



THE ALLEGED FARM NEWS

10 August 2006

One of Liz's coworkers keeps sending her home with piles of old issues of *People*. I think she believes that Liz suffers from a lack of adequate exposure to popular culture due to my grumpy Luddite ways and our strange insistence on living so far from any shopping malls and hopes that these sporadic infusions of out of date movie star gossip will in some way help. I also begin to suspect that she has figured out that this is the easiest way to do her recycling and constantly expect Liz to start turning up with bins of soda bottles and cereal boxes. Actually, come to think of it, those might be preferable. We could probably come up with uses for them, like storing interesting bugs or starting bonfires. On the other hand, they would probably teach us little or nothing about the difficult lives of celebrities or the latest sensational crimes.

Looking through *People* (reading is not a word that applies) does, I confess, raise a number of interesting questions. For instance, has Lindsay Lohan's partying gone out of control or does the camera just add a couple of points to your blood alcohol level? Can Brad and Angelina save every child in Africa and will they feel differently about all those adoptions once they see the bills for private school tuition? Will Paris Hilton be able to snag a rich husband so she does not have to struggle by on her meager hotel fortune? Is Jessica Simpson a transvestite or should she just consider legal action against her plastic surgeon? And as for Charlie Sheen and Beyonce and Jennifer Connelly and Matthew McConaughey and Jennifer Lopez and Jamie Foxx and Tom Cruise and, well, all the rest of them, why does anyone give a damn where they spent their vacations or what their publicists want to tell us about their dating habits or who they were married to for three months or how hard it is for them to be so beautiful and so completely and utterly and vapidly self-absorbed?

Despite the concerns of Liz's coworker, I do not have a blanket objection to the modern world—though it certainly has a lot to answer for. I am a tractor fan (thank god I don't have to use the donkeys to pull the plow). I write this newsletter on a computer. I take trips in airplanes. I take antibiotics. I have a credit card. I watch movies.

Nor do I necessarily object to popular culture. It depends what one means by popular culture. I am not particularly fond of crowds or group behavior (I balk at audience participation; even clapping along to music often strikes me as a form of submission). But I do not disdain movies or books or songs or designs or foods simply because they appeal to large numbers of people. I like French fries and there may be nothing more popular or more central to our culture (what else combines salt, fat, marketing and profit so perfectly?).

On the other hand, while I do care about the quality of the French fries I eat and have opinions about which varieties of potatoes and kinds of fat make the best one, I have no interest in knowing what Kate Hudson or Orlando Bloom thinks of them. To be fair, either one of them might be a keen student of French fries, capable of talking knowledgeably at some length about ideal French fry dimensions or the relative merits of various kinds of catsup. But we would be unlikely to hear about that—unless someone determined that it

This week's share: Beets, Carrots, Cucumbers, Eggplant, Escarole, Lettuce, Onion, Peppers, Hot peppers, Squash, Tomatoes, Parsley

served to further their careers, in which case one would be hard pressed to trust the information. More likely, we would be told whom they were seen eating fries with or offered some cute reminiscence featuring French fries designed to prove that despite the fact they earn a lifetime's wages to appear in a single film they still possess the common touch.

There may actually be real people living inside the bodies of celebrities, but if so you are unlikely ever to see them. What you get are products, carefully shaped, tested and marketed amalgams of natural and artificial ingredients blended in some unsightly industrial process to create irresistibly sweet concoctions without any nutritional value. And if those products and strange social lives are what we mean by popular culture—that is certainly what *People* has in mind—then, yes, I object. It bears as much resemblance to a legitimate expression of a specific time and place as a jar of Cheez Whiz bears to a wheel of Ducket's Caerphilly (which, for those of you who care about cheese, is well worth tracking down; it may be the best cheese I have ever eaten and I have eaten far too much cheese).

As an antidote to popular culture I recommend agriculture. In particular, I recommend you come to the farm and see it for yourself (thank you to those of you who came out last Saturday and weeded the carrots). That way there's absolutely nothing getting between you and the food you eat. You can pick a cherry tomato straight off the vine or pluck your own arugula leaves from the greenhouse. Which is why you will want to note now that the next work day is on Sunday, September 17 starting at noon.

In the meantime, here's the next best thing: a bag of fresh vegetables. For all I know, they lead wild lives. The eggplant is a heartbreaker. The hot peppers have substance abuse issues. The beets are battling unsightly weight gain. The parsley is getting over the bitter end of a relationship. The carrots struggle bravely with the effects of a tough childhood. Representatives for the onions and peppers say they are just friends. The tomatoes want to reveal their sensitive side. Does it matter? Not as long as they taste good. And they do. Even the escarole. This is, I recognize, a controversial opinion, but I am sticking to it. What is more, I believe many of you will come to agree with me if you steam it, squeeze out the moisture and sauté it with garlic and onion and perhaps a bit of hot pepper and a dash of vinegar. Then you will realize that it is one of the best cooking greens, good hot or cold, an excellent topping for pizza, and perfect with grilled sausages. Plus, despite its temperamental nature, it looks fabulous and 73% of respondents to our latest poll say they wish Lindsay Lohan would spend more time with an escarole instead of running around with all those weeds.

A note to those of you who pick up at Environmental Advocates: The folks at EA request that you please pick up your bag by 5 pm on Thursday or 1 pm on Friday. If you have any problems with this schedule (or with the site) please let me know.