

THE ALLEGED FARM NEWS - 3 November 2005

This seems like the proper moment for accounting. Thus I offer the following figures from this growing season. Please note that while I have striven for the greatest possible accuracy, some of these figures have been rounded off any way I please and a couple may have been entirely invented for narrative purposes. In other words, I have conformed to the highest known corporate standards. Oh, and that pension plan I promised, you should probably stop counting on that. Sorry, but I had significant birthday party expenses.

I am pleased to report, however, that we were able to offer substantial health benefits this year. True, we did nothing to cover anyone's medical costs. Don't look to us if you want to be reimbursed for that visit to the cosmetic dentist or those spiffy new design eyeglass frames. That's simply not part of our plan. On the other hand, how many other health plans include so many vine ripe heirloom tomatoes or quite such a large assortment of lettuce varieties. Or the opportunity to visit a working farm and see your food growing, a trip which, it must be mentioned, offers you not only the chance for exercise but also does wonders for your mental health.

Here's something else for your mental health: a sort of vegetable math problem. In order to tell you how much we grew this year I could go through all my records and calculate precisely how many pounds of carrots or heads of bok choy or bunches of parsley we handed out. But that sounds far too tedious, especially at this point in the season when I am preparing for hibernation. And so instead I offer you the following formula which you can use to figure out our total production for yourself: take the contents of the 21 bags you received and multiply by 160, then add some extra for farmers' market, a little bit for the resort up the road, another little bit for what we ate, plus a bunch of stuff left over that the gleaners from Community Action are scheduled to retrieve this week for food pantries in the area. And voila, that's what we grew.

Sadly, all those vegetables you came up with in your answer above don't grow by themselves, though we keep asking them to. Our farm output required a certain amount of input. In the absence of a simple formula calculate what it took to grow the vegetables, I offer the following list.

25 pounds of rubber bands. 800 gallons of propane. 5 toner cartridges. 1 ton of bagged fertilizer. 7 yards of

compost. 18,000 feet of twine. 4000 large brown paper bags. 220 plastic tubs. 2 pairs of shoes. 20 pairs of socks. 4 cubic yards of potting soil. Half a million seeds. 15 cubic yards of gravel. 15 gallons of fish emulsion liquid fertilizer. 1700 pounds seed potatoes. 14 sheets of corrugated metal roofing. 75 gallons of tea (hot and cold). 1 MAP sensor for a GM box truck. 3 trips to the chiropractor. 20 bags of cement. 1 cell phone. 4 tires. 3 tape measures. 25 pounds of nails. 49,000 square feet of row cover. 10,000 feet of drip tape. 600 half-pint baskets. 3000 plastic produce bags. 1 hammer. 2 pints of blood (various types). 75 gallons of sweat (hot and cold). 6 boxes of laundry detergent. 250 gallons of diesel fuel. 2 tubes of lithium grease. 100 feet of metal flashing. 600 feet of 2 inch layflat hose. 330 feet of insulated electric fence wire. 2 cans of liquid wrench. 4 gallons of hot cider. 3 pairs of waterproof overalls. The goodwill of 160 CSA members.

Thank you multiplied by 160.

This week's share: Brussels sprouts, Cabbage, Carrots, Celery root, Garlic, Kale, Leeks, Lettuce, Onions, Potatoes, Radicchio, Turnips, Winter squash, Sage, Thyme

This week's news: This is the end.

No, I have not gone apocalyptic. There's no doubt we are making remarkable strides towards self-destruction, but I was just talking about the CSA season, which ends with this bag of produce.

Not that it feel entirely like the end of the season. When we finished packing the last bags yesterday afternoon and walked out of the barn into the sunshine and looked out at the fall foliage and the green fields around us we had a hard time convincing ourselves that another CSA year had just ended. It is supposed to come to a close in a dark and barren world as we struggle to pry the last few gnarled roots from the frozen soil, not on a good day for tanning. For a moment we contemplated continuing the season.

Don't worry, even though are still some crops out there we got over the feeling. Lifting these final bags into the truck helped with that. They are heavy. I don't know that we have the energy to pack the truck one more time. Perhaps more importantly, though, their heft reminded us just how much produce we have handed out since June 16. We have loaded something close to 20 tons on the truck in that time and that seems like enough. More than we promised. Maybe too much. I hope not. We do not mean to oppress anyone with produce.

What we do mean to do is feed people. And not just people who pay for our vegetables. For the past few years we have handed out just about everything we grew to our customers. This could be considered a sign of efficiency, but it is closer to being a sign of desperation. When you don't have extra crops you don't have any leeway when things go wrong. If the late season cabbages don't size up you either hand out puny cabbages or hand out less than you meant to—and possibly, in a bad year, less than you ought to. Growing too much food gives you the option to wait for a crop to mature or skip one that has gone past its peak. And having that option makes for a better night's sleep. Of course, it also means that you end up with a lot of extra vegetables, which sounds inefficient. And it would be if they went to waste. But they do not. When we have enough extra crops we call Fred at Community Action and he comes to the farm with his gang of volunteers and they round up the food we don't need for food pantries and soup kitchens in the area. This year I hope to give them somewhere around a ton of vegetables.

Fred and his volunteers will be taking a lot of kale. I have no idea what they think people will do with it. But I can think of a number of things you can do with yours. Sauté it quickly and finish it with a dash of vinegar. Or cook it more slowly with onions and garlic and bacon. Or put it in a soup. It goes well with beans and sausage and it would make a nice addition to a leek and potato soup.

Last weekend I came up with a new way to use celery root. I made celery root sorbet. I boiled the celery root until it was quite soft and pureed it with simple syrup and a little salt and froze it in my ice cream machine. I don't know that I recommend it for dessert, but I served it