

THE ALLEGED FARM NEWS - 18 August 2005

While in the Easton Library recently I discovered a fascinating book compiled entirely by rural Appalachian children during the 1960s, edited by their teacher and published in 1972 as The Foxfire Book. These children visited and recorded the stories of elderly men and women whom had lived the majority of their lives off the land; growing food, building stone and log homes, making soap, moonshining and living in an intimate fashion with the natural world. I was immediately interested in these mountain folks and the knowledge they had shared with these high school children nearly forty years ago. However I soon began to wonder, how much of this wisdom is lost when these stories go untold as those that posses it pass on. The resourcefulness and perseverance of these people hold invaluable lessons to all of us that are living on this earth.

I don't pretend to live a self-sufficient life as many of the people in this book did however through agriculture I am learning a trade that brings me much closer to the source of my nourishment than I ever was before. The teachers in my life have been an eclectic group and they have reached me through many channels such as music, friendships, lectures, literature and walks in the woods. Though two of the most important teachers (excluding my mother, father and girlfriend) have been the farmers I have worked for in the past three growing seasons. They have helped teach me how to grow and preserve food, enjoy the weather, eat well, butcher a deer, build a greenhouse, hate the weather, use a tractor, work hard and sleep even harder. In short they have guided me in the process of learning a trade and a way of life that seems to be disappearing, certainly among those in my generation.

I feel that it is my responsibility to, some day, take the knowledge and skills I am learning and pass them on to future farmers. By doing so, I will help continue the process of learning from an actual farmer, doing the work and not trying to imagine doing it by reading a book. This seems to be truly sustainable agriculture, a process that not only leaves the land in excellent shape but also breeds new farmers to be the stewards of that land. I can only hope that by the time I own a farm there will be enough young people that have a passion for growing food and an earnest desire to do so in the future. It would be a sad day if there were so few farmers left that people had to scramble to the library in order to find out how to raise the fertility in a field or when the best time to plant potatoes is. Though, it

often doesn't seem that unlikely in a nation that has more prisoners than farmers.

The passing down of wisdom from teacher to pupil has probably been around since intelligent life forms have inhabited this planet. Human beings have a distinct advantage in communicating information due to the fact that we can read and write. The Foxfire Book is a great example of a text that preserves the knowledge of skilled woods people, a breed that is vanishing quickly. This being so, the most natural way to save something is by doing the work day to day with a person that has experienced it, often no words need to be exchanged.

-Jacob

Diaz

This week's share: Cherry, Heirloom and Hybrid Tomatoes, Squash, Cucumbers, Cabbage, Carrots, Onion, Garlic, Dill, Cilantro, Potatoes, Pepper and Chili Pepper

This week's news: Thomas isn't just taking a break from writing the newsletter this week; he is taking a break from all the farm tasks he normally immerses himself in. So, if there is anything lacking in your share, I am to blame. The lettuce and other leafy greens are missing from everyone's bag but they are growing and unless something disastrous happens, they'll appear again in a few weeks. The summer heat is beginning to fade, hopefully, so lettuce germination has increased and other cool weather crops like kale, Asian greens, broccoli and cabbage should be happier as well.

In the meantime many of the summer crops are doing quite well. The tomatoes for instance are really starting to produce; the trick for us now is to keep them healthy enough to fight off disease and to continue to crank out fruit. Ben, Andrew and I spent four hours on Tuesday picking all the tomatoes and by the end I was literally having an allergic reaction to them. My arms were green and my hands black from the resins of the plants, but that was normal. However I had an incredible itch on my stomach which it was swollen with red bumps. I soon realized that by swimming in these jungle plants all morning my stomach had become really agitated by the little hairs on the stems and leaves. At that point I knew it was time to leave the tomato field for a while.

Everyone should have red tomatoes in their bag which are the basic hybrid varieties. They are reliable producers and still very tasty because they ripen evenly on the vine before we pick them and are delivered fresh to you. There is also an assortment of colored tomatoes, most of which are older varieties that have survived due to their extraordinary taste, hence the term heirlooms. These tomatoes are not necessarily more difficult to grow but are more prone to disease, bruises and uneven ripening. Due to this there are some that we handed out that are not fully ripe and have a greenish tinge to them, just let them sit on the counter until they gain color and soften up. Don't be fooled by the three varieties that are green when fully ripened. As a general rule if they feel soft they are good to eat, really good to eat. You should have nearly all the ingredients for a colorful fresh salsa including the wonderful smelling cilantro (in the bunch with dill). The third category of tomatoes may be the real prize winner, the orange cherries; they are so sweet and juicy that I bet even children will eat them.

The first planting of squash and cucumber plants are starting to die, this may be good or bad news to you depending on how much you like these cucurbits. However it is certainly good news to those of us that pick them three times a week. In fact I may just plow them under before Thomas gets back, either way there will be more next week, don't worry. The potatoes will not be in short supply even though the early varieties have withered; they produced plenty of spuds before then. I myself could never feel overwhelmed by potatoes because I eat them like it is my job, in fact this winter it probably will be a voluntary position that I take up. If you

Fruit share: There is no fruit share this week