Notes from the Field: The Transition

You can feel it in the air. The sunlight slants ever so slightly towards the south. The nights are almost chilly, good weather for sleeping. We wear sweaters and drink hot coffee until the sun warms us up in mid-morning. The days are glorious, sun-drenched, and very slightly cool. The combination of summer and fall crops on the distribution table makes this time of year “the advertisement for being in a CSA,” as member Marian Friedman remarked last week. It also means we harvest all day on distribution days, from the dark of 6:30 AM until the evening, and sometimes in the afternoons on non-harvest days as well. But that’s alright, because the other tasks of the season are winding down, and cleanup is becoming a priority. Get that good food out of the fields.

This week, from the upstairs windows of our new, very tiny house, my son Jonah discovered squirrels. From his bedroom, we watch the squirrels and chipmunks running up and down the trunk of the oak tree, cheeks filled with acorns. “Sqw”, he says, or something like that. The farm staff also notices them when we try to store any food near our wash station—almost instantly, each tomato or squash has one small bite out of it, or the beets are detached from their greens and dragged off into the woods, or the boxes are opened and cucumbers pulled out and chomped. Frustrated as we are with their insistence on consuming the fruit of our labors, we feel a little kinship with the critters this time of year. Of course they want to eat up, stock up, slow down.

The equinox—which the New England writer Hal Borland describes as the moment when “the sun stands still”—is a brief balancing point on the scale of the year, when light and dark are in equal measure. It’s a time for balancing our accounts as well, making sure that we have enough of summer in our banks before we head into the shortening days of winter. If that means eating more watermelon, or canning up those sun-filled tomatoes, or savoring roasted peppers in the cool of the evening, then I think we are in good fiscal shape. There is something about the abundance of this time of year, in combination with the incredible beauty of the weather, that makes gratitude the first semi-rational response. Although hoarding seems to come naturally, a close second.

Enjoy these weeks of transition. The frost is not far off. When I mentioned this to Marian, she said jokingly “Oh, no! It’s all carrots after that, isn’t it?” Yes, carrots, and parsnips, collards, cabbage, delicate greens and hearty roots. Time for tasty winter veggies cooked in red wine with a cheese crumble topping. Time to savor the look of the fields as they become more horizontal than vertical, more peaceful than burgeoning. I’ll pass on the recipe for the kale-leek-and-grilled-cheese sandwich that my old boss and mentor taught me to live on one fall on the farm. The taste of kale sweetens with the changing of the leaves. For now, though, I’m thinking about having everyone come out to the field to harvest their own savoy cabbage so that you can see the loveliness of the dewdrops hanging like crystal in the beautiful bumpy surfaces of the leaves, the glowing iridescence of the veins in the leaves in the first rays of sunlight. But you’d have to come at 6:30 in the morning.

—The Farm Crew: Amanda, Meryl and Ryan, with many dedicated volunteers
Carolina Kale
from Moosewood Restaurant Low-Fat Favorites
1 1/2 pounds kale, collards, chard, beet greens, or mustard greens
2 cups chopped canned tomatoes and their juice or 3 cups chopped fresh tomatoes
1 cup minced onions
1 1/2 teaspoons ground cumin
2 garlic cloves, pressed or minced
1 teaspoon Tabasco or other hot pepper sauce or 1/4 tsp crushed red pepper
1/2 tsp salt
ground black pepper to taste

Wash the greens. Discard any large hard stems. Stack the leaves and slice them crosswise into 1/8-inch strips.

Combine the tomatoes, onions, cumin, garlic, Tabasco, and salt in a large pan. Cover and cook on medium heat for 5 minutes. Add the greens, cover, and gently simmer, stirring frequently, for 10 or 15 minutes, until the greens are tender but still green. Add a little water if necessary. Add pepper to taste and serve.

Serves 4 to 6. Moosewood says it goes well with Baked Beans and Cornbread. I served it with Zatarain’s Dirty Rice (made with ground turkey) and canned creamed corn.

3rd Sunday Picnic 9/19
Come to the picnic at noon on Sunday, September 19th at the farm. Bring your own lunch and dessert will be provided. This is a great opportunity to chat with the farm staff.

Carrot Soup with Thyme and Fennel
from Bon Appetit
1/4 cup (1/2 stick) butter
4 medium carrots, peeled, chopped
3/4 cup chopped onion
3/4 cup chopped leek (white and pale green parts only)
2 garlic cloves, chopped
1/2 teaspoon chopped fresh thyme
1/4 teaspoon fennel seeds
5 cups (or more) canned low-salt chicken broth

Additional chopped fresh thyme

Melt 1/4 cup butter in large saucepan over medium-low heat. Add carrots, onion, leek, garlic, 1/2 teaspoon thyme, and fennel seeds; stir to coat. Cover; cook until onion is translucent, stirring occasionally, about 15 minutes. Add 5 cups broth. Bring to simmer. Cover partially; simmer until carrots are very tender, stirring occasionally, about 40 minutes. Cool slightly. Working in batches, purée soup in blender. Return to pan. Thin to desired consistency with more broth. Season with salt and pepper. (Can be made 1 day ahead. Cool slightly. Cover and chill.)

Bring soup to simmer. Ladle into bowls. Sprinkle with additional thyme.

Serves 4.