

THE ALLEGED FARM NEWS - 4 August 2005

Last year the town of Greenwich installed solar powered lights along a new stretch of sidewalk that runs from the edge of the village out to the roundabout where Route 40 turns north off Route 29. I am hard pressed to imagine that many people will avail themselves of this pedestrian opportunity, especially at night. People still walk around the village even though the grocery, hardware and appliance shops have all shut. But I rarely see anybody going to the increasing number of shops outside the village by foot. Still, it is nice to see a town invest in any sidewalk at all, no matter how pointless, and I was particularly heartened by the presence of the solar powered lights. If a town like Greenwich can embrace alternative energy sources, perhaps there's more hope of us coming to our senses about fossil fuels than a cursory glance around the SUV-strewn highways and parking lots of America would lead one to fear.

Such, anyway, was my rosy take on the matter. And then the good people of Greenwich passed around a petition and several hundred of them signed on to the sentiment that the solar lights, because they are ugly, should go. And the Town Supervisor, while admitting grudgingly that the entirely state funded project was a good deal for Greenwich (I have yet to come across the Supervisor of a small rural town quite ornery enough to totally disparage a \$400,000 state grant), proclaimed that he had really hoped to install some reproduction gas lamps.

It's wonderful to hear that the Supervisor and his constituents are moved by aesthetic concerns. One cannot help wondering, however, if they have noticed that it's a little late to make a stink over aesthetics after you have willingly granted people the right to pave over the open fields of your town and erect random squat cinderblock stores of an ugliness only a developer with his eye on the bottom line could admire. It's odd to believe that reproduction gas lamps could atone for the haphazard commercial development of farmland.

The street lamps Greenwich got have four foot square solar panels atop utilitarian steel poles. From an angle as you drive out of Greenwich the row of panels, pointed hopefully towards the southern sky, looks somewhat like a sort of airborne rampart, a Christo project blown in from distant parts. I doubt the lights will win many design awards—certainly not for historic restoration—but there's something rather cheerily optimistic about them, especially on a grey winter day, and there's no question that in their orderly, functional way, they present a prettier scene than the half dead K-mart mall behind its cracked parking lot or the Dunkin Donuts in front of the tractor store or the brightly lit auto parts store that replaced a handsome Greek revival house. And of course there are no wires strung between the solar lights.

I have seen old pictures of Greenwich's Main Street. It was rather grander seventy-five years ago. The big hotel and the opera

house are gone and most of the new buildings, including the post office (when will the postal service accept its responsibility to construct handsome buildings?) are at best undistinguished and add nothing to the streetscape. But what made old Greenwich particularly attractive were the big trees along Main Street, trees long since removed to make way for the tangle of power and phone lines that serve now as the basic decoration of urban public space.

Perhaps we have just gotten used to the ugliness of our fossil fuel infrastructure: the power lines and coal mines and gas stations. But the recent spate of criticism aimed at the unsightliness of wind and solar power installations strikes me as perverse. No doubt there are lovelier sights than a wind turbine or a photovoltaic array. Surely, though, their appearance is less noxious than a strip mine, a coal-fired generator, smog, an oil spill or children with asthma. We are not going to get energy without any costs, even if we get it from the sun and the wind. But having to look at some solar lamps along a commercial stretch of Route 29 seems like a small enough price to pay for a little clean energy.

This week's share: Cabbage, Carrots, Cucumbers, Eggplant, Walla walla onion, Pepper, Hot pepper, Potatoes, Squash, Tomatoes, Oregano, Papalo

This week's news: I was starting to think we would be the first CSA to go a whole season without distributing any tomatoes. Not that this was my plan, though if it had been back in February I could have saved us a lot of bother. No starting a thousand plants, tending to them in the greenhouse, potting them on, transplanting them to the field, fertilizing them, cultivating them, mulching them and trellising them. We would have had a lot of free time to do something really fun—like weeding. But no, we went ahead and did all that work to get a tomato crop. And nothing happened. Well, not nothing. We have eleven rows of tomato plants out in the field growing quite nicely, and, thanks to a lot of hay mulch, without too many weeds. We just don't have a lot of ripe tomatoes. I confess I knew from the start that our crop would ripen later this year for the simple reason that we planted all our tomatoes outside. The high tunnels needed a rest (more of a rest, it turns out, than we thought; something has gone wrong with the soil, which, despite having been amended over the years with a lot of compost and hay mulch, is poorly textured and has little moisture-holding capacity). And I knew that the crop would come even later than I hoped when we had to hold off transplanting the tomatoes until the end of May because of repeated late frosts. It did not, however, occur to me that later would mean the crop just starting to ripen at the beginning of August. Now I have to hope for a warm fall to keep the plants going as long as possible. Given the current weather, a warm fall seems entirely possible.

Given the current weather, it seems entirely possible as well that nobody wants to turn on an oven. Fortunately, you can eat many of these vegetables raw. You could grate some of the carrots into a coleslaw and make a cucumber salad with a little finely diced hot pepper (the hot pepper is in the bag with the tomatoes). You could even eat the squash raw, but I don't recommend it. Not because you cannot do it but because squash tastes a lot better cooked. So make a fire outside and grill the squash, the eggplant and the onion. Then mix up some olive oil, vinegar, garlic, salt pepper and herbs (oregano, for instance) and pour it over the grilled vegetables and stick the marinating vegetables in the refrigerator over night. The next day you can have cooked vegetables that are tasty and cold.

If you are lucky enough to have good air conditioning—really good air conditioning—then you can ignore the foregoing suggestions and cook everything. You could make a big pot of steaming hot vegetable soup and sit by the window enjoying the smell and the view of the rest of us pulling ourselves slowly along through the thick air. Of course, if we happen to see you sitting there with your bowl of soup we may decide to forget about eating our vegetables and just throw them at you. If we can work up the energy.

I have been experimenting with new ways to use our produce that might

Fruit share: blueberries grown by Ken Denberg, Natural Selection Farm, Cambridge, NY