



# MSU STUDENT ORGANIC FARM FARM NEWSLETTER

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February 8, 2005

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

- Spinach
- Napa Cabbage
- Komatsuna
- Turnips
- Squash
- Onions
- Garlic
- Potatoes
- Fresh Oregano
- Carrots

## ***Announcements***

### *Farm Update*

Onions and leeks are going to be seeded up this week! More planting in the unheated green houses as well. Think about this: we have leeks still out in the field (a bit rough at this point, but still alive and edible with some work to clean them up) that were seeded up 1 yr ago! That is a long time to care for 1 crop, but they are so, so good and so, so hardy! Related to leeks, the SOF is going to be providing leeks for a soup for the MI organic conference help at MSU March 3 & 4th (hope to see you all there!) For any of you looking to do some service hours, we could use a couple people to help harvest and clean some leeks. The week preceding the conference.... Hope you all are well! Take care and thanks! Jeremy (one of your farmers)

### *Reminder*

#### **Edible Forest**

Jay Tomczak, SOF assistant manager, is designing an edible forest garden at the farm that will someday provide you with fresh fruit, nuts, berries, perennial vegetables, flowers, and herbs. This garden will mimic the structure and function of a natural forest ecosystem, providing a home for beneficial wildlife, native plants, and people. There will be about 200 trees and shrubs as well as a great diversity of herbaceous species. Some examples of species we will be planting are pawpaw, hazelnut, gooseberry, apple, Asian pear, chestnut, persimmon, blueberry, pear, peach, grapes, beach plumb, bush cherry, strawberry, asparagus, raspberry, groundnuts, and many more.

We will need some help to make this garden a reality. If any of you would be interested in donating \$10, that would go to the purchase of a tree or shrub. Contributions by March 1 would be appreciated for this year's plantings; checks can be dropped off at CSA distribution.

After the completion of the project you will receive a map of the garden with your name next to the plant you provided a home for. The map will allow you to visit your plant. You are also invited to help out with the creation of this garden. You are welcome to contribute for more than one plant and the garden will be here for everyone to enjoy for generations to come.

Information on these concepts can be found at <http://www.edibleforestgardens.com>. Please contact Jay with any questions at [tomczak1@msu.edu](mailto:tomczak1@msu.edu) or (616) 293-7208.

### ***What you always wanted to know about... ONIONS!***

The history of the onion can be traced back to 5000 BC. Since then onions have been used in Egyptian burials — the scent of onions was thought to bring the dead back to life — and Roman gladiators used them to firm up their muscles. Today, they are used all over the world for both medicinal and culinary purposes.

Onions are easy to prepare for cooking but slicing and chopping them raw can irritate your eyes and make you cry. This is because cutting onions breaks open onion cells, which contain enzymes that generate sulfenic acids. Sulfenic acids decompose into a volatile gas, which dissipates through the air. When it reaches your eye, it reacts with the fluids in your eye and forms an acid that makes your eyes sting. Your tear glands make tears to dilute and flush out this acid.

To make raw onion preparation more bearable, try these tips:

- Wet your hands before slicing
- Use a sharp knife (instead of a dull or serrated knife) when slicing in order to rupture as few cells as possible
- Chill onions in the refrigerator prior to slicing

### ***Recipes***

#### **ONION QUICHE**

1 tablespoon butter  
1 large onion, diced  
3 eggs  
1/3 cup heavy cream  
1/3 cup shredded Swiss cheese  
1 (9 inch) unbaked pie crust

Preheat oven to 375. Over medium-low heat melt butter in a large saucepan. Add onions and cook slowly, stirring occasionally, until onions are soft. In a small bowl, beat together eggs and cream. Stir in cheese. Spread onions in bottom of pastry shell. Pour egg mixture over onions. Bake in preheated oven for 30 minutes, or until eggs have set.

## **ONION AND BARLEY SOUP WITH SWISS CHEESE FLAN**

Bon Appétit, September 2001

Makes 6 servings.

### Soup

2 tablespoons (1/4 stick) butter  
2 tablespoons olive oil  
8 cups sliced onions  
1/3 cup pearl barley  
3 tablespoons dry Sherry  
8 cups chicken stock or canned low-salt chicken broth  
4 fresh thyme sprigs

### Flans

3 tablespoons butter  
2 cups sliced onions  
3/4 cup whipping cream  
3 large eggs  
1/2 teaspoon salt  
1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper  
1 1/4 cups (packed) grated Swiss cheese

### For soup:

Melt butter with oil in heavy large pot over medium-high heat. Add onions; sauté until caramelized, about 20 minutes. Add barley and Sherry; cook 30 seconds. Add chicken stock and thyme. Bring to boil. Reduce heat; cover and simmer 30 minutes. Season with salt and pepper. Discard thyme. (Can be made 1 day ahead. Cool, cover, and chill. Bring to simmer before serving.)

### For flans:

Preheat oven to 300°F. Place six 3/4-cup custard cups or soufflé dishes in baking pan. Melt butter in heavy medium skillet over medium heat. Add onions; sauté until tender but not brown, about 8 minutes. Cool slightly; transfer to blender. Add cream, eggs, salt, and pepper; blend until smooth. Stir in cheese. Divide custard among prepared cups. Fill pan with enough hot water to come halfway up sides of cups. Bake flans until centers are softly set, about 30 minutes.

Cool flans 10 minutes in pan. Cut around flans to loosen; turn out each in center of soup bowl. Ladle soup around flans and serve.

## ***Other interesting reading***

Here is an article about eating local year round! It is a good reminder of many of the benefits we get from eating locally, and a reminder of how lucky we are to have fresh local organic produce all year long! Iceberg lettuce from California anyone? One factoid from the article I had to point out...it takes 97 calories of energy to get 1 calorie of iceberg lettuce out this way....

*Eating local for the winter*

By Melissa Pasanen

From the Burlington FreePress

January 31, 2006

Thankfully Bill McKibben doesn't depend on coffee or tea to begin his day.

If he did, the environmental writer and Middlebury College scholar-in-residence might have had a more challenging time surviving for seven months almost entirely on foods grown within a few dozen miles of his Ripton home.

And those were not the easy summer and early fall months, during which one would be hard-pressed to avoid local bounty. McKibben managed to eat locally through the dead of last winter and early spring when Vermonters traditionally relied on root cellars, smoked and dried meat, salted fish, and a pantry full of home-canned vegetables and fruits.

That was, of course, before the days of global, single-season supermarkets. "In our world, it's always summer somewhere," he wrote in an article for *Gourmet* magazine's July issue about his experience.

Friday, he will be in Burlington to talk about the challenges and rewards of eating local through the winter. It really wasn't very hard, McKibben said one recent morning as he offered a visitor a mug of warm cider and a plate of cookies made with Vermont butter, eggs, and flour from Ben Gleason's farm in nearby Bridport.

Many of the dietary changes he made by necessity have stuck by choice. During the experiment, for example, he forewent his standard breakfast beverage of orange juice for apple cider from Champlain Orchards in Shoreham. A year later he says he'll never go back to the "pallid, reconstituted stuff out of a carton." The cookies, however, "have chocolate chips in them this year," McKibben added, "because I'm not being so strict."

The lack of locally grown cocoa beans might have been a deal-breaker for some, but McKibben missed other things more: rice and bananas, for example, and oats for breakfast, which he eventually found in Quebec, not as close as ideal but close enough.

Unfortunately, he points out, to get the oats over the border, they had to travel from Quebec down to their American distributor in New York's lower Hudson Valley and then

back to Vermont via UPS. "Not precisely an ecological triumph," noted McKibben in the article he wrote for *Gourmet*.

The traveling oats are a small example of what drew McKibben to the topic of local food in the first place. He is not a typical "foodie." He doesn't obsess over the superior flavor of heirloom beets or trot out the latest recipe he has discovered. The former *New Yorker* staff writer and Guggenheim and Harvard fellow has made a career of groundbreaking writing about the environment. His acclaimed 1989 book, "The End of Nature," was an urgent call to re-evaluate human impacts on the natural world, particularly as we approach what is known as "peak oil," when demand for oil is expected to exceed supply.

"We face very big environmental issues, especially global warming," McKibben said as he sat in his living room sipping cider, "and the food system we've built is example number one of the wastefulness we've created. Take the heads of lettuce in most supermarkets. They come from California's Central Valley. It takes 97 calories of fossil energy to grow and ship one calorie of iceberg lettuce. And all you have is iceberg lettuce in the end. We might as well be shipping baggies of water back and forth across America."

"Conventional food is marinated in oil," he continued, referring to petroleum. From the chemicals and pesticides used to grow it, to mechanized processing, to its transportation across the world, "it is a significant reason why we can't get a handle on global warming."

McKibben is careful to point out that although organically raised food is in principle a good thing, he prefers locally grown food even if it is not certified organic. As national corporations have entered the organic market, he notes, "the average bite of organic food travels further than the average bite of conventional food."

But conserving oil is just one reason to buy lettuce from a local farm -- or find other crisp salad options during the winter (see recipes.) McKibben has also determined that a key antidote to our increasingly mechanized, globalized, energy-gobbling society is "to figure out how to rebuild and strengthen our local economies."

Despite our long, cold winter, McKibben says, "Vermont is in a lucky position; it is more possible to be self-sufficient here." Should we need to feed everyone without imports from beyond the state's borders, McKibben says, local agriculture experts project that could be accomplished in about one growing season.

And, on a one-family basis, McKibben proved that it could be done -- with some planning and extra effort and his "Marco Polo exception" rule, which allowed salt, pepper and other spices and herbs.

McKibben learned to can tomatoes and freeze berries and vegetables, although he was dismayed to discover that his environmentally-friendly home could not, ironically, accommodate a root cellar because it holds heat too well. Throughout the winter, he depended on local farmers and food markets for storage crops such as potatoes, along with

other root vegetables and winter squash; as well as apples, eggs, dairy, a variety of locally raised meat, dried beans, and Gleason's flour.

His morning beverage needs were well met with apple cider, and the other end of the day was taken care of by local brewer Otter Creek, which makes one of its organic beers with wheat from Gleason's farm. (The Belgian-style wit bier is sold only during the summer, but McKibben stockpiled supplies for the winter.)

Although he went the whole way, McKibben figures that many people could get to at least 30 percent without changing much about how they eat if they just bought Vermont-grown meat, dairy products and eggs -- all available year-round.

He acknowledges that local ingredients can cost more, particularly meat, and that it takes time to put food by and to get to the right stores or travel to the source of some foods. One might even use a bit more gasoline in the process, but nothing compared to that trip from California.

"The question of time is a very important one. I know that not everyone has time to can tomatoes or bake bread. But should you consider that time a cost or a benefit?" he ponders.

McKibben says he also adjusted what his family ate based on cost. "Because meat is more expensive," he says, "I found myself cooking in the way people in four-fifths of the world do. We ate more beans, less meat."

Plus, he observes, there are ethical issues and hidden costs behind the cheap ground beef and chicken breasts in supermarket cases. "Do you want to buy meat from a bird that lived in a space the size of typing paper?"

All in all, he concludes, a little extra time and money spent feeding ourselves with wholesome, local food is a trade-off worth considering. "There's a certain price that comes with community," he says. "It's getting to know your neighbors better, having your neighbors get to know you better."

"One of the great pleasures of last winter," McKibben adds, "was that everything came with a story attached to it. Every night when we sat down to dinner, we knew who and how and why our food had come to us ... the good taste eating locally leaves in your mouth is not just the food, but the strong sense of community; the food really means something."