



Common Ground Farm

October Newsletter 2008

To be worried about making money, expanding, developing, growing cash crops and shipping them out is not the way of the farmer. To be here, caring for a small field, in full possession of the freedom and plentitude of each day, everyday-- this must have been the original way of agriculture.

--Masanobu Fukuoma, One Straw Revolution (1978)

Notes from the Field

As I sit down to write this newsletter, I am amazed that it's practically mid-October. How can time pass so incredibly quickly? The season has truly flown by for us. It seems like just a few short weeks ago when we were spending sunny days in the greenhouse, encouraging tiny seedlings along, and then spending grueling days on our hands and knees, planting every one of the thousands of plants into the garden. (How is it that every spring, long, grueling days in the garden are a novelty once again? By October, we're so over it!) However, in October you get the immense satisfaction of looking over the garden and seeing row by row, what went in and what came out as little by little, the rows of vegetables turn into rows of neatly mowed cover crops. (We use mostly clover and vetch, both of which "fix" nitrogen and make it available in the soil for future crops.) October allows us time to catch our breath, cook more of the food we've been growing, and reflect on the season. Overall, we definitely feel positive about this past growing season. We produced more food than ever and had a fantastic staff of interns. We added an additional 2/3 of an acre in land, which we grew in potatoes. (That made one mile of potato plants!) The weather, once again, was moderate and mild, with a few extremes here and there but never enough to wipe us out. We're thankful for that! We are weary, once again, at the close of a crazy-busy season of growing vegetables, but ever more in love with the work we do – growing food from the good earth.

The past three years have been an incredible experience for the two of us. We arrived as newlyweds, taking on a big responsibility that we were eager to tackle. We have poured our hearts and souls into growing food for the community on this farm, and it's with mixed feelings that we will say farewell to Common Ground Farm at the end of this season. We will be leaving New York after Thanksgiving to move back home to Southeastern Minnesota, where many things await us. Our family members, our long lost friends, a familiar landscape, plus the fact that we bought a farm out there this past summer! It is only 7 miles from the farm where Joe grew up on his dad's organic vegetable farm. We have 40 acres, a small old house, and barns to take care of, and grand plans for all of it. We hope to start our family, and raise a milk cow. We want to put in fruit trees, and a huge asparagus patch. Heritage chickens and draft horses, too. We feel thankful for the opportunity to grow food for this community of eaters, and glad to see interest in local food soaring

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here in the Hudson Valley. We hope people are as hungry for our vegetables in Minnesota as you were here!
Enjoy the fall colors and cool temperatures, Joe and Rebecca



To all those who helped to make the brunch a successful event I would like to thank you. Especially the board members, the set-up/clean-up crew and Susan Gin. Thank you for all of your help to make our first "Brunch in the Fields" such a successful event! -Nicole Raskopf

Director's Report

Dear Members and Friends,

Below we are going to run an essay I wrote for the farm breakfast, so I will keep this brief. I want to thank everyone who has helped us have a great season together, but especially I want to thank Joe and Becca who are in their final months here at Common Ground, on to a new future together as stewards of 40 acres in rural Minnesota. When Joe and Becca came on board things were a little scraggly— it seemed like such a tall order to get our farm in shape and they both seemed really, really young (Joe even, sorry Joe to embarrass you—calling our board member Mary Gardner "Ms. Gardner"!). Well, although we did not have doubts, I don't think any of us expected our farm to land into such capable hands. While they have introduced new systems to the farm, they also, in particular Joe, were able to "make it work" within the confines of our resources. Joe has created implements for the farm, they have saved seeds and last winter our greenhouse hosted a completely disassembled tractor that Joe had determined to fix (and he did).

Joe and Becca we will really really miss you and everything you have brought to our farm over the past three years. We wish you much luck on your new farm!

While I am on the subject of farmers, I did want to let everyone know, as I know its on everyone's mind, that we are in the process of interviewing many candidates for the job. Embarking on that process was one I was dreading, wondering how we could "replace" Joe and Becca. We can't of course, but I am genuinely excited by the prospective candidates and we hope, fingers crossed to have a decision by mid-November. We will, of course, keep everyone posted. Again, thanks for a tremendous season—its certainly not good-bye as we are planning events and other ways to stay in touch during the cold months!

Lisa

The other day I was getting in the car with my daughter and our neighbor, a teenage boy, was getting in his car, and my daughter started talking to him from across the street. She told him we were going to Common Ground Farm and asked him “do you go to Common Ground?” He is a nice guy so he engaged her back but said “uh, no??...” And she said, “Well, what farm do you go to?”

I realized at that moment that, although there have been other moments, many gauged through my daughter, (like telling a newspaper reporter when she was three that her favorite food was kale), that this was big. This was more than kale, more than knowing when a tomato was ripe—this was normalization of our experience here and it was incredible to think that we now have hundreds of kids here who expect that kids and people in general “go to farms”.

But what is “going to the farm?” Are we coming to buy our food or participating in something? I know, again from my daughter, that going to the farm means playing with friends, picking flowers or green beans and lately eating dinner by bringing a loaf of bread, olive oil, garlic and salt and a knife and just cutting into what we have and enjoying the freshest food we can get our hands on. Frankly, for me its pretty much the same thing as for my girl—connecting with friends, enjoying our bounty. Simple stuff.

But as someone who is running this farm, I think it took my daughter to help me see the magic in how normalized our experience is. Getting bogged down in the day to day you can forget how lucky you are that **this** is your day to day. In this country, we lose 2 acres of farmland a minute to development.

One part of our mission statement that I refer to again and again is the part about “interpreting anew the agricultural experience”. How are we reinterpreting the agricultural experience here, on route 9D here in Dutchess County amongst McMansions and cities and cars and Ipods and Dollar stores that define our geographic and cultural experiences?

Even though we are not in the center of Beacon or Poughkeepsie, we are essentially an urban farm. Dutchess County, like many places in this country and in the valley, is no longer rural. Our community, in the midst of the hustle and bustle (ask farmer Joe—this is still a fast paced life here!), is unique in many ways. Common Ground is a “third place” in the same way neighborhood cafés or pubs serve as third places away from home and work. We slow down at the farm, we work on slow meticulous tasks like hand weeding, we linger, we check in with people we see each week. The community here has bonds and a sense of responsibility and reverence toward this farm. Still, the leadership of the farm is constantly trying to come up with ways to better reach deeper into our broader community. *This is a special place, but it should not be a privelege to participate—how do we help normalize eating fresh food and knowing your farm for all members of this community?*

Over the past few years we have added a Family Wellness Program, participated in two farmers markets, sponsored the food stamp program at the Beacon Market, partnered with the Green Teen program and began

offering an educational program open to the public. Now we want to build on this opening- up of our farm and expansion of community by creating a Mobile market. This will serve families in low-income neighborhoods who might be limited, financially, or because of lack of access to transportation, from becoming shareholders at the farm. This market will expand the Common Ground community beyond the confines of our fields and our lawns here at Stonykill. Through food, this is an opportunity to create connections amongst people and families who might otherwise not have that opportunity.

We have also expanded our farming community—to provide educational opportunities to more young farmers-to-be and we plan to continue to grow our intern program, with improved housing and learning opportunities.

Going Forward

We face challenges in achieving these goals. Housing interns is a challenge, land capacity is a challenge, the cost of an indoor space for educational programs and outfitting a bus for market are also challenges. Share prices do not cover all the operations and programs of the farm.



Common Ground Farm, moving into its eighth year, with our farmers Joe and Becca moving onto their own venture, is still working toward its sustainability. We are still in discussions with Alex Reese about moving and expanding our operations to land in New Hamburg. We thank Alex for continuing to generously donate housing and making this benefit available to our incoming farmers.

As members of this community, it is our hope that your love of this farm and its mission will enable you to assist however you can as we move forward. Last weekend, I spent a few days with Shelley Tween, another board member, livestock sitting for a former board member of this farm, Kim Nagel. We had to milk just one cow. The milking machine kept breaking and the cow was unfamiliar with us. I milked by hand and Shelley brushed the cow to keep her calm, ran up to get oil for the machine, tested it, etc. It would have been completely impossible to have milked this cow alone—but together we made it work. That is the spirit of this farm, we have made so much happen by the hands of our members and we know we can continue to count on you as we move forward.

Education Report

By Jen Clapp

With the end of our growing season almost upon us we are gazing out at the fields, watching the dried heads of Queen Anne's lace (also known as wild carrot) curl up, as they wait for a furry pelt or pair of blue jeans to come by and help spread those sticky seeds around; eyeing shimmering tufts of milkweed drenched with dew in the tall grasses; ducking for cover when the wind blows and it's raining black walnuts... Yes, the fields will be



covered with clover and rye soon, but there are still so many beautiful things to see and hear and experience on our farmland and along the many trails at Stonykill Farm.

This past weekend my son and I went for a walk on the Sierra Trail, one of the wooded trails which starts on Red Schoolhouse Road. He wanted to find animal bones and I was looking for inspiration for one of my upcoming children's workshops on Animals in Winter. Neither of us went home disappointed. He found the skull of a small mammal next to a decayed tree stump, along with numerous feathers: red-tail hawk, a flicker (I think), blue jay, and some small brown stripey thing. And I was able to spot pine cones, acorns, all sorts of berries and a magnificent variety of mushrooms which will provide sustenance to the wildlife in the woods this winter. When we returned I realized we had found a few other things too: we were both calm, content, relaxed, tired and more joyful than we were when we left the house.

I should know by now that the hardest part of a hike is taking that first step out the front door.

Upcoming Education Events

Preschool Workshops (for ages 2 - 4, with adult)

Every Thursday and Friday at 10am through November 7. A different topic each week. \$5 per child. Call to register for upcoming dates: 845-838-1822.

Cooking with Winter Squash

Saturday, November 1 from 11am - 1pm

Jennifer Clair, CGF member and chef/owner of Home Cooking New York, will lead us in a tasty workshop on how to use our delicious winter squash.

Recipes include:

Winter Squash, Caramelized Onion, & Goat Cheese Gratin

Roasted Butternut Squash Soup with Apples and Ginger

Braised Winter Squash with Clementines and Butter

Curried Delicata Squash

Real Pumpkin Pie

Join us in the kitchen! Special price (\$40) for members of Common Ground Farm. To register, email Jennifer: Jennifer@homecookingny.com.

We are currently working in partnership with teachers from the Randolph School to provide field trips and classes. If you are a teacher and would like to bring your class to the Farm, please contact Jen: 845-838-1822.

Harvest ideas

Oven Roasted Tomato Tart from Food and Wine Magazine

3 pounds ripe plum tomatoes, halved lengthwise and seeded

1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil

1 tablespoon thyme leaves

Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper

2 garlic cloves, thinly sliced

About 1 cup all-purpose flour

6 1/2 tablespoons cold unsalted butter, cut into 1/2-inch pieces

1/4 cup ice water

2 tablespoons crème fraîche

1 tablespoon whole grain mustard
1/2 cup shredded Gruyère cheese

1. Preheat the oven to 350°. Toss the tomatoes with the olive oil and thyme; season with salt and pepper. Spread the tomatoes, cut side down, on a rimmed baking sheet. Roast for 35 minutes. Pull off the tomato skins. Turn the tomatoes cut side up, top with the garlic and roast for 35 minutes longer, or until slightly dried and the garlic is golden. Let the tomatoes cool, then blot dry with paper towels. Leave the oven on.

2. Meanwhile, in a food processor, combine 1 cup of flour with a pinch of salt. Add the butter and pulse until it is the size of small peas. Sprinkle on the ice water and pulse just until a dough forms. Wrap the dough in plastic wrap and refrigerate until chilled, about 30 minutes.

3. On a lightly floured surface, roll out the dough to an 11 1/2-inch round about 1/8 inch thick; fit it into a 9 1/2-inch tart pan with a removable bottom. Fold in the overhang to reinforce the sides. Trim off any excess dough. Chill the tart shell.

4. Line the tart shell with foil and fill with pie weights. Bake the tart shell for 35 minutes, or until just set. Carefully remove the foil and weights and bake for 5 minutes longer, or until golden.

5. Mix the crème fraîche and mustard and spread over the tart shell. Sprinkle the cheese on top. Arrange the tomatoes in the shell in 2 layers, cut side up, seasoning between the layers. Bake the tart for 25 minutes, or until the tomatoes are just beginning to brown. Serve hot or at room temperature

Live Kale Salad

1 large bunch curly kale (substitute any greens you like)
1/4 cup olive oil
1 large lemon - juiced
2 Tbl nama shoyu, Braggs liquid aminos or soy sauce
1 Tbl apple cider vinegar- raw and unfiltered
1 Tbl agave nectar
1 clove garlic - minced
3 stalks green onion - rough chopped
1/2 jalepeno, deseeded and minced
1/4 cup fresh herbs, minced
1 large red bell pepper, diced
1 large carrot, grated
dash cayenne, Celtic sea salt, fresh black pepper, to taste
1/3 cup white and or black sesame seeds

loving preparation:

1. Destem kale and place in a large mixing bowl with olive oil and lemon juice. Allow to sit for 20 minutes or longer, up to overnight to allow kale to soften.

2. Add remaining ingredients and mix well.