Notes from the Field:
NOFA Conference

Over the weekend of the 14th and 15th of August, despite the rain and wind brought up the coast by the remnants of two big storms, the WFCF CSA staff and volunteers spent time camping at the Northeast Organic Farmers’ Association summer conference at Hampshire College in Amherst, Massachusetts. This conference, which brings together farmers, gardeners, researchers, and homesteaders from across the northeast, is one of our great annual opportunities to network with other like-minded folks and learn more about other farming and food system efforts in our region. It gives us a chance to make connections with other organizations for mutual support, further our individual learning goals, and visit other farms to learn valuable techniques to improve our farm. We also come away inspired and moved by speakers like Vandana Shiva, a physicist and activist from India who founded a national movement “to protect the diversity and integrity of living resources, especially native seeds,” according to her website.

As you might expect, each member of our crew took something a little different away from the weekend. Ryan spent some time investigating the latest research into whole-farm planning for pest, disease, and fertility management. Meryl also studied farm planning from a holistic point of view, and was inspired by urban agriculture projects like the South Side Community Land Trust in Providence, Rhode Island. Ben, Sarah, and Marla checked out a little of everything, from dairy goats to tractors to farm tours to composting.

As for me, I was caught in my annual quandary: go to one workshop after another and soak up all the amazing knowledge that these folks have accumulated over the past year, or sit outside under the tree in the courtyard and learn (perhaps an equal amount) from the friends who happen by? In the end, I did both, as I always do. Food Bank Farm in Hadley, Massachusetts, gave an excellent tour that focused on their CSA distribution, seeding, and weed management strategies. Bruce and Jenny from Appleton CSA in Ipswich gave a great overview of tractor engines that helped me grasp the big picture about all the maintenance and repairs we’ve been doing this season (and gave me an easy way to explain the difference between a gas engine and a diesel). Julie Rawson from Many Hands CSA in Barre described some of what she’s learned from 25 years of farming in community about timing, goal setting, when to give a crop up for lost, and working with the strengths of each individual on the farm.

And I did plenty of sitting under the tree talking with old and new friends about crop varieties, equipment, distribution strategies, where everyone plans to end up next season if they are moving around, and just how everyone is doing. Farming is an occupation that engages us all physically, intellectually and spiritually, and the chance to connect with other folks to talk about some of the joys and woes of this engagement is one of the most important aspects of the conference for me. As the group of farmers that I apprenticed with and under get older, we also share the challenges of farming with a family, and Jonah enjoyed seeing goats, sheep, horses, dogs, and cows as well as other farm kids throughout the weekend.

Most of all, I came away from the weekend with a renewed sense of gratitude that this is the way I am able to make a living, despite the challenges and heartaches that come along with it. I am continually inspired by the enthusiasm and passion of the younger folks and by the wisdom and strength of the older ones. Thanks to all of you for helping to make it possible!

—Amanda, for the Farm Crew
2005 CFO Board of Directors

The CFO Board of Directors has identified the types of skills, experience and knowledge our 2005 Board needs to successfully address the challenges ahead of us. This year, the CFO Board of Directors has identified individuals with development (fund raising) and publicity expertise to be of particular importance. We are also looking for people who have knowledge about farmland preservation, community food security, or sustainable agriculture. Board directors commit to attending monthly board meetings and participating in committee work as needed between board meetings. They join a congenial group of people making important decisions that guide the future of CFO. If you, or someone you know, has skills in these areas, time to commit to our work, and interest in a board position, please contact the Nominating Committee at Board@communityfarms.org.

Ratatouille

1 Tbsp olive oil
1 onion, diced
1 clove garlic, minced
1 eggplant, diced
1 summer squash, diced
1 green pepper, diced
several pitted, halved, black ripe or kalamata olives
1 14-oz can chopped stewed tomatoes
splash red wine
dash cinnamon
big dash cumin (add some whole cumin seeds!)
salt and black pepper

Heat oil and saute onion. Add garlic, eggplant, squash, and green pepper and saute a bit more. Then add other ingredients and cook low, covered, until very soft.

Ratatouille is one of those dishes that tastes better heated up the next day. Try tossing peeled raw shrimp (fresh or thawed) in the hot ratatouille until pink and cooked. Sprinkle liberally with crumbled feta cheese and serve over pasta, quinoa, or another grain.

Eggplant Meatballs

from A Book of Middle Eastern Food by Claudia Roden

2 lbs. peeled eggplant
salt
oil
2 onions, chopped
1 lb. beef, lamb, or veal, ground
2 oz. parmesan or cheddar cheese, grated (1/2 cup)
2 large eggs, beaten
black pepper
flour

Slice eggplant. Sprinkle with salt and drain in a colander for at least ½ hour. Fry the eggplant in a little oil until soft and drain on paper towels. Fry the chopped onions until soft and golden.

Squash the meat with a wooden spoon and knead it to a smooth paste. Chop the eggplant finely and mix it with the meat. Add the cheese, onions, and beaten eggs. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Mix well.

Shape the mixture into walnut-sized balls. Roll them in flour and fry or saute them in oil gently over very low heat so that they are well cooked inside before they become too brown on the surface.

These meatballs can be eaten hot with potatoes or rice, or cold with a salad.

We welcome your recipes, farm experiences, ideas! Please send newsletter submissions to newsletter@communityfarms.org.

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Community Farms Outreach is a nonprofit organization dedicated to farmland preservation, hunger relief, and education.