

# Common Ground Farm

P.O. Box 59,  
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*\* When the North Star twinkles, expect stormy weather. \**  
*Farmer's Almanac*

## ***From the Farmer: Winter Greetings***

Hello, Friends! I miss seeing you all at the farm and hope the chilly winter months haven't erased the tastes and memories of our first season together. And if you miss getting fresh veggies, don't despair! Spring is right around the corner – I'm thumbing through seed catalogs now, figuring out what to plant in 2003.

And there are big changes going on in my life that I thought you all should know about. First of all, I'm marrying my sweetheart of seven years, Todd. But that's not all: we're having a baby! All this talk of fertility and planting seeds has finally caught up with me. The little farmer is due in May and we can hardly wait.

So, for 2003 I'll continue to be in charge of the farm operation but in a less active capacity. We'll hire a full-time assistant grower and possibly a summer apprentice as well. The search is on and there are promising applicants, but if you can think of anyone who might be interested, let me know. 845-255-7934.

Meanwhile, farm planning continues, the Core Group comes alive, and the garlic sleeps, full of hope, under the snow and straw. See you at the February 2 "Spirit of Winter" fundraiser if you can make it, but definitely in the spring for that first harvest of tender veggies... Peace, Linda-Brook

## ***Core Group Seeds the Apple-a-Day (figuratively speaking) our Farm Needs***

A CSA Core Group is made up of people who are willing and able to put in extra time, energy and ideas to make the farm a truly healthy, humanity-rich resource for members and the surrounding community.

On December 19, despite preChristmas panic, we had our first Common Ground Core Group meeting at Kim Nagel's house in Beacon. Kim will be our Core Group Chairperson, and we can also boast a Membership Coordinator (Carolyn Plage), a Friday Distribution Coordinator (Lisa Manderville), an Events and Community Building Coordinator (Gerry Rumold), an Education Coordinator (Jen Clapp), and a Newsletter Editor (Janet Ruhe-Schoen).

***Still needed:*** Tuesday Distribution Coordinator, Work Hours Coordinator, Outreach Coordinator, Publicity Person, Recipes/Produce Interpretation Person.

***Interested? Call Linda-Brook, 255-7934.***

## ***From 2002 End-of-Season Report:***

This was a tremendous first year for Common Ground Farm, marked by much growth, bounty, community support and involvement.

**Yields:** About 20,000 lbs. or some 10 tons of produce was harvested from the 3 acres under production. An abundance of flowers and herbs was also harvested. Our 55 members received about 500 lbs./produce each during the 24 wks. of harvest.

**Insect Control:** In part due to a mild winter, insect pests flourished – Mexican bean beetle, flea beetle, root maggot, to name a few. About 1/10 of the crops were damaged severely by insects; row covers, good plant care, healthy soil and consistent watering helped prevent more serious losses.

**Mega-fauna Control:** In April we installed a 6' deer fence around the five acres leased from Stonykill. With a small solar panel, charger & battery, we were able to create a consistent charge of about 4,500 volts. With proper baiting and grass maintenance, the fence kept deer at bay. The largest obstacle agriculturally was woodchuck pressure. They emerged ravenous in the spring. Lettuce & broccoli were hardest hit. Traps and sulfur bombs put a reasonable dent in the population.

**Well & Irrigation:** At our expense we drilled a 400' well on the eastern border of the field. After some delays in setting up irrigation, water reached the crops during the thirsty months of the summer. The drip system delivered water directly to the area around the plants without watering the weeds, and minimizing evaporation.

**Weed Control:** Using hand cultivation and a cultivating tractor, and by mowing areas within and without the fence, the farmer was able to prevent most weeds from setting seed. Particularly insidious weeds: wild radish and other mustards, yellow nut-sedge, thistle and pig weed.

**Cover Crops:** To increase soil fertility, Linda-Brook seeded about 1/5 of the acreage in crimson clover, Japanese millet, vetch, annual rye, oats, dwarf white clover. After the spring, she tilled them in and bared fallow those sections to control perennial weeds. In the fall she planted cover crops on sloped sections to prevent springtime erosion.

**Education & Outreach:** Common Ground participated in Stonykill's Kids Gardening, Mini Farming, Slug Workshop, Earth Day, Harvest Festival; welcomed tours from Sprout Creek Farm Summer Camp, Camp Rising Sun, Girl Scouts, Teen Girls from local high schools, Poughkeepsie Day School; gave talks for Verplanck Garden Club and Stonykill Foundation.

### ***Thank you!***

Members, you gave us a great rating on the end-of-season surveys. Well over half of you rated produce quality superb, quantity and variety as just right and over all experience as fantastic.

### ***Organic Goes Mainstream?***

There's a new tag on everything from bananas to billion cubes; in October 2002, the USDA instituted the federal Organic label. Now, organic farms with sales over \$5,000 must be certified using National Organic Program guidelines.

**Good?** Well, the "standardized" certification process may help consumer confidence. Also, increased organic practices are a good thing for the planet.

**Bad?** Basically, this will allow mega-organic companies to swamp the market. Many small farms can't afford the expensive certification fees, so they're knocked out of the competition. And careful reading of the standards discloses more and more synthetics allowed in organic processing.

Formerly, organic certification programs were nonprofit, farmer-run. Now, agribusinesses have discovered that organic is sexy. Using low cost labor in Mexico and elsewhere they can produce food that conforms to USDA regulations. But with mass marketing, organic food, like any other produce, loses flavor, loses connection to its place of origin & human community, loses nutritional value.

**Alternative labels?** Some small farmers who can't run the USDA's organics race are using other labels – natural, regenerative, eco-local, sustainable. The best from Common Ground's point of view may be sustainable: a truly organic farm is oriented toward feeding the future, not just the big NOW, so it feeds and builds soil, supports beneficial birds and insects, decreases erosion and water run-off.

**Cheering fact:** Recently the Poughkeepsie Journal published numbers from the Agricultural Statistics Service that fly in the face of the bigger-is-better bugaboo. In New York State small farms marketing directly to the customer at roadside stands, in farmer's markets, etc., grew by almost 9% from 1987-2000; they have been far more successful than huge wholesale farms.

**Love & work:** Big farms developed to some extent from a democratic ideal of producing enough cheap food to feed everybody. A good goal, but lusting after profits using industrial techniques won't achieve it. Meanwhile we've seen at Common Ground that it takes a lot of love & informed hard work (invaluable commodities) to grow healthy, organic food. Very democratically, everyone pitches in, and everyone gains by it, everyone's in the field to share and enjoy our sustainable farm practices.

**The bottom line:** Go beyond the new labeling and support your local farms and farmers. A contact: Small Farms Task Group, [www.smallfarms.cornell.edu](http://www.smallfarms.cornell.edu). A place to find highfalutin' locally made gourmet goodies: The New York Store in High Falls, 845-687-7779. A place to find people who (maybe) aren't in too much of a hurry to share thoughts about really good taste: Slow Food USA, Hudson Valley Convivium, [grgres@hvi.net](mailto:grgres@hvi.net).

***Hope to see y'all at our Fund-raiser, Feb. 2! (see attached flyer)***