

THE ALLEGED FARM NEWS - 30 June 2005

We are a nation, and increasingly a world, addicted to convenience.

This is hardly surprising. For a start, convenience is a lot easier to come by these days. It is cheaper, people are richer, and there are simply more ways to get it. While driving a car capable, if needs be, of fording a flooded river, you can call for dinner reservations at a Thai restaurant recommended by your onboard navigation system as your kids sit in the back watching a video. Or you can stay home, enjoy the air conditioning, microwave a frozen Thai entrée while your kids eat the delivered pizza in front of the TV, and check out the specs of the latest combat-ready SUVs on line.

But convenience is not just the product of a highly developed consumer culture. We may be perfecting it, but the search for convenience is natural. It is the desire to conserve energy that all creatures (with the exception of small boys, apparently) feel. It is the calculation a wolf makes when she decides that while taking down a full grown moose offers significant rewards, it is a hell of a lot easier to walk up the hill and catch a couple of rabbits and a ground squirrel. It is the choice a bear makes to feast on the endless delights of the garbage pile rather than trying to make a living one blueberry at a time.

Obviously, convenience isn't just about slacking off. If the object were merely to expend as little energy as possible, none of us would ever come out of our dens and we would eat our children when they got big or annoying enough. So we take the easy way, but only if the convenience saves us enough energy to offset the opportunity a more strenuous option offer. If rabbits or garbage, no matter how easy to come by, prove unfulfilling then we make the effort to go farther afield and maybe hunt a moose.

The tricky part is figuring out when to go with rabbits and when to look for moose. I have no idea how wolves decide, and I suppose they err from time to time—waste their energy trying to catch a moose when there were plenty of fat rabbits or have a meager meal of rabbit while a tired moose stumbles by. Whatever choice they make, though, is based, I would guess, on a short term assessment of risks and rewards and their needs and abilities. They are untroubled by the plight of their prey, unaware of their role in the ecosystem, unburdened by an understanding of the long term consequences of their options.

For what it is worth, people know more than wolves. But you would not guess it if you watched us in avid pursuit of convenience. For a start, we are prone to opt for conveniences that offer at best dubious advantages. It is possible you can heat up frozen scrambled eggs faster than you can make them from scratch, but not much, and the frozen version will taste worse and contain all sorts of ingredients added not to do you any good but to make frozen scrambled eggs taste marginally palatable. It is possible, too, that someday you will need the protection an eight thousand pound vehicle provides. But all that weight won't do you any good when your heavy car flips over going around a corner.

More seriously, even when we are correct about the short term advantages of convenience, we choose to ignore the long term costs, especially when they will be borne by someone else in another time or place. There's no question it is easier to leave a lot of lights on around the house or turn up the heat on a chilly night or buy tomatoes in January or drive to work alone or get your suits dry cleaned or pour the paint thinner down the drain or burn your trash or spray herbicide or strip mine or leave the PCBs on the bottom of the Hudson or shoot all the wolves.

It is easier, anyway, for now for us. We can, like the White House, keep pretending that we don't know what we are doing (of course, lots of the time they don't) and let someone else pay for our convenience. Of course, life will be a little less convenient for the people, such as our children, who get to deal with us having used all the fossil fuels and poisoned the water and damaged the ecosystems we have not simply eradicated and altered the climate of the planet in the name of making our lives easier.

This week's share: Arugula, Beets, Chard, Green garlic, Garlic scapes, Kohlrabi, Lettuce, Scallions, Basil, Cilantro, Parsley

This week's news: In a normal year (whatever that means) the rain we got yesterday from two thunderstorms would have created a small lake in the field behind the house that would have taken days to drain away. The crops we have there—kale, chard, beets, herbs—would have struggled to adapt to their suddenly aquatic environment and eventually given up. In fact, having seen that happen so often, we decided at the start of the year to leave the east half of the field (where the lake forms) unplanted. But this dry season all that empty ground started to look ridiculous and in the end we could not resist and tilled up the beds and filled them. It is possible we will regret that before the year ends, but for the moment the crops are thriving. And this time those two downpours may only make them do better. The ground was so dry it soaked up everything the clouds unleashed. Now the vegetables have water and heat and it is possible everything will be twice as large by tomorrow afternoon. Of course, that includes the weeds.

Not that the chard and kale needed much help. But the potatoes and onions will put this rain to good use, and I am hopeful that the cucumbers and squash will be inspired. They didn't look terrible, but what little water we could afford to send them through the drip irrigation lines clearly was not satisfying them. Not that I want them to do too well. As some of you may remember, last year's cucurbit crop was (too) plentiful and we have planted more this year. That may sound sadistic, but last year's crop was exceptional. If we have a normal year (whatever that means), the extra plants will produce only a reasonable quantity. All I want is for them to get to work producing some fruit so that we can hand it out to you.

In the meantime, here's some more kohlrabi and a lot of garlic scapes.

And some green garlic, which is just garlic pulled early in the season before it has fully formed. It tastes like garlic, but possibly even better. Peel away the outer skin on the bulb and use the cloves as you would grownup garlic. For instance, cook lots of it with the chard.

And some beets, which make a nice salad with the parsley (and/or basil) and scallions and a dressing of olive oil, vinegar and a little soy sauce. Obviously (or at least I hope it is obvious), when I say they make a nice salad I mean they make a nice salad once you have boiled them until just tender and peeled and sliced them. As it happens, though, you can make a salad with raw beets. Just shred them as you would carrots for a carrot salad. Actually, raw beets and carrots make a good salad together, especially if you put a lot of good Dijon mustard in the dressing.

As you may recall, I said we would switch to a later delivery schedule next week so that your bags do not sit around at the pickup sites too long. I am still trying to work out exactly when Jacob should set out (which determines when he gets to the various sites) so that he gets to the sites

Fruit share: strawberries from Hand Melon Farm, Easton, NY

Next week there will probably be no fruit, but blueberries and currants (and maybe raspberries) should be ripe by the 14th.