



News
from

Harmony Valley Farm

An Update for Our Community Supported Agriculture Members - Since 1993

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Another Cause for Celebration

Last weekend was 2 days full of old friends, old stories, old pictures and some good food and drink (thank you Derek!) The hullabaloo was all in honor of the 20th Anniversary of Harmony Valley Farm.

The pictures told the story -- humble beginnings. Even our diesel mechanic

ard was left with little money in the bank and lots of functional, but not valuable, farm equipment, and no land to farm. It was then that he met George Siemon (now CEO of Organic Valley) at the 1st. Bioregional Conference in Esofea Park in Vernon County. On that trip George



Most of the current crew stopped under the harvest wagon for a photo on Sunday.

reminisced a little this week when I picked up our truck. "Yeah, Richard sure had some ancient gems!" Ditto for the tractors, the potato digger, the disks . . . well, nearly everything. He looked a bit like the Beverly Hillbillies, moving old machinery, rabbits in hutches, even his hand built out-house, on flatbed semis into the valley. Although we hooted with amusement to look at the old photos, it really made us realize how amazing the journey has been.

Richard never would have moved to Harmony Valley had he not been forced from his farm in Minnesota. Expansion of the south bypass and airport industrial park caused the condemnation of his piece of Minnesota. The state was supposed to compensate him for the cost of relocation, \$20,000, but they reneged. Without the resources to conduct a legal battle, Rich-

ard and his wife, Jane, showed Richard a 200 acre farm for sale. Ten thousand dollars per year, for 10 years, no interest! Unbelievable land contract! Without the relocation money, Richard didn't think he could swing it.

He returned to Minnesota, living out of boxes in his abandoned farmhouse, searching for a place to go. Then a call came -- George's parents, Margaret and Bob Siemon, would buy the farm and lease it to Richard. They'd even help with the cost of constructing Richard a combination house and packing shed so they could use the old farmhouse as a summer home. In return, Richard would pay the taxes and the insurance. Bob and Margaret were supplying Richard with security,; no fear of missing a farm payment because of a bad crop year. Richard was supplying Bob and

This Week's Box
Basil
Beans
Broccoli
Carrots
Cauliflower; White or Orange
Cucumbers; Mini white and slicers
Fresh Cipollini Onions (store in frig)
Fresh Garlic; Italian not cured, for short term storage put in frig. To keep longer, cure in dry, warm area (top of frig in open bowl?)
Salad Mix
Zucchini & Summer Squash
Choice Box: Fennel or Snow Peas
No FruitShare this week.

Margaret with a fixed cost summer home (no surprise tax increases) and a place they could be proud of. (They ate pretty well during the summers, too.) It was all done on a hand shake and it worked out amazingly well.

As the farm finances improved, Richard and Linda tried to buy land -- this farm, from Bob and Margaret, and neighboring farms they could easily work without picking up stakes, (something Richard had vowed never to do again.) The Siemon's weren't ready to think about selling. The neighbors talked about it, one coming very close to closing a sale, but in the end, all decided to keep the land in the family. Prospects for purchasing land seemed pretty dim, and a vision for how to pass the business on to a next generation of farmers got pretty foggy. Each year saw

see back

Derek's notes

For about the past two weeks Richard has been bringing in different types of garlic almost every night. It grows very fast and the window of time you have for getting it out of the ground can be very short. I watched as the garlic cloves became bigger and the membrane that separates them got thicker and more paper like. Remember in the spring when we had the young garlic and you could use the entire bulb and most of the leaves? You certainly could not do that now. The flavor has also become more pronounced and I remember having to chop a lot more of the spring garlic than I do now pound for pound to get the same flavor. The garlic was getting very close to being ready when suddenly we got almost an inch of rain on Friday. Richard brought in a few bulbs which had some definite signs of damage on their stems from the water. He called in an emergency crew on Saturday and they worked into the afternoon nonstop getting most of the field harvested. Now it is hanging on every available space in both greenhouses to cure for a while. Every time the wind blows a certain way you can catch a big whiff of it anywhere on the farm and I smell it every night when I am going to sleep like some kind of weird aromatherapy for a cook.

There are a few things I would like to say about cooking garlic and the different results you can get from treating it different ways. First of all, I almost always cook garlic, at least a little bit before using it in things. To me when it is raw it has kind of hot sulfur like taste that I find unpleasant. I know some people really like the taste of it like that and if that is how you like to use it, that is fine. (I do really like to rub a raw peeled clove on toasted bread with some butter or olive oil.)

You can roast garlic in an oven or a pan. Some people almost fry it in oil until it becomes brown and then turn the heat off and let the heat of the oil finish cooking it. Slow roasting it gives a totally different effect. This is how I roast garlic: Rub a few cloves with olive oil and put on a bed of kosher salt in a shallow pan with a cover. Roast at 300 to 325 for about an hour to an hour and a half. It depends on the size of the individual bulb, and at such a low temperature it won't overcook too fast. This is fresh garlic so it takes a long time to roast all the way, but it is worth it. The garlic will be very soft and paste like and can be cooled and squeezed out of it's papery cells for another use. If you have

the time (and can stand to have your oven on that long) let it roast until it starts to brown, this is where the real changes happen. The sugars in the garlic start to caramelize and change the flavor dramatically to a sweet nutty taste that's nothing like raw garlic.

Another thing that happens often is people accidentally burn their garlic when cooking it in a pan. It is very easy to do and I smell it all the time outside restaurants. It is caused by using high heat and not enough oil. Burnt, or even slightly burnt, garlic doesn't smell or taste very good at all. Use low heat and "sweat" the garlic slowly. Make sure you have enough oil or butter or even water will work. You want to release the oils and soften up the garlic and this can only be done with low heat and a little patience.

A few tips on cooking zucchini and summer squashes: I like both of these vegetables and eating them really makes it feel like summer to me. Maybe because my mom used to grow them in our garden when I was a kid, or maybe because I really like them on the grill, either way the thing about both of them is that they really don't have a lot of flavor. A lot of people don't like them at all because of this. My suggestions are to not over cook them and to add lots of flavor to them. Mushy overcooked squashes are ugly and unappetizing. They are made up mostly of water and air so once the air pockets start collapsing they cook very fast. Try this if you want using things out of the box: Heat some olive oil or butter in a pan and sweat some garlic (flavor) and some onion (flavor) until they start to soften up. Add sliced zucchini and just enough chicken or vegetable stock (flavor) to create steam. Add more as necessary to keep the pan and vegetables moist. When they start to soften up add some minced basil (flavor) and salt and pepper to taste (flavor) Don't over cook the squash and serve immediately. By handling it correctly and adding LOTS of flavor I believe squashes can be enjoyed by all. I also like to dip them in a flavorful marinade right before I put them on a hot grill. -- Derek

From Front land values inch up, and farms more and more being sold as recreational land and second or retirement home sites. Rational farmers can't justify the prices if they plan to pay for it with farm income. Still, Richard and Linda were hoping to buy, and discussing it with Margaret (now widowed) each year.

So, in the midst of last weekend's celebrations, after a few hundred pounds of hot dogs, hamburgers and potato salad were consumed, and after Richard and Linda recognized some special folks who had a hand in building this farm, George and Margaret asked to speak. They announced their intent to strike an agreement with us for the transfer of Harmony Valley Farm. "We're this close," George said, holding up a small space between his thumb and forefinger. And, truly we are! The applause was deafening. Our friends were expressing our feelings, unabashed happiness that we will someday soon own the farm. It was a long wait. We are thankful for the opportunity!

After the applause died, Margaret remarked that the biggest challenge may lie ahead, passing on the farm to another generation of farmers. It's true. Farming is hard work, but lots of people work hard. Farming requires many diverse skills, but many talented people have worked here, work here now and will work here in the future. Will the right person or persons come along at the right time, willing and passionate? (Or will our boys change their minds and want to take on the challenge?) Will land ownership be possible for the next generation, or will land be so expensive that creative ways of owning land, including conservation easements and land trusts be needed? So many unanswered question to set the imagination free upon.

Happily, Your farmers,
Richard and Linda

