



RED FIRE READER

Monthly newsletter from Red Fire Farm, growers of healthy organic food for communities in Massachusetts
GRANBY, MASSACHUSETTS 01033 (413) 467-SOIL SEPT. 29, 2008 ISSUE NUMBER IX



IN THIS ISSUE

NOTES FROM RYAN

BROCCOLI

REMINDERS

RECIPES

FARMER OF THE WEEK

WINTER SHARE INFO

FARM CAM

CALENDAR:

October 3rd : Eat the View fundraising dinner for Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture (CISA) Look Park, Florence, 413-665-7100 for more info.

October 11th : Red Fire Farm's Fall Harvest Feast, 3:00 PM (see our website for ticket info)

October 24th: Ona's cooking demo at the Granby Farmstand.

REMINDER: Watch for the end of season survey. The survey will be coming out via e-mail starting in early October. Make sure to take the time to give us feedback about how the CSA has been for you this year!

Now in season:

lettuce – carrots – chard – beets – parsley – radicchio – dill – basil – potatoes – sweet potatoes – cabbage – radish – hakuri turnips – broccoli – cilantro – garlic bulbs – scallions – garlic – kale – collards – tomatoes – peppers – onions – cut flowers – eggplant – winter squashes

Locally grown Apples.

CIDER MAKING AT THE FALL FEAST!
Saturday, October 11th at 3-7PM. Families and non-members welcome.

Reserve your tickets today for the fall harvest feast in the picturesque Ludlow Line Field. Come early to press cider and stay for dinner. The press will be available from 2pm on so bring jugs and apples (we will also have some cider apples available at the farm). There will be live music all afternoon. At five, we'll move out to the field to sample the many varieties of winter squash grown on the farm. Then we'll enjoy a harvest meal prepared by the farm chef, featuring winter squash and other seasonal vegetables. Come see the farm one last time and meet the farmers who have been hard at work all season to bring you yummy produce.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

Several members e-mailed the farm with questions lately. I feel the answers may be of interest to others as well, so here are the questions and my responses.

Dear Red Fire Farm,

I am one of your share holders and I have a question about the definition of "organic". Last year during the tomato fest I visited the farm and informed (and a bit disappointed) that you use some chemicals and pesticides in your organic farm. I had the impression that organic products are totally free of chemicals. Please clarify and educate me on the subject. If you use approved organic chemicals (although sounds to me as an oxymoron) can you please disclose their names/types?

-Red Fire Farm member

CHEMICALS ON ORGANIC FARMS Ryan's Response:

We do not use any chemicals on the fields. Chemical fertilizers and pesticides are prohibited for use on any organic farms. We do use naturally occurring fertilizers on the fields. These include such items as rock phosphate (ground rock dust), chicken manure and sulfate of potash which is a mined source of potassium. We also use lots of compost and cover crops to help keep the soil fertile and healthy for good crop growth. For insect pest management we rely primarily on cultural methods to outsmart the pests. This includes things like rotating the fields in certain ways so the pests have more trouble finding the crops, covering certain crops with a row cover fabric when they are vulnerable to pests, and also releasing beneficial insects that eat the pests (we released beneficial insects on peppers, corn and beans this season.)

There are a couple of pests that prove particularly challenging and we use organically approved materials on these. To be approved for organic uses these materials must originate from a natural source, not a chemical lab. For example, one material that we use for Colorado potato beetle is derived from a fungus that attacks certain insects called spinosad. We

(continued from page 1)

spray this on the crop using a boom sprayer like a conventional farmer would spray a chemical pesticide, but the material is much safer for humans and for the environment.

Any materials that are used on organic farms must pass review and get approval by the Organic Materials Review Institute (OMRI). This government agency has very strict standards and tests all products to make sure that the ingredients comply with the organic standards (naturally occurring and safe). Crops that we spray with Entrust (the spinosad containing material) or any similar organically approved materials are a small fraction of the entire farm. They include potatoes, brassicas, sometimes sweet corn, sometimes squashes and cukes. The two other materials that we used this year on a small number of crops are called pyganic and *Bacillus thuringiensis* (M-Pede brand).

One of our biggest pest challenges are weeds. Conventional vegetable farmers have an arsenal of chemical herbicides that they use to keep weeds under control. Organic farms such as RFF must rely on mulches, cultivation, careful rotations, and ultimately more hand labor (hoeing and hand weeding on certain crops like carrots). This extra hand labor is one of the major reasons that organic produce tends to cost more than conventional produce.

I hope this helps you understand what organic means. You can check out the NOFA MA website (<http://www.nofamass.org/>) for more information about what organic means, and feel free to call or e-mail if you have more questions.

Thanks, Ryan at Red Fire Farm

PICK YOUR OWN QUESTION:

Hello,
I'm a Boston Area member and I am thinking about whether I want to renew my membership for next year. What puzzles me is that for weeks on end, there is a long list of items for local members to "pick your own" "as needed" but we have never received most these items in our order. It seems as if the Boston Area members are subsidizing the local members, who often can pick as much "as needed" but there isn't enough to put in our orders. What is going on????

Ryan's answer:

It is true that members who live near the farm have easier access to the pick your own patch. That is an advantage in that they have in that they have chosen to live in the country. We invite all members (including those from the Boston area) to come to the farm for the



Picking raspberries by the farmstand.

pick your own crops when they are in season.

We realize that Boston members don't make it out as often, and because of this we allow these folks to take larger amounts at once. We have many members from Boston who make it out for only one day during September, but when they are here they load up on beans and raspberries to freeze, herbs to dry and so forth. That said, even if you never make it to the farm for any of the pick your own crops, your delivered share is still a great value.

You should realize that about 2/3 of the money that you are paying for the picked and delivered part of your share is going toward the labor that our staff is paid to harvest and wash that produce. The other 1/3 of the value covers everything else that is involved in growing the crop. This means that if we were to pick all of the pick your own crops for each share each week, we would have to dramatically increase the share price. The crops that are in the pick your own patch are the ones that are extra labor intensive to harvest (berries, beans, peas, etc.)

Another factor that we considered when we set up our pricing structure is that that of the farms cost of delivery. The Boston distributions require us to drive a box truck for two hours to deliver the produce to the city. As you know diesel fuel prices are incredibly high this year, so this delivery process is very expensive for the farm. Shareholders who come directly to the farm and pick up their produce each week don't require any extra delivery charge in terms of fuel or truck ownership and maintenance, so we feel it is fair that they get some extra value in terms of easier access to the pick your own crops.

Lastly, I would like to impress upon you again an understanding of the labor involved in harvesting and preparing your share . . .

... continued on page 4

BROCCOLI REPORT

Some of you may have noticed that there has been little or no Broccoli in your shares this fall. This was not our intention, and in fact we did plant almost 1 acre of field space with the hope of loading you all up with broccoli this fall. We know from past surveys that broccoli is one of the most favorite crops. Most years Broccoli grows best for harvest during September and October, so this should be the prime season for it. Unfortunately Broccoli is not very productive in terms of yield, even when the weather is good for it, so often even in a good year we can just barely grow enough. This year it just happens that most of our fall Broccoli plantings ended up by chance going into fields that suffered dramatically during the excessive rainstorms that swamped us during most of August. We watched one of our major broccoli fields fill up with water until the plants in 75% of the field were drowned. In another slightly later planting the storms washed out the newly transplanted plants, leaving only a cake of mud where our broccoli rows should have been. So we are sorry about this lack of a broccoli harvest this fall. We tried and will of course try again next year. Fortunately, most of our other fall crops have grown well and this is quite a bit better than what neighboring farmers are reporting on their fields.

-Ryan

KIM CHEE

If you find yourself with lots of extra cabbage this year, consider fermenting it. The health properties of fermented foods are numerous and it is easy to make. Naturally fermented sauerkraut can be made exactly the same way by leaving out these flavors and simply adding salt and caraway seeds to the cabbage before letting it ferment.

1 head napa (or green) cabbage

½ cup daikon radish (opt.)

3 cloves garlic

1 Tbs. grated ginger

½ dried chili flakes

1 Tbs. Salt

Chop the cabbage, toss with the salt and let stand for 15 min. Add the rest of the ingredients and pack into quart jars, allowing the cabbage juices to cover the cabbage. Pack to 1 inch from the top, screw the lid on and leave at room temperature for three to 6 days depending on how strong you want it. Unscrew the lids to release any built up carbon dioxide and move cold storage (either the refrigerator or a cellar).

Farmer of the Week: Ona Lindauer,

Farm Cook and Food Educator

Where are you from? Hollis, Maine

What is your dream farm? A small diverse farm of fruits and vegetables surrounding my little cob house on a hill with a view where the goats and chickens are noisy but my neighbors are too far away to care.

What is your favorite vegetable? The beet. Raw, cooked, hot or cold; it can be sweet or savory. And best of all is it's color—a rich dark pink that really sticks with you.

What is your goal for the year? To get others as excited about the vegetables in their share as I am

What is your favorite job around the farm? Picking okra. I just have to remember to wear gloves.

What is farming for you? Farming is an excuse to be outside doing something useful for the community and good for the earth on a crisp, sunny fall day.

What are your current projects? Finishing the cob oven so we can start weekly crew pizza parties.



WINTER DISTRIBUTION SCHEDULE

Note- there are no more winter distribution (Nov. / Dec.) shares available for those not already signed up. Distributions will be **Friday, Nov. 7, Nov. 21, Dec. 5 and Dec. 19.**

Jamaca Plain- 2:30-6:30PM

First Baptist Church, 633 Centre St. Coordinator: Tressa Jones, 413-575-9651 and tressa.jones@gmail.com

MIT-3:00-6:30PM

Stata Center, 32 Vassar St., MIT Campus Coordinator: Jeremy Angier, 917-902-0545 and j@machinegraphics.com

Cambridge- 3:30-7:00PM

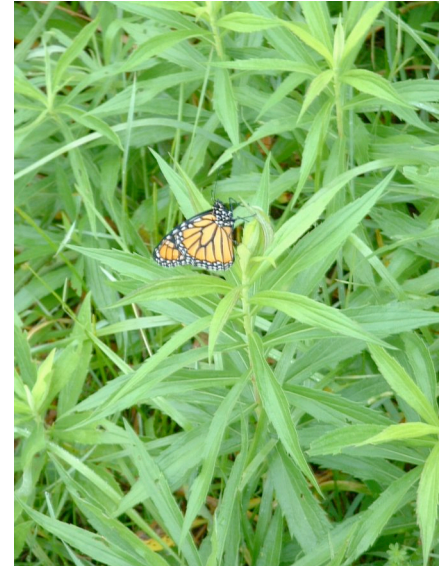
YWCA, 7 Temple St. Coordinator: Natalie Schmitt-Wampler, 210-373-3752 and natalieschmitt@gmail.com

Brighton- 4:00-7:00PM

18 Fairbanks St., Brighton Coordinator: Cathy Kittredge, 401-855-1072 and cathykittredge@yahoo.com



Farm Cam: Little Hill Field is slowly browning. The pepper plants will still produce until the frost, but the tomatoes are dead or dying. We will be pulling the stakes out and cutting the strings from the tomatoes this week. Some of the fingerling potatoes have been dug, but there are a lot more to dig as soon as we finish digging potatoes in another field.



The Red Fire Reader is compiled and edited by Ona Lindauer, the Red Fire Farm culinary intern. Newsletter topic ideas, recipes, writings, poems, and CSA community announcements are welcome and should be submitted to redfirefarm@gmail.com.

Pick Your Own Question (continued from page 2)

The flowers are a good example. It is reasonably easy using our tractors and transplanting equipment to grow a 1/2 acre field of flowers. Harvesting them though, is another matter

John and Chanya spend the entire day before each distribution harvesting and arranging the flowers (they were making about 50 bouquets per day on each of the three harvest days each week.) John and Chanya are very fast and efficient workers, yet it still takes them an entire day to cut and arrange 50 bouquets of flowers, stem by stem, leaf by leaf. So most of what you are paying for the flower share is their labor to harvest and arrange those flowers each week. If you want to come out to the farm and pick flowers from the cut your own flower patch, that is great and we don't have to charge you any labor cost for that!

If you haven't visited the farm yet, I hope that you make a trip out soon in order to get some raspberries and other PYO crops before they end this fall (the raspberries are very nice right now!) Please feel free to e-mail me back if you have other questions or comments. We really appreciate your support in purchasing our shares and hope that you decide to continue with the farm next season.

Thanks, Ryan Voiland -owner of Red Fire Farm

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