



Harmony Valley Farm

Producers of Fine Organic Produce & Beef

An Update for Our Community Supported Agriculture Members - Since 1993

Madison & Local Edition

Why did the chicken cross the road? To get to Elmer Beechy's Farm! *By Andrea Yoder*

As CSA members we know you place value on good food raised organically using sound methods. We have been asked by members over the years to help them find a source for reasonably priced organic chickens. Although we looked for growers to work with, until recently we were unable to find anyone who raised truly pastured chickens fed organic grain. We are pleased to have the opportunity to make a new offering to you this fall in partnership with a local, organic poultry farmer, Elmer Beechy. At your sites this week you will find a brochure featuring organic chickens and turkeys which you can order now for delivery in November and December. This is the first year we've worked with Elmer on this project, so I spent a couple hours at his farm last week to see how his operation is run. I would like to introduce you to your poultry farmer and hope you'll take advantage of this source for good quality poultry from a grower you know.

Elmer and his family own and operate Tilth Farms in Elroy, Wisconsin near Hillsboro. Elmer and his wife Anna moved to the area in 1996 with their 6 children. Since then their family has grown to include 15 children, 12 boys and 3 girls, and 1 grandchild. One son moved out of Wisconsin, but the rest of the children either live on the farm or on farms nearby. Everyone is involved in the farming operation and one of Elmer's goals is to give his children a good start with their own businesses for their futures. Their home farm is about 250 acres, about half of which is tillable and the other half pasture. They also rent some nearby property and his sons own some of their own land as well. In addition to raising poultry, they also graze 100 head of cattle, grow 18 acres of asparagus, and grow a crop of winter squash as well as a large garden for their personal use. For the past two years, we have purchased asparagus from Elmer's farm to supplement our young crop.

Elmer's farm has been certified organic since 1997 and is currently certified through MOSA (Midwest Organic Services Association).



One of Elmer Beechy's turkeys in pasture.

While farming organic, he has found that nature helps to prevent and resolve its own problems, alleviating the need to use antibiotics or chemicals. Since this was the philosophy he wanted to farm by, he figured he'd pursue the certification and sell his product for what it is.

Elmer isn't looking to break into the large poultry markets selling to places such as Wal-Mart, where the quality and value of his product become diluted by trying to compete with large-scale producers selling low quality, low priced goods. He prefers to do direct marketing to establish working relationships with his customers. His goal for his family and others in his community is to have a way to make a living farming at home, on the family farm, while providing others with good food at a reasonable price. Having paid high prices for organic poultry in retail markets, I can truly appreciate being able to purchase organic meat that is also affordable.

During my time on Elmer's farm I learned quite a bit about how he raises his poultry and I walked amongst the flocks of birds in the pastures. That's right, I said the birds were in a pasture roaming around outside of cages. While many producers claim their animals are pasture raised, some of the practices producers employ are questionable. Often there will be an open door to allow birds to go outside, but the grain and water are kept inside, so that's where the animals stay. Elmer's birds, both chickens and turkeys, arrive at his farm one day after they hatch. Initially kept in a barn, they are fed and watered there until they have grown and matured enough to survive in a less controlled

This Week's Box

Green Week

- ♥ **RED BEETS:** Ever tried the classic Borscht soup garnished with a dollop of sour cream?
- ♥ **DELICATA SQUASH:** See feature on back
- ♥ **GARLIC:** Sauté with greens for a quick side dish
- ♥ **RED BARON POTATOES:** Shred & sauté with onions and herbs for a breakfast side dish.
- ♥ **ASSORTED PEPPERS:** Make a roasted pepper cream sauce for pasta
- ♥ **RASPBERRIES:** Raspberry pancakes are a great way to start the day!
- ♥ **SALAD MIX:** Top off with some of the last tomatoes and peppers of the season!
- ♥ **BUNCHED GREENS:** Add to vegetable soup-see recipe on back
- ♥ **ASSORTED TOMATOES:** If you haven't had a BLT sandwich yet, this is the week!
- ♥ **YELLOW & RED ONIONS:** Carmelize with a little bit of balsamic vinegar and add to pizzas and sandwiches

environment. Chickens move out to pasture when they are 4 weeks old and turkeys at 6 weeks. The processes for pasturing chickens and turkeys are basically the same. When the birds are first moved to pasture they are taken to the far end. They are provided with movable shelters, feed troughs, and water systems placed outside of the cages. The chickens' shelters are low cages that are raised so the birds can go in and out, as they please. Some producers lower the cages at night or keep the chickens in them all the time to protect from predators. Elmer usually leaves them raised and has had few problems with other animals invading the flock. The turkeys have larger shelters that are open on the sides but have a roof and places for the turkeys to roost. Every few days the shelters, feed troughs and water systems are moved a little further down

the pasture to provide fresh clover and grass. Both are fed a specially formulated and balanced mix of organic feed including corn, beans, vitamins and minerals. The chickens are pastured until about 8 weeks and the turkeys until they are about 14-17 weeks old. This is usually enough time for the animals to gain enough weight to be processed. His chickens are a Cornish Cross breed and the turkeys are the Large White Broad Breasted breed; both produce meat efficiently.

When we raise vegetables at Harmony Valley Farm, we use crop rotation systems that help with plant disease and pest control by allowing several years before the same vegetable is again planted in a field. Elmer employs a similar concept with his animals. Not only does he move them across a pasture to give them fresh grass to forage, but he also rotates the animals in pastures. For instance, next year cattle will graze where the turkeys are being raised this year. He will not pasture turkeys on this land again for three years.

Elmer's poultry will be available for you to purchase this fall! Poultry will be delivered directly to your pick-up sites at the same time as our November & December beef deliveries. Both products are sealed in plastic and quick-frozen at the processing plant. They will be delivered to you frozen, so now would be the perfect time to buy your holiday turkey and stock up on chickens to feed your family throughout the winter! Brochures with further details and pricing information are available at your pick-up site and will be on our website soon.

COMING SOON

Queen Bee Soaps, based here in Viroqua WI, has generously donated 250 bars of their handmade soaps for us to sell to aid our fundraising efforts! They will be available for your purchase in sets of 5 for \$25. Check your email for details, coming soon!
Thank you to
www.queenbeesoaps.com

We Have a Flog!

We have officially entered the Internet age. To get the absolute latest, up to the minute goings on at the farm, go to our Farmer's Blog (or Flog) at
www.harmonyvalleyfarm.blogspot.com

You'll see photos you won't find anywhere else, stories of our day to day adventures, and updates on our fundraising and flood recovery efforts.

VEGETABLE OF THE WEEK: WINTER SQUASH

Fall is right around the corner and the summer crops are starting to fade away. The flavors of fall have already snuck into your box and are ready for you to enjoy as we bid farewell to summer with the final tastes of tomatoes, summer squash and raspberries. All of our winter squash, (including Butternut, Acorn, Festival, Delicata, and Kabocha) are harvested and waiting to be delivered to you.

Winter squash are hard-skinned squash that take longer to mature than summer squash. Harvested in late summer, you will be receiving the different varieties in the remaining deliveries of the season. Don't think you have to try to eat them all before the next box arrives; the beauty of winter squash is their ability to keep for up to several months, when stored properly, at about 55°F. You can also use them as fall decoration around your house. Enjoy their beauty and keep a watchful eye on them. If you notice a bad spot starting to develop, cook it and eat it!

From a nutritional perspective, squash are excellent sources of vitamin A and beta-carotenes as well as other vitamins. They are also low in calories and most that we grow are naturally sweet and delicious so they really don't need much added to them. You can incorporate squash into soups, stews, bread, muffins, pancakes, or enjoy it as a vegetable side dish. Squash pairs well with garlic, rosemary, sage, parmesan cheese, dried fruits, nuts, honey, maple syrup, apples, cranberries, curry powder, nutmeg, and cinnamon.

There are several ways to cook squash. If you are going to use the squash as a puree, the easiest way to cook it is to cut it in half and put it in a baking dish with the cut side down. Put about ½" of water in the bottom of the pan. Bake the squash in a 350°F oven until tender. Allow the squash to cool enough to handle, then scrape out and discard the seeds. Scrape the remaining flesh out of the shell. If you want it to be smooth, blend the flesh in a food processor. If you are adding the squash to soups or other dishes and want to have it in pieces, cut the squash into manageable pieces and peel it using a paring knife. Butternut squash is one of the best for dicing, as its skin is not quite as thick. You can also slice and pan-fry squash, or steam it.

SQUASH & VEGETABLE SOUP

Serves 6

6 cups chicken broth	2 thick slices bacon, cut into ½" pieces (optional)
1 butternut or delicata squash—quartered, seeded, peeled, and cut into 2-inch pieces	2 packed cups coarsely chopped greens (e.g. chard or kale)
5 thyme sprigs	1-15 ounce can pinto beans, drained and rinsed
2 garlic cloves, halved	1 medium carrot, finely diced
2 medium onions, rough chopped	1 red pepper, finely diced
1 small celeriac, rough chopped	1 cup frozen sweet corn
1 tbsp vegetable oil	Salt and ground black pepper, to taste

-In a large, heavy pot, combine broth, squash, thyme, garlic, onions and celeriac and bring to a boil. Cover and simmer over low heat for 45 minutes.
-In a medium skillet, heat the vegetable oil. Add bacon strips and cook over moderately high heat, turning once, until crisp, about 7 minutes.
-Discard thyme sprigs from the soup. Working in batches, puree the soup in a blender. Return the soup to the pot. Add bacon, greens, pinto beans, carrot, pepper and corn and bring to a boil. Simmer over moderately low heat, stirring occasionally, until the vegetables are tender, about 7 minutes. Season the soup with salt and pepper and serve.

Adapted from *Food & Wine* magazine, November 2006

Upcoming Events

Fall Harvest Party-This Sunday, September 23rd Noon-6PM

Wagon Tours of the Fields, Packing Shed Olympics, Potluck Meal and Pig Roast
Bring your own tableware and a dish to pass - we supply the pig!
The farm is about 2.5 hours from the Madison area & 35 miles south of LaCrosse.

Core Group Meeting- Saturday, October 13th, 2-4pm (Madison Location TBA)

Some of our best ideas have come out of these meetings with our members. We'll be planning for next year's pricing and products so bring your ideas on how we can improve our CSA! Email invitation coming soon.