Food with a Farmer’s Face

These summer days are long indeed for the folks who grow your vegetables. This column is intended to introduce you to them and let you know who to talk to if you have a question or a concern about your farm.

Amanda Cather is the farm manager, responsible for the CSA as well as all of Community Farms Outreach’s hunger relief and education programs. She lives in Waltham and is the mother of 2-year old Jonah and wife of Mark Walter. Talk to Amanda for information on the ‘big picture’ of our organization, CSA share value and other crop planning issues, or questions about pickup, distribution and crop conditions.

Ellen Gray is the assistant grower you’ll most often see at the distribution shelter on Thursday evenings. She lives in Waltham and loves to spend time at the Skellig on Moody Street with her boyfriend, Brad. Ellen is our best educated farm staff person, with a Master’s degree in Agriculture, Food and Environment from Tufts University. She loves to talk about food systems and sustainable agriculture practices. And she’s a hard worker, too. Ask Ellen any questions about pick-your-own crops, Thursday distributions, or general farm conditions.

Matthew Kochka, our other assistant grower, is a New Jersey native who combines his love of agriculture with a passion for reality television, fashion and all things New York. You’ll see him under the distribution shelter on Sunday nights. He is our most skilled mechanic and our resident expert on strawberries. He graduated from the University of New Hampshire and currently lives in Somerville with his artist girlfriend, Alexis. Talk to Matthew for information on genetic engineering, vegan cooking, Sunday distributions, or general farm conditions.

Aviva Gerber is our education intern. She is a Brandeis student from Houston, Texas, who manages our Children’s Garden program, helps coordinate the Sunday night Kids’ Corner at the CSA distribution, and works hard on the farm as well. You’ll also see Aviva at CSA distributions, where she loves to share recipes for unusual crops. Ask her any questions about our children’s garden or programming.

Alex O’Neill is our agriculture intern. He is a Brown University student and native of Lincoln who shows up every day to plant, weed, harvest and philosophize. Ask Alex questions about Marx, Kierkegaard, or the Boston Red Sox.

Becky Krauss is doing an internship on our farm as part of her work on her senior thesis at Hampshire College. She is passionate about sustainable local agriculture, close to home and around the world. Becky lives in Brookline, where she has only missed two Red Sox games all season—both because she was working on the farm. Ask Becky questions about CSA sustainability, value-added products in CSAs, and local agriculture.

Next week: our hunger relief program.

See you at the farm!—Amanda
Welcoming the Rain
Submitted by shareholder Helene Newberg

Smelling (and then seeing and hearing) rain as I hauled out of bed this morning just before six, I smiled at my house full of sleepers and made a silent wish that the rain would go on for hours. Ordinarily, in the summer with a young child to entertain, rain would unravel me. This morning, I was thinking of the farm.

I knew that as I was getting up our farm crew was already at work. The day before, between my chores, dropping and picking up from day camp, and my part-time work hours, I spent a few hours volunteering at the farm. Yesterday just thinking about walking a step was heavy enough to raise a cloud of dust. That dust, mixed with sweat and sunscreen, had remained on my hands through nearly a dozen handwashings and a dunk in a swimming pool.

I've been a CSA shareholder for about five years, three years in Waltham. Our first farm included a work requirement. Though it was further from town, I managed to give the farmer about twelve hours over a summer, more than asked for but less than needed. Even though our CSA has no work requirement, over the last several weeks, as my available time has shifted like blue sky on a partly cloudy day, I've been able to give a morning a week for a few weeks in a row.

Not that I'm any great hero. I like getting dirty and I like making food happen. Perhaps I like being told what to do for a few hours a week. I know I like having an abundance of work to challenge me. And I like hard work. Some would say it's cheaper, and more useful, than therapy.

When I'm working by myself, I reflect on the intense weed pressure Amanda talks about and what metaphorical weed pressure needs attention in my own life. I listen to some children singing in Hebrew and recall, with some difficulty, a word or two I forgot I knew. And sometimes, I just work.

I love what I see on pickup days: folks of all stripes collecting big, beautiful and tasty veggies grown with a minimum of chemistry (and a lot of artistry) on a few acres of land close to home. On harvest days, I've helped to pick and wash hundreds of pounds of produce, and then stacked dozens of boxes to be taken to feed the hungry, reward enough in itself.

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Yesterday, my schedule had me at the farm a little ahead of the drop-in hours. With half an hour available between moving irrigation pipes through the squash and when drop-in volunteers would be shuttled to the Lyman field, the task that made sense was hoeing cucumbers. The assignment resulted from a typical calculation involving the number of bodies on hand, the size of the weeds, the size of the plants, what the tractor's cultivator would do, what else needed weeding but was soaked and muddy from irrigation, whether anything needed to be planted or harvested, how close to the end of its harvest cycle was each crop (and therefore, would pulling weeds make any measurable difference) and other factors I can't even imagine.

Doing the work isn't difficult: if weeding, get a good look at what not to pull up and then destroy anything that's not that. If harvesting, find the ripest veggies on the plants meeting some basic criteria and remove them as instructed. Figuring out what's to be done, that's the real heavy lifting, knowing that hundreds of the poor and the families of 250 shareholders will know sooner or later how well those decisions went.

As I hoed cucumbers and was asked to shuttle any latecomers over to the auxiliary field, I found myself starting to hope for the cavalry (and for cooling rain, which continues as I write). Knowing that no one had to turn up, and knowing that our farm crew had the work to do regardless of how much help was offered, made me treasure most excessively those who did come out.

Rather the same way I feel about the rain.

Romanian Carrots with Sour Cream
From Sundays at Moosewood Restaurant

8–10 medium carrots, peeled and cut on the diagonal into half-inch rounds
¼ cup butter
1 Tbsp unbleached white flour
1 cup sour cream or plain yogurt (try half of each)
¼ cup chopped fresh parsley
2 Tbsp chopped chives
1 Tbsp chopped fresh dill (or ¼ tsp dried)
¼ tsp ground fennel seeds
salt and pepper to taste

Boil carrots until tender, about 5 to 7 minutes; drain and set aside. Keep them covered if you plan to serve them warm; plunge them into cold water and then drain if you prefer them chilled.

In a medium saucepan, melt butter and stir in flour. Boil carrots until tender, about 5 to 7 minutes; drain and set aside. Keep them covered if you plan to serve them warm; plunge them into cold water and then drain if you prefer them chilled.

Whisk in sour cream or yogurt until blended. Add remaining ingredients and gently simmer several minutes longer. Pour sauce over carrots. If serving cold, chill at least 2 hours.

To reach us:

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Marla Rhodes: developmentmanager@communityfarms.org
Volunteer Coordinators: volunteer@communityfarms.org
Newsletter Submissions: newsletter@communityfarms.org
CFO Board of Directors: board@communityfarms.org

We're looking for an Assistant Grower
with farm experience
to work August–November.
Interested applicants should email resume and cover letter to: farmmanager@communityfarms.org.

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