



COMMON GROUND FARM

March Newsletter 2006

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

Hello, and winter greetings to you all! It's your new farmers here, Joe and Rebecca! We are both thrilled to be here in New York, on the cusp of many great things, we are sure. We come to you with knowledge, experience, and passion for what we'll be doing at the farm this year. For the sake of getting to know us, here's what we were up to before we came to Common Ground... Joe was born and raised on an organic vegetable farm in southeastern Minnesota. His father started the farm and they grew an enormous diversity of vegetables, fruits, herbs, and flowers for the local farmer's market and their CSA. It was the same size and scale as Common Ground, and during the past few years, Joe took on the responsibility of all the field managing, so he has several years of full-time experience with organic farm management. As for Rebecca, well, I fell in love with food when I studied in Europe while in college. When I returned to the states, I sought out locally grown food and found a fabulous opportunity to work at a student run, organic market garden at my university in South Carolina for two years. After I graduated, I headed off to Minnesota for a year-long apprenticeship at this great sounding farm I'd heard about ...It was not even within the scope of my wildest dreams that less than a year later I would be married to a farmer! Joe and I worked alongside each other every single day last year, from seed starting, to planting the garden, to the super-abundance of harvest and work of the late summer, to cover-cropping the garden at the end of the season. We fell in love while doing this work and it's such a part of us. We love growing food and being part of a community who understands its importance!



Joe and Rebecca Schwen, our new farmers

We're thrilled to be your growers and we look forward to meeting each of you and working alongside you as we grow on this farm you have all so lovingly created. We have been busy on your behalf ever since we accepted the job mid-January. While we were preparing for our move out east from Oak Center, Minnesota, we spent much time sitting at the table beside the woodstove, getting lost in the pages of the seed catalogs. We started our planning stages way back then and got our seeds all selected and ordered so they were literally waiting for us to get here in NY! Once we arrived, we got to work immediately with starting seeds and getting both greenhouses up to speed. Within two weeks, our wonderful new greenhouse with all of its space will be ready - heated and usable year round, which is good news because we're already outgrowing the little greenhouse! Trays and trays of leeks, onions, parsley, celery, and celeriac fill the shelves, and each day we eagerly await those first glimpses of germination.

(continued on next page)

What's inside:

- ✿ Report from the Board
- ✿ Recent Events
- ✿ Committees Info

We have lots coming up in our early season work – investigating our new acreage on the lower end of the property, fencing it and looking into its irrigation are some of the top priorities. We are also doing a lot of pre-season planning for the planting schedule, distribution amounts, etc. It's exciting work full of anticipation! Even though the winter looks dull and grey outside, and the wind is biting cold, when we're working in the greenhouse, it feels like the tropics and springtime seems like it's coming just around the corner!

--Rebecca and Joe



Some members of the Common Ground Farm Board (L to R): representing Pearl Jessup is husband Kevin Byrne :, Jennifer Di Gregorio (top), Lee Ann Pomplas, Marla Teyolia, Pat Freeman, and Jen Clapp. Missing from this lovely photo are board members Lisa Jessup (in person), Karen Shea and Malachy Cleary.

REPORT FROM THE BOARD

Greetings,

With Rebecca and Joe working out at the farm basically every day since they have gotten here, with seedlings coming up and trenches being dug in the oddly unfrozen ground the season pretty much feels in swing. I am sure it feels that way to our new farmers who will be joined by our new assistant grower, Patty Gentry. Patty, who will be volunteering (!) on a part time basis as of March and coming on full time at the height of things, is a chef who has fallen in love with farming. We have quite a convergence of people, having come from afar (well, Minnesota and Brooklyn) at 79 Farmstead Lane this year. I know I am feeling the love and, more importantly, I know our crops will be too!

We also have some new faces on our Board of Directors. Marla Teyolia and Malachy Cleary joined the board in the fall. Marla will be coordinating our new Healthy Families program, helping to bring more members into the farm community who could not otherwise afford it, Jennifer DiGregorio joined the board in January and she has the distinction, aside from being a real presence in our fields, as being the only member whose family actually adopted a row last year (go DiGregorios!) is our new recording secretary. Jen Clapp, who has heretofore served as our recording secretary, will now serve as our treasurer replacing the gone but certainly not forgotten and actually not really gone far Melanie

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Sherony. I want to take this opportunity to thank Melanie for all of the tremendous work she has done to hold our act together as an organization. Melanie worked two years on the core group maintaining our database, coordinating work hours, calling members every week to come out and harvest, on the board she served as our correspondence secretary and most recently as our treasurer, handling our books and bills and budgets. Melanie has offered to continue to work on special projects for the farm, including our 501c3 application (non-profit status) as well as our database—thanks again Melanie! I also want to thank Janet Ruhe, who has left the four walls of our meeting room for the perennial beds. Again, not gone—just gone outside! Janet, one of the founding members of the farm and a board member since its inception has been responsible for creating and maintaining our perennial garden (you know—the herbs and flowers and berries and plums for thirsty harvesters to snack on) for keeping us in the papers and keeping our collective mind calm with constant reminders of our accomplishments and what we have rather than our urge to dwell in the nagging worry of what we don't have and need (more on that later!) We hope Janet will continue to share these thoughts with all of us through her “Perennially Yours” column. The rest of us will continue doing what we have been doing: Pat Freeman, Vice President, Lee Ann Pomplas communications Czar, Karen Shea, events coordinator, and me, President.

If you were counting the names above, then you know that we are eight board members—where we should ideally be nine. We would like to fill the remaining board position as soon as possible. If this is something that interests you, please contact us via e-mail at membership@commongroundfarm.org, or you can call me at 831-6070.

Lastly, we will be contacting folks soon about work parties to get our new fence up, balance payments, and ultimately when our first harvest will be. If you have new contact information please forward it to us, either via e-mail or phone (above).

Wishing everyone a splendid spring,
Lisa Jessup



RECENT CGF EVENTS

The Potluck that we organized to welcome our new farmers was lots of fun, with many members gathering together at University Settlement. A huge thank you goes to Mary Gardner who helped put the event together. It was really wonderful to meet and hang out with Joe and Rebecca, and hopefully they have a better sense of our community as a result. Thanks to all who came and brought AMAZING food! It was really quite a feast. Imagine what we can make once the Farm veggies start up again...

The Harder and Vogel families enjoying the food at the potluck!

WORK HOURS AND COMMITTEE INFO

There are many opportunities to fulfill your work hours requirement (15 hours for a full working share over the course of the season, 10 hours for a small working share). The vast bulk of work that needs to be done is in the field during harvest on Tuesday and Friday mornings. Also, we are instituting member committees that will share some of the work of running the Farm and hopefully bring new ideas and fresh insights to the Farm. Also, consider joining one of these if you have trouble getting out to the field for harvest or working distribution during the week. Typically, these committees would meet occasionally (perhaps once a month, in the evening) to discuss goals and plans, and each member would have a responsibility within that committee. And all of the time put in on committee work counts towards your work hours requirement. Email membership@commongroundfarm.org if you are interested. Here are the committees:

WORK HOURS—Do you have ideas on how to help members get out in the field for harvest? How about for monitoring work hours? Do you have experience working in the field or distribution and want to share your knowledge with the rest of the membership? Join the work hours committee and help in training members for field work, creating training materials for harvest and distribution, and developing a system for keeping track of work hours among other things. Our biggest responsibility will be getting members out into the field for harvest.

MEMBERSHIP BUILDING—Do you love CGF and want to sign up all your friends? Do you have ideas about how we can reach out to our community and recruit new members? Then join the membership committee and help with community outreach. We will locate events for CGF to participate in and staff them, spreading the word of how great our Farm is (like the strawberry festival in Beacon, and harvest days at Stonykill). Consider this committee if you want to spend some of your hours putting CGF fliers up at local businesses around town.

HEALTHY FAMILIES--This is a newly launched program at the Farm that will provide reduced-cost shares for low-income families and help CGF reflect the diversity in our community. Join this committee if you would like to work on the program.

EVENTS/FUNDRAISING—Do you like to throw parties? Do you have innovative thoughts about fundraising or special events? Join this committee and organize social events for our members like potlucks, the annual harvest dance, barbecue and fundraisers, and brainstorm new methods and ideas for fundraising.

WORKSHOPS/EDUCATION—Do you have a skill that you can share with the rest of the membership through one of our workshops? In years past, we have had workshops on pickling, canning, building cold frames, gardening with kids, and an herb walk. Would you be interested in running one of these workshops, do you have ideas for other ones? Join the workshops committee and develop our education program for the season, come up with new activities and new ways to enlighten our membership.

In addition to these committees, we also have the following openings:

Board member—if you are passionate about the Farm and want to contribute your vision to the running it, please join us. We meet once a month in the evening, and share the work of the Farm between the nine of us.

Photographer—we need someone to take pictures at events, harvests and distribution for the newsletter, our archives and for publicity (preferably with a digital camera).

If you have professional or personal skills that you feel could enhance the Farm, or creative ideas for working your required hours, please let us know. We can figure out ways for all of us to work on the Farm! Email membership@commongroundfarm.org.