

## THE ALLEGED FARM NEWS - 13 October 2005

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Our neighbor Ann Connor died this spring so there was nobody to tell me during tomato canning season that she always put up 150 quarts of tomatoes. It is something she reminded me of every September for the ten years we lived down the hill from her. She knew somehow that I did a little canning—no doubt we would have talked of it when she came over to pick plum tomatoes at the end of the season—and soon established the profoundly amateur nature of my efforts. She was pleased to discover that I did it at all. You never know with newcomers and young people have lost the habit. But she did not want me to feel too pleased with myself. It is one thing to process a bushel of tomatoes some quiet afternoon and quite another to put away, as any sensible farm wife would, enough tomato sauce to get you through the year.

Ann was a devout Catholic, but she was not immune to pride. She was proud of her daughters, who all went to college. She was proud of how much she knew about what was going on in town. Gossip is a competitive sport in Easton and Ann was an all star. She always knew who was dying and how painfully and she would tell us even if we had never heard of the afflicted. She was proud of her faith, proud of being a Democrat, not an easy thing to admit in this town, and proud of being from White Creek, only one town east but far enough for her to declare after fifty years on the farm that she was from somewhere else. And she was proud of the food she made.

It was not so much the quality, though she knew her food was more than good enough for someone of, as she might have put it, her station. In fact, she would not have wanted to make anything too fine. Fancy food was for those who wished to put themselves above others. And anyway someone with enough time to make such food must have lacked real employment, meaning a herd of cows to milk and a family to feed without frequent trips to the grocery store.

What Ann bragged about was the sheer quantity of food she turned out. And it was worth bragging about. Even after she and her husband stopped farming, after her daughters had left home (one, it is true, only moving next door), after there was any particular reason, she continued to freeze and bake and can enough to feed several farm families. Her daughters had to come back every June to help her harvest strawberries not because she needed help bending down but because she needed enough labor to pick the hundred or so pounds she insisted on getting. They had to return later in the summer for the raspberry harvest, which was of a similar size. She must have baked cookies several times a week because her house was full of them and she stopped by frequently with neatly wrapped plates of them for Sam and Will. A friend of ours once organized a bulk food buying club in the neighborhood and was somewhat taken aback to discover that the farm wives wanted not sacks of healthy grains but hundred pound bags of sugar and industrial packages of chocolate chips. It would not have surprised her so if she had been in Ann's house and seen the jars of cookies covering every surface not displaying a picture of her grandchildren.

But it is those 150 quarts of tomatoes that impressed me most. I don't know why Ann needed so many jars. By my calculations the Connors would have to have eaten tomato sauce at least twice a week to go through that much. Whatever inspired her--quite possibly hearing some other farm wife boast that she did 140 quarts—it was a remarkable undertaking. This year I made all of 18 quarts. That is slightly less than an eighth of Ann annual output. It required one large tub of tomatoes and two very late nights. I cannot imagine spending another two weeks peeling and cooking down a quarter ton of tomatoes, and I don't have cows to milk or cookies to bake.

Nor do I have Ann to remind me that I have, unsurprisingly, fallen a little short of her standards. But I do have those jars of tomatoes sitting in my basement and no doubt some day this month I will open one up

**This week's share: Beets, Cabbage, Carrots, Celery, Escarole, Lettuce, Mizuna, Onions, Hot peppers, Potatoes, Shallots, Tatsoi, Cilantro, Dill**

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**This week's news:** There is something almost satisfying about the weather's inability to resist responding to my comments last week about how good it had been this fall by becoming so miserably unpleasant. For the first time this season (at least, as far as I can remember at this point) we have standing water in the fields and real mud. I am hopeful that all the rain came too late to do much harm (beyond, that is wrecking pair after pair of socks). But I do recognize that making public statements about our oversupply of potatoes and carrots put those crops at risk, and I fear they may begin to rot in the ground soon if we do not harvest them all (though I also fear they will rot in the barn if we do harvest them). I am, for the moment, vaguely optimistic that the ground will be dry enough this Saturday that we will be able to get at least some of the potatoes harvested. Enough, anyway, to help fill your bags for the last three weeks of the season.

Yes, there are only three weeks left in the season. Well, I say only but it does not feel like that. We have reached the point in the season when we are just using up any energy we have left without generating any more. Each week, the tubs of vegetables seem to get a little heavier, the afternoons a little slower, our socks a little wetter. Even Jacob feels worn down, though that could also have something to do with having to look after his new puppy.

We are also using up any vegetables we have left. Once we have picked the last of some crop there will be no more of it until next year. Fortunately, we still have quite a few vegetables to use up, such as these escaroles, which turn out to like growing in a greenhouse. You may be thinking they liked it too much and wondering what to do with an escarole that size. You will find, however, that it takes up a lot less space when you have cooked it, which is what I recommend. You can use the inner, blanched leaves in a salad (I like them raw) but the outer leaves taste better (which is to say, good) cooked, particularly—you guessed it—sautéed in olive oil and garlic. Escarole has become one of my favorite cooking greens (and I like cooking greens).

Tatsoi is another tasty cooking green whose inner leaves you could use in a salad (it often appears in those rather sadly wilted grocery store salad mixes). It tastes quite like bok choy, but I prefer it. I find the texture (or mouth feel as the say in the industrial food realm) of the stems superior.

Mizuna, on the other hand, is a salad green that you can cook.

Half of you have a bag of shell beans. If you don't have them this week you should get some next week or the week after. I thought I had planted more than enough, but then they got weedy just when all our weeding equipment broke and after we had weeded them by hand we had to cover them up, inhibiting pollination, because the deer were mowing them down. I figured it would be better to have a smaller crop than none at all.

**Fruit share:** no fruit this week. Next week (which is the last week of the fruit share). apples and cider.

but probably somewhere between 20 minutes and an hour. You can add things