



THE ALLEGED FARM NEWS

21 September 2006

Kari, one of my workers, would rather get a paper cut than eat spicy food. It is not that she has a particular fondness for paper cuts. In fact, she feels about them more or less the same way the rest of us do. I would like to think, however, that her views on hot food are a tad extreme. Perhaps, though, it is mine that are out of the mainstream. After all, I not only enjoy hot peppers but go around telling people that habanero peppers taste good.

Not that I really expect a lot of people to believe me. I recognize that Northern European tastes continue to predominate in this country (Kari's family is Irish and Norwegian, cultures less than famous for the spiciness of their cooking). This culinary heritage, which leads to an overuse of cinnamon and a diet heavy on potatoes (they account for nearly a third of the per capita vegetable consumption in the U.S.), also causes many Americans to take a leery approach to anything remotely like a hot pepper. At market many people actually shy away from the hot peppers when they see them as though the peppers might leap off the table and pursue them through downtown Glens Falls threatening to assault their taste buds.

There is, however, some reason to think that things are getting better for hot peppers in this country. For a start, we have discovered Mexican cooking. It is odd it took us so long. After all, they have been down there cooking for an awfully long time. And they use cinnamon. But better late than never, and now this country is awash in bottled salsa and packaged corn chips and tortillas wrapped around chicken salad. All right, so maybe we have not exactly embraced authentic Mexican cooking—I don't see a lot of people tucking into platters of garlicky fried grasshoppers or stewed corn fungus. But we have learned to like at least a little heat in our food. If we want a bottle of hot sauce now Tabasco is not the only choice. And a good thing, that, since Tabasco has a harsh chemical burn that makes one think more of paint stripper than of food.

This being the land of shopping, not only do now we have a range of hot sauces to choose amongst, we have whole stores dedicated to hot sauce. Why you need a whole store for hot sauce I do not know. How much hot sauce does anyone actually buy? You might as well open a shop that sells only erasers. As for the vast array of sauces themselves, most of them seem to have been designed solely to challenge the resolve of masochistic culinary hennen. They tend to have names The New York Times would coyly point out it could not print and a unidimensional heat intended not so much to complement food as to obliterate the taste of it.

That is a shame because a hot sauce made carefully using the right peppers, even a tear-inducingly hot one, has a deliciously positive effect on many dishes. Not all dishes, to be sure. I know people who keep a bottle of hot sauce on the table at all times just in case they feel a sudden urge to splash a bit on their cereal or cherry pie. I don't see anything wrong with putting the hot sauce away every now and then, with waiting for the right dish, such as chicken and rice or chili.

As for the right pepper, scientific experiments indicate that it would be the habanero. This is in part because it is the most cost effective heat delivery system. I single habanero

This week's share: Beans, Cabbage, Carrots, Bogatyr garlic, Onions, Hot peppers (ancho, habanero and another), Nicola potatoes, Tomatoes, Cilantro, Lemon grass

can keep you warm all winter. But there is more to the habanero than heat (though there can be a lot of heat in one of these peppers: at their hottest they are twenty-five times as potent as a jalapeno). Habaneros also taste good. I am not recommending that you pick yours up (it is the tiny red, slightly crinkled one) and take a bite, at least not until you have made certain that there's an ambulance available. But you could try adding it (or part of it) to a dish. A Thai soup, for instance, with good chicken broth, lots of garlic, lemon grass, cilantro. A cup of that will help you get over the cold wet fall weather in a hurry.

Sadly it cannot do the same for the summer crops in the fields, otherwise we would be out there right now spooning some Dtom Jiw Gai onto the tomatoes, eggplants and cucumbers. It is a little late anyway. They are more or less dead already. Perhaps it is just as well. We were getting to that point in the year when we start to resent some of the vegetables. They are so needy. They demand to be picked all the time. You keep going out week after week, but by early September you are starting to dream about hooking up the bush hog and mowing them down. And then the nights get cold and there's thick fog each morning and the summer crops die of their own accord and you wonder why they had to go so fast.

It feels like everything keeled over sooner than normal this year. Certainly the nights got cold early. We had our first frost advisory a week and a half ago (there was frost in Salem, two towns north of us). Perhaps things ended a little more suddenly this year because the plants were not as healthy this summer as they would have been in a dry year. But I think I feel this way at this time every year. And I would feel a lot worse if we had simply run out of vegetables. As always there is still quite a lot out there to pick. We have not even finished harvesting the onions yet and we have only dug 10 of the 30 rows of potatoes (some of those 10 thanks to the help of the people who came out to the farm last Sunday).

Other than signaling the end of tomato season, the cold weather means it must be time for the fall open house. See the flyer for details. It tells you everything you need to know about the event. Well, almost everything. It does not mention the pie contest. So I will. Any member is eligible to enter a pie into the contest to be judged by the farm crew. The maker of the best pie will win a prize and eternal glory—or at least a mention in a newsletter, which is the next best thing. For the purposes of the competition a pie will simply be defined as a crust with a filling. As for the kind of crust or the nature of the filling, that is up to you. It could be apples in a classic flaky crust. Or cheesecake in a graham cracker crust. Or pastry cream and berries in puff pastry. Or a Jamaican beef patty served with a little habanero hot sauce.

One quick note on beans. Some of you have normal green beans. Some of you have shell beans (in red and white or tan pods). If you have shell beans, take the beans out of the pods and cook them as you would dried beans (e.g., in water with lots of garlic and a little tomato), but for less time.

Fruit share (in separate bag) : Stanley plums and Macintosh apples from Borden