Dear friends –

From the Farm Office

Maybe you’ve heard: farming is a tricky business, with high costs, small margins, and a vast array of ever-changing risks. Farmland gets scarcer and more expensive every year, especially close to cities. Increasing numbers of extreme weather events and potent pests in turn increase uncertainty and expense. Good growing doesn’t always mean a true surplus or financial success, but helping to feed others and tending the land sure bring farmers a lot of pride.

Food produced in the way that we know to be best – for consumers, for workers, and for the land – remains largely inaccessible to all but a small group of consumers. As the enormous costs of our country’s broken food system become increasingly clear in rising rates of hunger, obesity, and disease, the work of building viable models for making fresh food accessible to everyone becomes ever more imperative.

Food sovereignty is about a lot of pride.

Zannah Porter was born to farm. Of her childhood in Virginia, she says, “I was always really interested in the natural environment around me, in the relationship between soil and plants and animals and how people fit into that. I’d dabbled in farming my whole life, but I didn’t realize it could be my livelihood until I moved to Massachusetts.” Sutton Kiplinger arrived at farming later, after spending the first eight years of her career confronting the consequences of a misguided food system in public health work. “I came to farming first as a way to intervene further upstream on issues of health and poverty, and then I just fell in love with it.”

Waltham Fields is delighted to welcome back Zannah and Sutton as second-year Assistant Growers in our Farmer Training program. In 2013, they will take on responsibilities that leverage their considerable talents and allow them to do structured learning in their own areas of interest. Each will independently manage a portion of the farm’s leased acreage – Sutton at the Lyman Estate, and Zannah at the Gateways property – with mentorship from Farm Manager Amanda Cather, entering her 10th season!

Zannah’s vision for Gateways includes Waltham Fields’ first-ever animal enterprise: a few heritage breed pastured pigs. Zannah feels that “integrating livestock into vegetable production is a natural progression, in terms of being self-sustaining, creating our own compost and fertilizer.” Sutton will undertake an efficiency analysis on key crops, which she describes as, “an exciting opportunity to better understand the true costs of production and where we can introduce new practices that help keep our food affordable.” Both Zannah and Sutton cite the farm’s unique culture of rigor, innovation, and support as key to their experiences so far.

Sprout 2013 Highlights – Please Join Us!

Top-notch silent auction & raffle, and eSprout online auction too

• Fantastic food from JJ Gonson and his crew at Cuisine en Locale
• Live jazz by guitarist Tom Pendergast
• Open bar, beer and wine
• New – Gift card grab bags
• New – Feinstein Challenge – donate anytime in April or while you’re at the event and we will receive matching funds from The Feinstein Foundation’s Million Dollar Challenge!

We were so happy to have Paigie Habringer and her students at Nerdley College (the farm-to-table culinary class has been moved to the fall), but we are thrilled to have this year’s Sprout feast prepared by JJ Gonson and Cuisine en Locale. Cuisine en Locale is deeply committed to using locally produced ingredients and these folks also have a passion for throwing great parties!

For more information and tickets for Sprout, see www.communityfarms.org/sprout

Event volunteers needed. Contact sprout@communityfarms.org

At Waltham Fields, we are redesigning one such model. We mobilize skilled leadership, strong community, and a culture of innovation to build a production system that can reliably provide for a diverse population. From our modest beginnings in the mid-90s, we have grown into a highly productive 15-acre organic vegetable operation feeding 1,000 families a week at the height of the growing season, and providing hands-on educational opportunities to over 1,500 people each year. It’s challenging, inspiring work.

Waltham Fields Community Farm
Waltham Fields Community Farm is the business name of Community Farms Outreach, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit charitable organization.

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Deb Gutmann, Bookkeeper & Tech Coordinator
Sutton Kiplinger, Assistant Grower
Zannah Porter, Assistant Grower

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Our biggest season

Last season was our biggest ever. We grew over 200,000 pounds of mixed vegetables, giving CSA shareholders strong value and exceeding the most ambitious food access/hunger relief goal of the Farm’s history by a full 50%. Our Learning Garden engaged 500 youth, our fields welcomed 300 volunteers, and two farmers-in-training gained increased skills to manage their own farms someday. We aimed high, and conditions mostly cooperated with our plans. But more importantly, our farmers and educators did what they do best: planned smart, managed risk, and seized opportunity, yielding an inspiring vision of how a farm can grow enough to go around and improve people’s lives.

Our growth from here

This coming year, we plan to maintain our high level of production while advancing our land capacity to generate abundantly for many years to come. We’ll refine our education agenda for maximum impact and sustainability. We are especially excited about piloting two new Learning Garden programs to serve community needs, one on MCAS science prep, and the other on farmers’ market entrepreneurship with a paid six-member youth crew. We’ll move into our second season of fiscal agency for the Waltham Farmers’ Market and our fifth season of bringing farm-fresh produce into the Waltham Public Schools. We’ll continue to consult and partner with towns near and far seeking to establish their own community farms, and will uphold regional leadership in facilitating a robust farmer training network. We’ll grow as much food as we can for people in need, offer scholarship assistance for programs, and welcome the public to the Farm for our annual Farm Day event on October 5th to celebrate the harvest and the Farm as an important resource.

Waltham’s mission at Waltham Fields Community Farm is much larger than the food we grow: it’s about the role of farms in society, and about forging healthy relationships between people, their food, and the land from which it grows. As we head into another ambitious season, we are grateful most of all for those relationships: for the vibrant network of enthusiastic eater-dedicated volunteers, and generous supporters of all kinds that make it possible to nurture a diverse community. Thank you for joining with us to build a local food system that works for everyone.

Here’s to another year of good growing, of food and community both.

Janet Yeracaris, Board President
Clare Kozower, Executive Director

Zannah Porter and Sutton Kiplinger (left to right) Farm Manager Amanda Cather and second-year Assistant Growers Sutton Kiplinger and Zannah Porter.