



THE ALLEGED FARM NEWS

4 October 2007

Does it matter if you never see this farm? No, not really.

I doubt a visit to the farm would seriously change your life for the better or worse. I do not know of anybody experiencing any sort of epiphany here. Vegetables tend not to be profoundly inspirational. Nor farmers, for that matter. It is true that last year Kari, one of the farm crew, became briefly ecstatic after eating a purple carrot and Liz's former boss was somewhat shaken—and might still be, for all I know—by the sight of Mickey Boy. But Kari had a giddy streak long before she came to the farm and Tom DiNapoli's averse reaction to giant pigs was unsurprising given his suburban upbringing and outlook. While the farm may have allowed them the opportunity to express their natural tendencies in a new context, it did not alter either of them in any way. It is true that since then Kari has gone back to college and fallen in love and Tom has become New York State Comptroller, but we (and the carrots and the pig) take no credit for that.

Nor will coming to the farm affect your share. Every member gets pretty much the same vegetables over the course of the season whether or not we have met you. I confess that many members who have come out to the farm have left with extra produce—bunches of sunflowers and basil, pints of black currants, bags of canning tomatoes. But the next week their share is the same as everyone else's.

Your visit probably would not have much effect on the farm either. While it heartens us to have members turn up to meet us and see what we do, such visits do not lead us to change how we farm, except of course for the duration of the visit, during which we (gratefully) tend to do somewhat less work. Actually, that is not quite true. We often make the farm look a little neater for guests, throwing out some of the trash and mowing here and there, and spend more time baking quantities of cookies than normal. But nobody has come to the farm yet and caused us to change our methods. We are open to suggestions. Anyone who knows of a better way to keep weeds out of carrot beds or pull parsnips or put new plastic on the greenhouses should not hesitate to tell us. That just has not happened yet for whatever reason. Perhaps tact simply keeps you from telling someone else how to do his job. Many people do not react well to those sorts of helpful hints.

As for everything else on the farm—the plants and equipment and dirt, the bugs and rodents, the barns and streams—none of it pays us much heed though it sees us everyday. So it would be surprising if visitors made a considerable impression on the things. I suppose someone bent on mischief—or, for that mattered, determined to do a little tractor maintenance—could have a real effect on some of the infrastructure. It is not clear, however, just how much one can ever affect the plants, bugs, rodents and especially the dirt. True, we as a species are having a serious go at it. But it requires immense effort and quite some time—certainly more than most people have to spare during a brief visit to a vegetable farm. Even if all of you brought back all the compostable scraps from your shares—which you should feel free to do—the resultant pile of hummus would make little difference to more than a few square yards of the farm. We bring in dump truck loads of manure and bedding straw and barn

This week's share: Arugula, Carrots, Garlic, Husk cherries, Mustard, Onions, Peppers, Hot peppers, Shallots, Tatsoi, Tomatoes, Winter Squash, Basil, Cilantro

pack and old bales every year and get enough material to add a thin layer to a few beds. In order to cover all our vegetable ground in enough organic material to really alter our soil substantially for the better, we would need something on the order of 32,000 cubic yards of vegetable scraps. Just getting the pH on half our fields back into the acceptable range after years of corn crops required the application of 22 tons of lime. So while someone walking through our fields on a fall afternoon might leave footprints (if it ever rained), they would not make any lasting impression on the ground.

Of course, most Americans visiting France don't change the course of that country's history or warp its culture. And yet many people continue to consider it, with good cause, a reasonable place to visit. You eat well, see pretty things and learn about a way of life that while easily approachable is different from your own.

You could say the same thing about a trip to the farm for the Open House this Sunday. You will certainly eat well. CSA members, unsurprisingly, take a serious interest in cooking it shows in the food at the Open House dinner. The weather, for a change, promises to be freakishly pleasant. One of the maples trees by our houses has turned a lovely shade of red and every time I see it I wonder why the leaves are changing so early and then I have to remind myself that it really is October. So you will have a chance to see this part of the world at its best—the hay fields brilliant green, the corn golden, the leaves just turning, geese flying, combines making their stately progress through the fields, and our fall crops standing neatly in their rows waiting to be dug for you. You might even learn a little bit about how we grow the things you eat (assuming you eat the vegetables we send out in the shares) as you walk around the farm and chat with us. I won't claim that coming out to the farm on Sunday will equal a trip to France (we cannot, just for a start, offer anywhere nearly as many kinds of cheese). But I am perfectly happy to avow that if you will find enough to do and see and eat to make the journey worthwhile.

In the meantime, while you consider whether or not to make the trek, here are a few things to chew on. I recommend that you chew on the tomatoes fairly soon. At this time of year they do not last nearly as long. So enjoy them now with the basil and shallots (which, despite what some people say, do not taste just like onions).

The tatsoi is not much of a keeper either. Treat it as you would bok choy (that is, with enormous respect).

I had not meant to hand mustard again quite so soon but the mustard had other ideas. The second planting nearly caught up with the first. I guess it is nearly as confused by the weather as I am.

Speaking of the weather, I usually suggest at this time of year that you turn down the thermostat and eat a hot pepper to warm yourself, but I think for now I should instead point out that eating one will make you sweat, which helps to cool you down.

I hope to see many of you here on Sunday (though if you are trying now to decide between coming here and going to France all can say is bon voyage). And don't forget to bring your pie.