

THE ALLEGED FARM NEWS - 14 July 2005

If you ask locals whether they are from here they will tell you, "no, I am from White Creek" (the next town east) or "no, I was born in the north of town" or "no, I grew up on the other side of the hill" or "no, my bedroom was upstairs." Some people find such a specific sense of place annoyingly parochial. Easton or White Creek, one side of the hill or the other, what difference does it make? Surely such minute distinctions can only matter to people who know nothing of the wider world. But I like living in a place where here means something, where each spot has a remembered history and a particular identity. We are well on our way to turning everywhere into one endlessly bland suburban franchise land so that nobody will know any longer if they are in Tucson or Green Bay. If only for that reason, it's heartening to hear people from Salem talk about coming to Easton as though they had traveled to a foreign land.

I find this intense focus on the local less charming in a newspaper. There is much to be said for local reporting on local stories. Journalist who know the people and interests involved, who understand the context and culture, can (not will, but can) cut through the cant to show what is really happening. There is not a small town in America that would not benefit from knowledgeable, insightful local media coverage.

I do not, however, know who benefits from small town newspapers' preoccupation with finding a local angle to every major news story. At best, the effort creates little of substance. Some nearby approximate expert offers generally bland assessments. At worst (and it tends towards this), the local angle proves pathetically irrelevant and serves not to heighten our appreciation of what has occurred, but to diminish it.

Take, for example the *Post Star's* coverage of the recent London bombings. You might think a newspaper in this state would recognize that we need no local angle in order to understand what a terrorist attack on a major city means. You would be wrong. The *Post Star* did put the bombing story at the top of the front page, though the other two thirds of the page were given over to a general piece on dam safety. And closer inspection revealed that half the bombing story concerned a woman from Whitehall who was in London on Thursday. In London, but nowhere near the sites of the bombings.

The message, if I understand it correctly, is, sure a bunch of foreigners were blown into unrecognizable bits on their way to work, but thank god nobody from around here was harmed. And in case you missed that message, the *Post Star* ran a front page piece the next day entitled "Laundry kept area woman from terror zone" (a more accurate headline would have been "Area woman cleans clothes as people die"), in which the lucky laundress's mother suggested that this amounted to "divine intervention." "The Lord works" she added, "even through washing machines." The necessary corollary to this, the mother might be chagrined to contemplate, being that while god chose to save her daughter he must have had it in for the people who died and in that case worked through carefully placed explosives.

One might dismiss this sort of coverage as harmless stupidity. But harmless stupidity is my six and eight-year-old sons calling one another silly names. The Post Star using the murder of foreigners as a pretext to assail us with the laundry woes of a woman from the area is certainly dumb. But the suggestion that everything, no matter how grave, is really about our lives, no matter how banal, is also dangerous. It encourages precisely the arrogant, ignorant, petulant disregard of the rest of the world that makes people want to blow us up.

Local does matters. It matters when you talk to an Easton farmer about his birthplace. It matters when you want to understand what makes your city councils lust after reproduction gas street lamps. And it matters when you want good, fresh produce. But there are times we should forget about here and about us and peer over that hill, beyond the edge of town, beyond even White Creek and Whitehall, to see what is going on in the world.

This week's share: Cabbage, Endive, Garlic, Lettuce, Green red onions (red green onions?), Snap peas, Squash, Yukina Savoy, Anise Hysop, Basil

This week's news: We have experimented with onions a bit this year. These red green onions, which is to say, red onions picked while their tops are still growing, are the result of one of these tests. We planted somewhere between three and six seeds per cell in our greenhouse trays and transplanted the cells to the field house (the large, unheated greenhouse) quite close together. The outcome is not all I would have hoped for. They could have sized up more, especially given how large their tops are. But we should probably have given them a little more room, so I don't really blame them. And now that we have thinned out the patch, perhaps the others will get bigger. This trial has served to convince me that properly spaced onions could do extremely well in a field house, well enough perhaps to justify filling up a whole field house with them. It has also, of course, served to provide you with some onions, which might taste good sautéed with squash.

The anise hyssop is a bit of an experiment too. Jacob suggested we grow some. It has certainly done well and it has a nice flower. I am just not sure what you do with it. I believe Jacob said you could make a soothing tea with it.

The Yukina Savoy may well look like an experiment gone awry—like bok choy run through the wrong dryer cycle or spinach bulked up on steroids. Actually, it is a crinkly version of Tatsoi, one of those mild Asian mustard greens that taste good stir fried with lots of garlic and finished with a bit of soy sauce and sesame oil.

You could stir fry the cabbage too, as an experiment, but given the weather I would recommend coleslaw. In fact, no matter what the weather is like, I would recommend coleslaw. More specifically, I would recommend it with a dressing rather more like vinaigrette than it usually gets. You can amend the vinaigrette with a bit of mayonnaise or heavy cream or sour cream (or some combo of those) if you like creamy coleslaw or you can add soy sauce and sesame oil or a bit of cumin and paprika.

As for the endive, just cook it, by which, of course, I mean sauté it in olive oil with lots of garlic. It goes well with sausages.

Another experiment I promised to try this year is having more work days on the farm to see if that causes more of you to come to the farm. I doubt the words “work day” will actually entice too many of you, but I am willing to give it a try. So we will have farm work days (by which, naturally, I mean come to the farm to do an exciting, low impact chore for an hour or two, enjoy the scenery and meet the weird looking ducks day) on July 30 and August 27 (which coincides with the Washington Country Fair, an event no cow lover wants to miss). If you come at 10 am we will do some task like transplanting lettuce or weeding a bed of carrots or pulling garlic until lunch time, when you can sit down on a grassy spot and eat and admire your work (I will provide drinks and dessert). If anyone feels so inclined, we can do more work after lunch or you can look around the farm or go tubing on the Battenkill or go to the Ice Cream Man for excellent local ice cream, which you will deserve an extra scoop of for having worked so hard all morning. If the weather looks iffy or just downright nasty, call me before you set out and I will let you know if we are working or if we have a rain date (most likely the next day). I hope this experiment proves at least as successful of the green (I mean red) onions, not so much because I long for free labor as because I would like to meet more of you and have you see where your vegetables come from.

Fruit share: Raspberries grown by Ken Denberg, Natural Selection Farm, Cambridge, NY and currants grown on The Alleged Farm.