Notes from the Field: Hunger Relief

As many of you are aware, Community Farms Outreach does not just run Waltham Fields Community Farm’s Community Supported Agriculture project. Our work extends beyond the weekly harvest for 185 full-price members and 8 workshare members into the realm of what our mission statement calls hunger relief: “growing produce for soup kitchens, shelters and food pantries.” The way it works, quite simply, is this: We have long-term relationships with the Waltham Salvation Army food pantry and soup kitchen; the Red Cross food pantry; Sandra’s Lodge, a Waltham shelter for women and children; and Food for Free, hunger relief “brokers” who pick up food at all sorts of local outlets and make sure it gets to various distribution sites, including food pantries, meal programs, and home deliveries, primarily in Cambridge. We sent out a produce survey to each of these partner organizations to find out which crops they would accept and could use, and discovered which ones were unfamiliar to them (kohlrabi) or just too difficult to manage (hundreds of pounds of greens).

Constance Moore, our dedicated hunger relief schedule coordinator, finds volunteer delivery drivers from among CFO members to get our produce to these sites each week. Betsy, Laurie, Janet, or Food for Free’s intrepid drivers have been making the pickups. On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, they pick up all the produce that we’ve harvested for donation throughout the week. They take it to one of the outlets, where it is usually distributed to a family or made into a nutritious meal within 48 hours of being harvested.

In addition, this year CFO has partnered with Re-Vision House, a Boston-area organization, to get our produce out to even more folks who might not otherwise be able to access it. Re-Vision House is a Dorchester shelter for homeless, pregnant and parenting women. For the past five seasons, they’ve been collaborating with Drumlin Farm in Lincoln on a unique urban-suburban CSA incorporating low-income urban folks. These members would not normally have joined a CSA, but neither would they have visited a food pantry or soup kitchen. This year, Re-vision House received a Community Food Security grant from the USDA to expand the program and bring in another local farm to grow produce for 50 more families. We have been harvesting produce for these 50 families since June 23rd.

This newest program is an example of hunger relief work that goes beyond the traditional vision of food pantries and meal programs. By making locally grown CSA shares accessible to low income folks, we are building a food system in which all community residents can obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable and just food system. Community Farms Outreach and Waltham Fields Community Farm are part of a community food security movement that is growing in strength across the nation and around the world. Our donations to emergency food programs like the Salvation Army and Red Cross are good temporary solutions to the very real problem of immediate hunger in our community. Working from a community food security point of view will help us become a more active promoter of changes to our local food system—particularly here in our home town of Waltham. We can create programs that connect local residents with their local farms. The Food Security Coalition calls this alliance “non-traditional but natural,” connecting hunger relief and farmland preservation in very real ways that you can feel in your (full) stomach.

Radical? Yes, certainly. Necessary? Without a doubt. Let us know if you’re interested in learning more about community food security or have ideas about how we can make connections in our community. We’ll keep you updated.
Tim Laird’s Kale and Leek Grilled Cheese sandwich
This is the recipe Amanda mentioned in last week’s newsletter that she got from her old boss at Drumlin Farm.

Ingredients:
Handful of kale (Lacinato is very tasty)
Two small leeks
Good bread, two slices per sandwich
Tamari
Olive oil
Mustard, mayonnaise or other condiments of your choice (inner beauty hot sauce used to be great on this sandwich)
Good cheese

Directions:
Chop the leeks and kale into bite-sized pieces, taking out the center stalk of the kale and using all the white and some of the green of the leek. Heat the oil in a small pan. Add the leeks and saute until they begin to turn soft and translucent, about 5 minutes. Add the kale and about 1/4 cup of tamari. Saute for a few minutes on high heat until the kale begins to wilt. Then add more tamari, a tamari/water mix, or water (depending on your salt tolerance — mine is high), lower the heat and cover. Cook, stirring occasionally, until kale is tender (about 10 minutes). Meanwhile, toast the bread. Add any condiments. When the veggies are ready, lay the cheese on the toasted bread and cover it with warm veggies and the other piece of bread. The warmth of the toast and veggies should melt the cheese slightly and blend the flavors. Makes a great lunch for hungry, chilly farmers.

Arabian Squash-Cheese Casserole
From the first Moosewood Cookbook

2 medium-large butternut squash
1 heaping cup chopped onion
2-3 cloves crushed garlic
1 heaping cup mixed green and red peppers, chopped
3 Tbsp butter for saute
2 beaten eggs
1 cup buttermilk or yogurt
1/2 cup crumbled feta cheese
1 tsp salt
black and red pepper to taste
1/4 cup sunflower seeds or chopped nuts, for the top, optional

Cut squash down the middle lengthwise, scoop out seeds, and place face-down on oiled tray. Bake at 375 degrees about 35 minutes or until soft. Cool until handle-able; scoop out and mash.

Saute onion and garlic. When translucent add chopped peppers. Saute until peppers are just under-done.

Beat eggs with buttermilk or yogurt. Crumble in the feta cheese. Combine everything and mix well. Add salt, black and red pepper or hot sauce to taste.

Put in greased casserole or baking pan. (Top with seeds) Bake at 375 degrees: covered for 25 minutes and uncovered for 10 minutes.