



THE ALLEGED FARM NEWS

28 September 2006

I do not expect to have much to say in the newsletter for the next few weeks. Well, that is not quite true. I may have enough obstreperous opinions, silly jokes and vague cooking tips to fill two sides of a page. What I won't have is a lot of time to write them down.

Every year I tell my workers that come late September farming gets a lot easier. The last few trays of seedlings have been put out. The weeds have slowed their assault and most of the nasty bugs have disappeared. A lot of clean up tasks remain—gathering up the plastic mulch, pulling out tomato stakes, washing greenhouse supplies, sorting onions and shallots. But the daunting list of chores on the board in the packing room—a list that for four months only ever seemed to grow longer—dwindles each week, leaving at last a short list of random and less than essential building projects.

Naturally, we still have crops to pick. There are another five weeks of CSA deliveries and farmers' market goes through the Saturday before Thanksgiving. But even picking gets easier in the fall. The zucchini, with their scratchy stems and their relentless production, are dead. The tomatoes and beans are petering out. The garlic and winter squash are already in the barn. And the vegetables still to be picked are so healthy and abundant that gathering them is almost a pleasure. We can mow down a block of greens such as the mustards in this week's share without worrying about weeds or aphids and there are more radishes than we can use.

At least, that is the story I tell my workers each year. And it helps boost our spirits to think of that time of ease and plenty as we struggle through long, hot summer days of weeding and picking. Of course, the late season never turns out to be quite as effortless as I promise. For a start, we are usually still trying to catch up with all the jobs we failed to get to during the busy months. There are, for instance, still five beds of carrots to be weeded and another 1200 lettuce seedlings we really ought to put in somewhere. The clean up always proves harder than it sounds. Pulling up a strip of plastic mulch may sound simple, but in a weedy field it is like trying to extract a wad of chewing gum from someone's hair. And just about every year we end up doing the late season work with fewer people.

Perhaps some year farming in the fall really will be as relaxing as I like to claim in June. But not this year. We have to dig up a lot of carrots and potatoes, pick a lot of shell beans, plant a lot of garlic, pull up a lot of plastic (more than two miles) before we start to take it easy. Still, we are not too busy now for me to find time to write a newsletter. There is less to do now than there was a month ago (if farming does not get easy at the end of September, it does at least get easier), and I managed to write the newsletter then.

The problem, instead, is that I believe my stories about farming becoming a tranquil pastime at the end of the season. You might think I would know better than to listen to myself. Apparently you would be wrong. I must at some point this spring have thought I would have a lot of free time in October. I don't know how else to explain why I signed up to cook fancy fundraiser meals three weekends in a row in October.

This week's share: Beans, Carrots, Eggplant, German Porcelain garlic, Mustard greens, Onion, Peppers, Hot peppers, Russian Banana fingerling potatoes, Pink Beauty radishes, Acorn winter squash, Purple basil, Cilantro

Whatever the reason, though, I did sign up. I don't really regret it. I am raising money for two good causes. But it may cut into my leisure time. In other words, I may have to stay up late on Wednesday nights cooking instead of writing.

I hasten to point out that if this distresses you there is something you can do about it. It's a little late to get me out of my cooking duties this year, but you could save me from them next year by giving a lot of money to the Robert C. Parker School and the Agricultural Stewardship Association (ASA). If they get enough donations from other sources they won't need my help any more and I will be free to loiter about in the fields all October.

Perhaps, though, that does not sound like a good enough reason to give generously to these two institutions. In which case you could choose instead to support them because they deserve it. The Parker School offers kids (including Sam and Will) a place to learn to love learning and to develop the ability to think for themselves—something this country needs a lot more of these days. ASA is a land trust that works with farmers and other property owners to preserve the agricultural land base through conservation easements (including 120 acres of our farm)—which is another thing this country could use a lot more of these days. But why take my word for it? Visit their websites: RCParker.org and Agstewardship.org. You could also come to the opening of ASA's annual landscape show on October 7 or drop in on Parker's fall festival on October 14.

Even if you decide for some reason to skip those events, I trust you are planning on coming to the farm this Sunday for our open house. Those of you so inclined can come between 2 and 5 pm and join others in a little gentle farm work (if it is wet we can still sit in the barn and clean onions). You are of course free to pass up on that fabulous offer and come later to tour the farm, eat dinner, taste garlic varieties, make cider and hot sauce and have your pie judged by the farm crew. There are directions to the farm on the bright green flyer you got last week. If you cannot find it, let me know and I will tell you how to get here. And here are some tasty vegetables with which to make a fabulous dish to bring to the open house—a garlicky bean and potato salad for instance, or perhaps a roast winter squash and carrot puree with ginger, or soba noodles with mustard greens and pickled radish, or a spicy eggplant and pepper caponata. Or, of course, a prize winning vegetable pie.

I look forward to seeing you—and your pie—on Sunday.

Fruit share: no fruit this week. More orchard fruit next week.