

THE ALLEGED FARM NEWS – 27 October 2005

After getting twenty weeks of fresh produce delivered from our farm, you do not, I trust, need me to tell you why saving farms and farmland matters—and matters not just to farmers and their neighbors, but to people all over the region. I hope, anyway, that every piece of our produce you eat serves, in some small measure, to remind you of the benefits of having working farms nearby. I hope too that those of you who have come out to the farm this season and seen our fields and woods and the countryside around us understand that keeping farmland in farming provides more than culinary rewards.

But while figuring out the benefits of preserving farmland is easy, figuring out how to actually preserve it is harder. You could, of course, buy a farm and work the land. I have been told that some people actually do this. But perhaps that is a little more of a commitment than you, quite sensibly, are willing to make. In which case you can simply support the people who were daft enough to undertake it. Which, of course, you did this year by joining our CSA. You may think of membership in the CSA as a good way to get local produce, but it is also an effective form of farmland preservation. Farms survive when they manage to sell their produce at a fair price. By joining a CSA you ensure that your food dollars go straight to a local farm rather than being dissipated in the vast distribution system that skims off most of the profits from produce sales in this country.

Of course, preserving farmland by supporting a farmer only works as long as the farmer works. But sometimes farmers stop farming—because they are old and tired or crippled or bankrupt or just because they thought of something better to do on a cold, rainy day. When that happens you need another way to save farmland. In Washington County, we are fortunate to have an organization dedicated to just that job. The Agricultural Stewardship Association (ASA) works with farmers and landowners to place conservation easements on good farmland. These easements ensure that the land thus protected will remain available for farming no matter who the farmer is. They also, by ensuring a good supply of fertile land, by reducing development pressure and property taxes and by maintaining this county's rural character help to make the lives of those farmers, whoever they are, easier.

And what does this have to do with you? Well, those potatoes in your bag were grown on land protected by a conservation easement held by ASA. And perhaps some day your great grandchildren will also get potatoes grown in those fields and they will be able to come out and enjoy a day on the farm and see red tailed hawks circling overhead and find newts by the stream and hear an owl hooting from the woodlot up on the hillside and know that the land will remain in farming even after their farmer is gone. If you want to know more about what ASA does or join you can call them at 692-7285 or go to Agstewardship.org.

And if you want to continue to support your farmer and make sure he is out in that field next year (and maybe for years to come), you can sign up for next season using the handy little form below.

The Alleged Farm CSA 2006 Season Sign-up Form

Name _____

Phone

Address _____

E-mail

I would like a 2006 season vegetable share for \$360. I would like to pick up my share from Flanigan Square (DOH employees only)/ Emma Willard / Riverview (DOH employees only) / Parker School / Environmental Advocates / Delmar / Guilderland / Schenectady / Clifton Park / Cambridge / Farm.

Signature _____

\$360 share price good only until 12/15/05. \$75 deposit due with sign-up. Balance due by 5/31/06 (or contact the farm to arrange an installment plan). Please make check payable to The Alleged Farm and send to The Alleged Farm, 209 Cooke Hollow Road, Valley Falls, NY 12185.

This week's share: Beets, Beet greens, Bok choy, Carrots, Eggplant, Lettuce, Onions, Peppers, Shallots, Potatoes, Winter squash, Parsley

This week's news: It is great to have a job that allows you to go outside on nice days and stay inside when the weather is terrible. And in a couple of weeks I will have just such a job. For now, though, we go out to the fields even on the most miserable days. And this Tuesday was pretty close to being as miserable as a day can get. Certainly as a day ought to get. The temperature dropped to that magical point at which precipitation vacillates between rain and snow. This nasty, sleety stuff finds its way through any openings in your clothing like rain and chills you like snow, and only does both more so when driven at you horizontally by a bitterly cold north wind. I must confess that our dedication to farming wavered just a tad as we knelt in the deep mud, pelted with rain, struggling to get our numb hands to work well enough to bunch beet greens. Quality and attractiveness started to seem less important than keeping all our fingers. Fortunately, the beet greens were still in good enough shape that the bunches came out looking good enough despite our divide allegiance. I dare say they are not as clean as they could be, but we were pulling them out of an extremely muddy field (the tractor, despite a large engine and five foot tall ag tires, had some trouble getting through it) and lacked the enthusiasm to spend too much extra time spraying them—and ourselves—with the hoses when we got back to the barn (though the well water, previously painfully cold, felt almost pleasantly warm on our hands, which is probably some warning sign of hypothermia). What we were enthusiastic about was drinking more hot cider. As you may recall, I wrote a whole essay about how wonderful our insulted water jug is. It is possible that over the course of Tuesday we came to feel more affection for the cheap coffee urn (or, in this case, cider urn) we kept plugged in in the corner of the packing room all day. I hope the water jug will forgive us. It is a just question of being in the right place at the right time. Such is the relative nature of love. I am fairly certain that come next August the coffee urn won't seem anywhere nearly so attractive. But our waterproof gear may. I don't generally offer product endorsements, but I will say that being clad head to toe in Helly Hansen waterproof clothing made working in the field on Tuesday if not actually fun then at least possible. Apparently those Norwegians know something about surviving in a harsh climate. Some day when I have gotten rich from farming I will buy enough rubberized overalls to outfit everyone who comes to our work days. At the moment I only have one extra pair, though I would be happy to lend them to the first person who decides to join us in the mud. And we will make sure there's enough hot cider to go around.

The rest of you can stay warm and dry in the kitchen sautéing the beet greens. Or cubing winter squash flesh, steaming it until it is only just tender and then sautéing it in butter and brown sugar. Or roasting chunks of beet, potato, carrot and onion. Or steaming carrots and beets until they are quite tender and pureeing them with some cream, a dash of nutmeg, a pinch of paprika and a little white wine. Or doing just about anything with the vegetables really. This may not be great picking weather, but I