 3.5 inches. We irrigated several times in May. In June and July we fell farther behind. The last rain we had was a paltry 1/4 inch on July 31. It rained while we ate lunch and was done and dry enough to go out to the field by the time the tables were cleared.

Crops are surviving on dew drops while waiting their turn in the irrigation schedule. Some crops never get a turn, like the asparagus. Other crops we are currently picking or that we have just recently planted get watered once every 10 - 14 days. We just don't have the capacity to get to them more frequently. The crops planted under plastic mulch, with a drip tape system in place are lucky. We are able to give them water 1 - 2 times per week by rotating the 1000 gallon tanks every day.

Dan (just back from 1 week off with his newborn daughter) jumped right back into irrigation. Surely, we thought, by the time he got back we would have gotten rain and the irrigation pipe trailers would be parked for a while. No such luck. Adrian and Dan have set up two systems every day and they run all night. It is



Dan and Adrian planning out an irrigation line.

really clear that our systems are inadequate for the amount of land we are farming. In fact, we have known that for several years but resisted buying more capacity because we remember the 4 consecutive years when it rained adequately and we didn't move even 1 pipe. The system deteriorated from lack of use. But Wednesday morning found both Richard and I at our desks. I was monitoring the radar map of the Midwest and Richard was researching a "traveling gun." His time proved to be more productive than mine. I watched the storms track far to the north and simply evaporate, leaving all parts west, from whence rainfall usually comes, as clear as a bell. Richard on the other hand spent nearly \$20,000 and bought an irrigation system we have had our eyes on for years. We had hoped to find a good deal at an auction or through the classifieds, but nothing that worked for our farm came up for sale. Now, feeling a real need to do something other than watch our crops wither, we bought a system designed for us. They are

This Week's Box
<b>Carrots</b>
<b>Edamame</b> ( Fresh Soybeans)
<b>Eggplant</b>
<b>Sweet Corn</b> -some of the ears are short, but with sweet kernels.
<b>Watermelon</b> - orange or yellow
<b>French Orange Cantaloupe and/or Butterscotch (Sweetie No.6)</b> (smooth skin)
<b>Bell Peppers</b>
<b>Tomatoes</b> - A combination of some of these: Red and Pink Slicers, Sungold Cherry, Red Grape, and possibly the ugly duckling, Striped German. (Give this sometimes deformed heirloom a chance, we think its flavor makes up for its imperfections.
<b>Italian Garlic</b>
<b>Sweet Spanish Onions</b>
<b>Choice: Basil</b>

coming out Monday to set it up and teach us how to operate it. It promises to be quick to set up and will be the equal in volume and area covered to one of our other systems, increasing our ability to water ground by 1/3.

This so-called traveling gun is really a huge water cannon on a hose, with the hose attached to a 6 foot tall reel. The reel is attached to the mainline that comes from the pump and locked into place. Then the gun is pulled out by a tractor to the full length of the field. As the water pumps through the hose, its pressure ratchets the reel so the hose is slowly wound back up, thus pulling the giant sprinkler through the field, from one end to the other. Since we have many long narrow fields with roads between them, this system will work well. The triangular fields along the river or by the creek will continue to be watered by the more flexible moveable pipe systems. The

traveling gun can be set up in much less time and moved without having to walk through freshly watered mud.

Since the sky dawns clear everyday and the heat hasn't broken yet, it is probably useless to dream of rain. When things are going awry, my father has always reminded his children to "count your blessings." Here are just a few that come to mind:

- The onions and shallots loved the dry weather. They are big and beautiful and seem to be free from the neck rot that causes that rotten core that is nearly impossible to detect until the onion is cut open. The greenhouse is bursting with them.
- There are far fewer insects than we normally see in August.
- The watermelons have never tasted better nor been crisper.
- We haven't had to mow our lawn for weeks.
- Tomatoes have fewer leaf diseases in dry weather.
- I haven't had to wear my rubber boots for a long time.

For those of you who don't like to be too sheltered from the truth, there will certainly be negative consequences from this extremely long dry period. The smaller the plants, the more vulnerable they are to the hot, dry soil conditions. We plant salad mix weekly and the past few plantings have struggled. Even when we watered before planting and tried to irrigate again the following week, the ensuing hot days fried many little seedlings. Ditto for Richard's final beet planting and Linda's fall spinach crops. We have been fortunate with some of the other late plantings; turnips, carrots and radishes are surviving, and since it is so dry, there is not a weed in sight in those fields.

Only time will tell what the consequences of this drought will be on next year's crops. Strawberries are setting their blossoms for next year right now. They could use 1 inch of rain per week from August through September. Raspberries, haven't received any irrigation, and we don't have a system to water them because of their location. To fill out those berries we'll need rain.

And then there are those *new* plantings of asparagus and raspberries. With their newly established roots, will they be able to hang on? Plants can amaze us with their resilience. Let's hope these are hardy stock.

Even the wildlife seems to be effected. Some critters, in search of water, found our spuds a handy, underground source. The swallows, except those with young in the nest, have left 1 month early. The dragon flies swarmed and migrated earlier this week.

We hope you read this newsletter with a bit of surprise, not being able to tell from

the boxes that this has been one of the toughest seasons we can remember. In spite of the harsh conditions, we are blessed with a productive farm. But, bring on the rain! Linda

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### Get Involved and Have Fun!

Two of our members have been brainstorming ways to help members adjust to the CSA way of cooking -- lots of fresh, sometimes unusual veggies, that the farmer surprises you with each week. They would like help forming a mentor program -- experienced members helping others learn the ropes. You are invited to a planning brunch at the home of Julie Wuestoff, L'etoile's forager and HVF's member, on Sunday, Sept. 7th, 10:30 - 1:00. Her address is 720 E. Gorham #303. Please RSVP Julie at 257-1333.

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### PRODUCE PLUS -TOMATOES

Slicers, slight blemishes, or Romas 20-25 #for \$18 -Order the usual way.

### *Lee's Recipes*

I'm aware of the fact that not everyone likes eggplant but I'm convinced that it's solely due to the number of poorly executed eggplant recipes out there. Eggplant **MUST** be cooked until it is very soft otherwise it is like chewing a dense sponge. When it is properly cooked, however, I know of no other vegetable that is more unctuous and pleasing in the mouth. You've probably heard before that it is a good idea to salt eggplant to draw out any bitterness. This is a cooking myth. If you are using fresh, young eggplant they won't be bitter and if you have an old, bitter eggplant, no amount of salt will help it. There *is* a purpose to salt though. Salt collapses the cells of the eggplant which prevents them from absorbing as much oil as they would otherwise. In the second recipe, I did not use the full quantity of oil listed, instead adding a little at a time as I fried.

For those of you never before introduced to edamame, it is a Japanese snack food. It is often served, cooked but still in the pod, in Japanese bars, as we would serve peanuts; or in Japanese restaurants, as a Mexican restaurant would serve chips and salsa. It is not the very same variety of soybean that is used to make tofu, and certainly not the same as is grown all over the heartland to feed to cattle or to make oil. This variety is bred for its buttery, nutty flavor when eaten green and the seed is not only hard to find, but very expensive, (but worth it!)

I like it best freshly boiled in heavily salted water, chilled in ice water and popped in my mouth as quickly as possible. For a more refined approach, try the last recipe. It has eggplant in it too!

### EGGPLANT AND OLIVE RELISH

1 eggplant  
2-3 tomatoes  
½ c. coarsely chopped Kalamata olives  
lemon juice to taste  
fresh ground black pepper  
2-3 Tbsp. parsley

Cut the eggplant in half. Lay the halves face down on a lightly greased cookie sheet and roast in a 400 degree oven until they are very soft. While the eggplant is cooking, quarter the tomatoes and arrange skin side down on another baking sheet. Roast until they begin to char around the edges and most of the excess juice has cooked away.

When the eggplant is cool enough to handle, scoop the flesh into a colander. Let the eggplant drain for ½ hour and then chop it coarsely. When the tomatoes are ready, remove the skins. Stir the tomato pulp into the eggplant. Add the chopped olives, lemon juice, black pepper and parsley. You shouldn't need salt, the olives will provide enough. Serve with pita chips or on crostini.

### EGGPLANT STEAKS WITH EDAMAME, TOMATO AND MUSHROOM RAGOUT

½ lb. shallots, quartered lengthwise, tossed with a little oil (substitute 1 med. onion this week)  
1 lb. tomatoes, quartered and seeded  
1 large eggplant  
¾ c. olive oil  
½ lb. edamame  
½ lb. mushrooms, shitake or button  
1 Tbsp. minced garlic  
1½ tsp. fresh rosemary, minced  
½ c. dry white wine  
1 Tbsp. Balsamic vinegar

Roast shallots and tomatoes on separate, well-greased baking sheet until the tomatoes are tender but not falling apart and the shallots are soft. Put roasted vegetables into a bowl. Meanwhile, cut the eggplant crosswise into thick steaks. Brush well with olive oil and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Place on a baking sheet and roast until very soft.

Boil edamame in salted water for 3-5 minutes, until tender. When cool, remove and discard pods. Add to roasted tomatoes and shallots. Heat 2 Tbsp. oil in a skillet and sauté the mushrooms with the garlic, rosemary and salt to taste until golden and any liquid from the mushrooms is cooked off. Add the wine and cook until reduced by half and the mushrooms are tender. Add the roasted vegetables and stir until heated through. Add the vinegar and serve over the eggplant steaks.

E-group recipients; check out the other great eggplant recipe sent Friday.