

# STUDENT ORGANIC FARM CSA NEWSLETTER

September 30, 2004

## **In your share this week:**

- Carrots
- Celery
- Tomatoes, Sweet *and* Hot Peppers, *and* Eggplant (think Ratatouille!)
- Swiss Chard
- Onions *and* Garlic
- Melons (Watermelon and/or Canteloupe and/or Honeydew)
- Green Beans
- Perhaps a few last summer squash *or* cucumbers
- Herbs: Basil (whole plants -- almost the last of the season – time to make and freeze pesto!) and U-pick Parsley (flat *or* curly leaf), dill (flower *and* leaf), oregano (perfect time to harvest for drying), sage, and many more.
- U-pick *FLOWERS*: Sunflowers (tail end of the season – soon they'll form seed heads for birds and CSA members to enjoy), Statice (perfect for drying), Red Salvia, Dill flowers (great in bouquets), ornamental grass, Zinnias (may be the last week for these – they'll get hit by frost), and more
- *Optional*: Braising mix, Kale, Collard greens (U-pick)

## **Announcements**

1. Potluck: I got only a few responses about a potluck this coming Sunday, but they were all positive – it may be short notice for the rest of you, but let's do it this Sunday, the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October! Assuming Debby and Simon Billinge are still game, it will be at their house, early afternoon-ish (how about 1:00-3:00?), and they will have to send directions and confirm the time. (Debby and Simon, please respond to “all” on this email with directions and the time, assuming that still works for you).

Please bring a dish to pass – keep in mind that some of our members prefer vegetarian and/or raw food, but don't let that stop you from making your favorite dish if it's cooked or meaty. The point is to celebrate the harvest and our CSA community! There will be plenty for every taste, I'm sure, and I'm looking forward to trying everyone's creations. Just bring your favorite seasonal dish, with the recipe or at least its name written down, bring your own plates, cups, silverware (minimize landfill fodder and bring reusable stuff!), and bring kids, family members, and co-sharers.

2. Volunteering: Many Saturdays we will be at the farm in the morning. If you've always wanted to volunteer but couldn't make it during the week, now's your chance! There is lots of **weeding** to do, **green tomatoes** to harvest and take home (for chutney, green tomato pie, green tomato pickles, or of course fried green tomatoes), **irrigation tape** to take out of the fields, **greenhouse plastic** to replace and repair, **herbs** to bunch and dry, **garlic** to clean, **signs** to paint, and more. If you can do any of those things, please give the farm phone a call during the week (517-230-7987), and let us know when you can come out! Don't limit yourself to weekends, however; feel free to drop by any weekday but Thursday, from 8-5. If you want to volunteer on Thursday (harvest and CSA day), please call first so we can plan accordingly.
3. Another VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY: We need to **pick up a truckload (pickup truck) of wooden crates** from a farm in Tipton, near Adrian. It's the home and farm of Beverly Ruesink and Oriana Bosma, two SOF alumnae, who are generously donating old, no longer used apple crates to the SOF. If you have a mid- or large-sized pickup truck (or van, or trailer), and would like to visit some former SOFers while doing the farm a huge favor, please send an email to Michelle, and/or call the farm phone. The whole trip will probably take 3-4 hours, including driving, loading, and unloading (and probably touring their farm while you're there!).
4. WELCOME to our new student farmers! We recently hired on a bunch of new folks, many of whom plan to have farms of their own after college, and we're thankful to have found them – please welcome Andy, Randi, Mikey, Ryan, Nicole, and Tomm (who's been here since August) when you see them at the farm. With Jeremy (new co-manager) and our half-new crew on board, things are looking a little different, and a lot better than this time last year! For starters, I'm going to be able to take time to finish graduate school – classes and starting to write my thesis. Part of the thesis will be the story of the farm and the folks involved in creating it – including our members. Two requests: one is that you fill out and return all surveys we send you (for those of you who were members this summer session, you'll receive one on email soon). The other is that I may ask you to share stories of your experiences with the SOF – if and how your diet, relationship to food and farming, understanding of nutrition, farming, and seasonality of produce has changed since joining the SOF, and more. That one is still in the idea phase, but if you have a story you'd like to share, keep it in mind; I'll be in touch

soon. So THANK YOU to our great new-and-old crew for showing up when we needed you.

### **What's up at the farm?**

The fall is truly and finally upon us – frost threatens, or promises, every night. The tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, and a few other frost-sensitive crops are tucked under plastic or frost fabric in the fields, the winter squash are cut and curing, fall roots (carrots, beets, turnips, rutabagas, parsnips) are growing like mad, and we're re-planting all the hoophouses to winter crops. Normally this is a time for the "home stretch" on a CSA farm – looking to the end of the season, trying to squeeze as much winter squash as possible into share boxes, getting ready to put the farm to rest. But here at the SOF, we're already getting into full swing for winter farming. Salad greens, cooking greens, root veggies, scallions, and more are seeded or transplanted into the newly prepared beds in the hoophouses, and we're looking at our ever-growing waitlist of potential CSA members for the January-April session. What does that mean for you? As current members, you have first dibs on shares for that session – you have from now until the beginning of December to renew your membership for spring. After that (date TBA), if there are shares unclaimed, we'll invite the folks on our waitlist to join.

What does a winter/spring share at the SOF look like? If you ask last year's members, you'll hear "cabbage." It's true; last year was the Year of the Cabbage here at the SOF. We planted a lot, knowing that it's hard to screw up cabbage (both growing and storing), as insurance for our winter shares—just in case something went wrong with the other, hoophouse-grown crops. That cabbage really came through for us, with flying colors (green and purple, at least). And we gained some experience, confidence, and understanding of winter production of lots of other crops.

You may be surprised at the diversity of crops available in the Great Lakes bioregion in the heart of winter, with just a little ingenuity and storage space. You won't be seeing as much cabbage this year (collective sigh of relief from old members), though there is still plenty for everyone to make kraut, coleslaw, and cabbage rolls until spring. If last year was the Year of the Cabbage, this year looks like the Year of the Carrot! Hooray – who doesn't like carrots? We're growing carrots in the fields, for both storage (fall harvest and cooler storage) and holding over (mulching heavily and digging out of the ground through the winter), and in the hoophouses, for slightly easier access (no mulch or snow!). You'll also see beets, both from storage and fresh dug throughout the winter, rutabagas and turnips, Brussels sprouts and greens, Asian greens (mizuna, mibuna, tatsoi, komatsuna, Napa cabbage, and lots of choi – pac choi,

mei qing choi, etc.), radishes, scallions, lots of spinach, baby salad mix, Swiss chard, kale, arugula, lettuce, parsley, other herbs, and more.

We're trying out a new (to us) technique of "low tunnels" in the fields this fall – covering cold-hardy crops like leeks and Brussels sprouts with plastic or frost fabric supported on wire hoops to keep it up off the plants. They'll look a little like miniature hoopouses (also called "high tunnels"), or caterpillars, stretching across the fields. These crops are already hardy enough to withstand low temperatures, and with minimal protection from wind, rain, snow, and hail, they can last even longer fresh in the field than without protection. This is the same basic concept behind our hoopouses, just on a smaller scale.

And that's just the fresh-grown crops! You'll also receive crops from cold storage: potatoes of all kinds, winter squash of several varieties, onions and garlic, cabbage (OK, I never said we weren't doing it at all--and it's tasty.), dried herbs, dried chile peppers, dried flowers, and more. We're not growing tomatoes in January; that's not the point – we're using low-tech, relatively low-input and low-cost techniques to bring you the freshest, local, *seasonal* produce available.

I hope you'll enjoy the adventure, and sometimes challenge, of eating seasonally in Michigan... which brings us back full circle to this week, the end of September: It's going to frost any night, perhaps any minute, now. We gave out a lot of tomatoes for canning, freezing, drying last week and the week before. We're going back to about 6 ripe tomatoes per share this and next week, just because these cold temperatures mean that all the green tomatoes on the vines probably won't ripen, even though they're covered with plastic for now. So not many more for preserving. But if you'd like a batch of **green tomatoes**, for frying, pickling, making chutney, pie, or anything else, by all means, just ask. I wonder if green tomatoes make good *salsa verde* (instead of or in addition to tomatillos)... We'll fill up your car if you're not careful.... Folk preservation lore tells us that if you wrap a green tomato in newspaper and keep it in a cool, dry-ish basement, you can bring it upstairs, unwrap and set it on a sunny windowsill any time during the fall/winter, and it will ripen. They may not be as flavorful as vine-ripened tomatoes, but they're probably better than the cardboard-flavored tomatoes in the supermarket. I've never tried this myself; will you let me know how it works for you?

I remember we mentioned doing a canning/preserving workshop – what's true is that my fall planning eyes are bigger than our farm's fall stomach – no time! If you have a favorite preserving method or recipe – please send it in; we'll put it in subsequent newsletters, and keep it in mind for next year. And I recommend a book for beginning (or experienced) preservers: *Putting Food By*, a classic canning, freezing, pickling, etc. book. I also recommend a dehydrator

for making dried tomatoes, 'eggplant jerky,' which Rick and Cricket brought in for us to sample last week (yum! Thank you), spicy flax crackers (favorite snack at the SOF, thanks to David!), prunes, dried apples, etc. Drying, freezing, pickling, and canning allow us to carry the overwhelming bounty of summer with us through the grey cold winter months, to remember the sun, the dirt, and green life of the warm season. It takes some time, but it maintains those connections, as well as reducing our dependence on fossil fuel-trucked produce from California or Mexico. I think it's worth it.