



BLOOMING GLEN FARM

November 13, 2008

Newsletter

Issue #33

BloomingNow!

Features Fresh from the Farm

Community

Supported

Agriculture

From the field...

Another season come and gone—where does the time go? All in all we were pleased with the 2008 growing season—we weathered a late, wet spring and a dry summer, some crops more bountiful than last year's (potatoes and garlic!) and some not so much (sadly the onions and broccoli). The distribution tally's for this year show we gave out about the same pounds of tomatoes as last year (an amazing 50 pounds per share!), but reached our goal of extending the season over 18 weeks instead of 12. Each full share received 21 weeks of garlic (green garlic, scapes and bulbs); 12 melons; 23 pounds of summer squash; 10 weeks of winter squash; 16 weeks of lettuce; 29 cucumbers; a whopping 27 quarts of beans (double last year!); 30 pounds of potatoes from white, red, purple and gold varieties (again, double 2007's distribution); 9 quarts of cherry tomatoes; 15 weeks of p-y-o flowers; 16 weeks of basil; 12 weeks of peppers; 14 weeks of eggplant and 13 weeks of beets! Not to mention the myriad of greens and assortment of other crops, new and familiar, from over 20 different hot pepper varieties to carrots, kohlrabi, bok choy, arugula, cabbage and on and on! The pick-your-own flower patch and culinary herb section continues to grow and improve each year, as we see what varieties are successful and popular. The market value of the 2008 crop distribution was a total of \$1300! That's approximately \$900 for the crops we picked for you, and another \$400 in pick-your-own crops. This is based on competitive retail sales prices for the 2008 season. So we are reassured that on a dollar for dollar basis, you are getting your money's worth (and more), and that's not including all the intangibles involved in a CSA that you can't put a cash value on. We realize that for many people, the lack of choice can be a difficult adjustment, but we hope that when you realize what a great value you are getting for your dollar, that you

can overlook the occasional crops you may not like! And returning CSA members who have been with us since the first year, are beginning to realize that the rhythms of the seasons from year to year means each season is not necessarily identical to the last. (To read more about the survey, see page 2.)

That said, we are excited to make some changes next season. First, an investment this winter into a farm well and irrigation system which will help us to meet our watering needs, and hopefully prevent dry spells from reeking the havoc that they did this year! (Though we joke that putting in a well will almost guarantee a wet summer in 2009!) Second, we have heard the moms who feel rushed on pickup days to make it home by the time the bus drops the kids off, as well as the local business folk who want to pickup their share on their lunch break. So, we will try to be accommodating by starting the pickup at 1:00. It won't be easy, as even with starting the harvest at sunrise on a pickup day, it's been a hustle to be done by 2:00. But we will try it out, bring in more labor, and see if we can do it! Third, we are excited to be bringing in a computer person who worked with another local CSA to develop their website's recipe database and some other cool online options. This means you won't have to comb through archived newsletters to find recipes. We will also be changing the look of the newsletter to hopefully make it easier for you to read and access, and easier for me to post things to the website (for example—a Monday posting of what's coming up in the share that week). We're also looking at adding a photo slideshow page to the website—since many of you told us how you enjoy the farm photos!

We are currently working on the registration form for 2009, and debating, as we do each year, whether or not to drop the work requirement. And in these times of economic uncertainty, our farm

publications warn of rising prices in the cost of seeds and other farm supplies—specifically increases in seed prices of almost 30-40%. However, we will keep the share price the same for 2009. We will send out the detailed registration info at the end of November, and you'll have until Jan 1 to give us a deposit to hold your place.

New this year, we will be selling a limited number of "holiday boxes" for Thanksgiving, made up of some of our extra storage roots and cold hardy greens. We'll email you the details on Monday the 17th and take orders from the first 50 respondents.

As we wrap up another season, we would like to thank our interns Emma, Miriam and Wilmer for devoting 8 months to learning and working at our farm. We wish them luck as they continue on to new adventures! Thanks also to our part time workers (Super-Sam!, Andy and Emily), Aunt B, our morning harvest work share washing crew Megan, Gina, Rosemary, Chuck and Kaitlyn, and our folks for the child-sitting, baked goods, lawn mowing, and all the other countless ways you support the farm! Thank you to the Rosenberger's for their passion for local agriculture and for the opportunity to farm their land. Big thanks to Mikaela and Brooke for posting the newsletters and keeping the website updated, and thanks also to John Maraska for making and donating the beautiful cedar arbor in the herb and children's garden. And to our CSA community for your continued support and encouragement! We take it seriously the trust that you have in us when you make the commitment to pay us in the Spring to provide you with 24 weeks of healthy sustainably grown vegetables. Despite the long hours for us and our crew, we get great satisfaction from the effort! As the land rests and rejuvenates this winter, so will all of us! See you in the Spring!
Farmers Tricia and Tom

Survey Says.....

"I just filled out the survey and neglected to mention how much I loved the u-cut flowers. For me, this was a major cudo of joining the farm as I love fresh flowers but hate to 'pay' for them. Getting them from the BGF felt like a freebie!"

"Wow. Every week was a time consuming but enjoyable culinary adventure."

"We enjoyed the many weeks of beans and tomatoes and greens and garlic! Would love more onions!"

"Not only are you making an impact on my life but on the area, our children and the future of our farms."

"We really gained a connection to our local food source, an important part of why we joined."

"I appreciate the opportunity to support a local farm with a once-a-week visit and the freshness, variety and quality CANNOT be beat."

"Enjoyed the visual beauty of the bounty as well as the challenge to create new recipes with what was available."

"When 'Mother Nature' cooperates, the quality and variety were super!! There were a few lighter weeks, but that is to be expected!"

"I absolutely love the photo of a 'typical share'."

"It is too confining for our lifestyle to be required to pickup on a given day, at a given time."

"The kids love the children's garden and we love to spend time together picking up nourishing food..."

"Not sure if it is managerially possible for people to decide at the beginning of the year what they want and the farm would then produce to that list for each client."

2008 CSA Survey Results

The surveys are in, a total of 137 respondents. Thank you all for taking the time! And the question Tom and I find ourselves pondering as the survey responses roll in....how do we please a *group of individuals*?! It is a delicate balance! We walk a line between keeping the share interesting from year to year, but also growing crops that are reliable and high yielding. We want the CSA to be an economically viable source of food for your family, just as we want it to be an economically viable business for our family.

We make choices based on a limited amount of resources- labor, water and land. For example, beets grow well in our clay soil but spinach does not. Chard stands up to the heat of our Pennsylvania summers. Most lettuces do not. Broccoli needs consistent cool weather to head up- a hot spell will cause it to bolt. So spring broccoli is out, yet we are determined to grow it better in the fall and provide more of this favorite staple. Carrots are seriously labor intensive- so for now, it is just not feasible to provide a bunch a week for 24 weeks. Corn takes up lots of space and nutrients to grow, for comparatively small yields. And sometimes, we just have a surprise abundant crop like string beans- they like dry weather and basked in this summer's lack of rain. So hopefully you took advantage and froze a few for your Thanksgiving dinner! Heirloom tomatoes are grown in our greenhouses, are very labor intensive (grafting, pruning, trellising) and are valued at \$4-6 a pound depending where you shop. We do plan to put up another large greenhouse soon so we can increase our supplies of these finicky yet delicious heirloom tomatoes, but it is a considerable investment.

The crops that showed up consistently for those of you who responded with the vegetables you *disliked* were: chard, kale, collards, beets, turnips, bok choy, fennel, radishes, and eggplant. However, many of you also passionately *love* these crops! The lists of top 5 crops were as varied as the respondents, and included pretty much everything we grow, especially tomatoes, potatoes and garlic. So again, it begs the question, how do we please a group of individuals? Hopefully by finding a balance between crop staples and funky 'unusuals' (hoping that the more unusual-yet-easier-to-grow, make-more-sense-for-our-climate-and-soil-type vegetables, eventually become staples in your household.) We are always open to growing new things...even brussel sprouts and pea tops! But sorry folks- asparagus would be ready in early spring, before the CSA season starts. Some of you requested more fruit. We do not plan to put in fruit trees for the CSA. That is a whole different ball game, with its own skills and challenges- none of which we have experience with. We did work on a CSA that had fruit trees managed organically but honestly the

yields and quality were so low as to be laughable, and it really requires a full time fruit manager. We have considered adding raspberries sometime soon (it would be another pick-your-own crop for you all!)- so stay tuned!

As for the *pick-your-own* crops, most of you relish the experience, some of you could do without it. One respondent requested we limit the amount of pyo's to one crop. But who's ready to give up cherry tomatoes in the share? Flowers? String beans? Peas? We feel it is an important part of the CSA experience for these to be pyo. And we wouldn't grow them if they weren't. Most CSA's that deliver boxes, do not include these labor intensive crops in the share, or if they do, the amounts are considerably less. Though it is worth noting that even if you do not do the pyo crops, the retail cost of your share is close to what you pay. Also, as outlined in the CSA Rough Guide, you are welcome to come back and do the pyo's on another more convenient day.

One common refrain in the surveys was 'more scales in the distribution room!' Sorry everyone! That could have been easily resolved months ago- please let us know right away when you notice these types of problems. We may not be able to control the weather, but we can definitely help with the flow of the distribution process!

Some other general survey results: the reason for joining a CSA that received the highest ranking as 'very important'- "Local produce is better tasting and higher quality than store bought." Second and third were to preserve open space and to reduce energy use by buying local. 8% of you want us to get organic certification. 12% said it's not necessary and 58% said either way is okay with you. 65% of you completed your work requirements. 73% of respondents said they will return next year, while 23% of you are unsure. These numbers are consistent with our retention rate of about 75% over the past few years. The main reason for people not returning, besides moving, is the lack of choice and the constraints of being at the farm at a certain day and time frame.

Again, thank you for your survey responses. We have spent time with each one. As we are a young CSA, we pride ourselves in being open to change. We continue to learn and grow each year, as we look for the CSA model that pleases the most people. We continue to learn more about the challenges of growing crops not only in southeastern Pennsylvania, but on the land that is uniquely 98 Moyer Road. And we look ahead with gratitude to a new season, and another chance to do it all over again!!

"One day, coming from work feeling overwhelmed by life, I suddenly felt at peace as I picked beans in the mud."

"The amount of 'pick your own' is about right."

"I would suggest you limit the PYO types of crops to no more than one variety per week. (The beans took forever!)"

"I enjoyed picking the vegetables more than I had imagined. It brought back childhood memories which were as sweet as the produce!"

"At times I would have preferred to pick and choose what my family could eat."

"More broccoli would be awesome."

"I felt like a kid in a candy store every week but even healthier."

"I was hesitant to join and worried about the weirdness factor; arugula / kohlrabi / hakurei / escarole/collards/ kale/ broccolini etc, would never be in my grocery cart. A few cookbooks and recipes later, they are welcome additions."

"We received very little squash, and tons of string beans and swiss chard."

"Loved it all. However, I am a 'greens' freak and would love to have more of those. I could devour one share's worth no problem on my own. Am I the only one?!"

"Excellent quality. Didn't like the greens."

"The best thing was bringing my mother with me to pickup, going in the fields for PYO crops. The experience allowed us to share some special times."

"The quality of the food was wonderful. The flowers were an incredible surprise... such variety and beauty."

"The potatoes were on the small side. Would like more spinach if possible."

"There was a noticeable difference in taste of everything fresh picked over store bought. My son commented that the lettuce tasted so good it didn't need dressing...!"

"Last year I was new to this and did not always know how to use or store the vegetables. This year I purchased the cookbook ("From Asparagus to Zucchini") and found it extremely helpful and inventive."

"Variety was maybe too large. Would like to see some more 'staple' veggies appear throughout the season."

"At times I felt like we could have had more variety. It does sometimes feel like you are eating the same things over and over."

"Once again, a stunning variety carried through right to the end of the harvest."

"On balance excellent. What we really enjoy are different and often old veggies- e.g. heirloom tomatoes and watermelon radish."