

Pinehold Gardens Field Notes

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A DAY IN THE LIFE

The newsletter Growing For Market once published a list of 10 ways to tell if a farmer is having fun. One of them was when farmers consider a farm conference a vacation. That is very true for us, except we did escape to Chicago for a day that included a relaxing Amtrack ride. This week David will be attending a new CSA specific conference that will not only cover the how tos of CSA farming for beginners to experienced growers, but also take a look at the changing face of CSAs as more farms partner with other farms or offer custom boxes, and the influx of non farms, really distributors, associating themselves with the CSA movement.

At the end of February I will be attending the Midwest Organic Farming Conference, now in its 24th year. It has come a long way from 100 people sharing a nun's retirement quarters in Sinsinawa to 3,000 taking up the entire La Crosse Convention Center. And we have come a long way from our first year with one member 19 years ago to our current goal of 175 members. I will be concentrating on the workshops covering establishing habitats for beneficial and predator insects, innovative irrigation ideas for small farms, and managing water and fertility in the hoop-houses. It's a place to renew old friendships and make new ones that will last a lifetime. Check out the website www.moses-organic.org and come dine and dance with the farmers.

SURVEY RESULTS

An analysis of the 2012 survey that a record 107 of Pinehold members participated

in suggests that we are doing a pretty good job of finding the all important mean when it comes to variety, quality and quantity of produce in the boxes. That is not to say everything went well for every member. Some of the devilish details pointed out by a few members need to be addressed.

A heartening 96 percent of the members were highly satisfied or satisfied with the quantity of produce. Nearly 100 percent (99.1 percent) were highly satisfied or nearly satisfied with the quality of the produce. And 89.7 percent enjoyed the variety we offered.

The details are more interesting. Many of you, when forced to pick one vegetable that you wanted more of, tomatoes were the winner, followed closely by an unexpected outpouring of support for broccoli.

Tomatoes were understandable. While we gave more paste tomatoes and a delivery of cherry tomatoes this year, we weren't able to give as many slicing tomatoes as we did last year. The hoophouse is our main source of tomatoes and the heat this summer took its toll on that environment.

Broccoli is a more complicated story. It was planted a week later and grew slowly because of the heat. Therefore it reached its peak at the end of the season. Another drought notwithstanding, we hope to avoid this problem this year.

Of the produce the members said they would like less of was no surprise to us: greens, including kale, collards and Swiss chard. This is a problem for us since we also know there are members among our community who

cannot or could not get enough greens. A solution may be two fold: One, better utilize the extra boxes that we tried this year. Second, more information on how to use greens and make them more interesting to eat. They are really good for us and we would like all members for that reason alone to develop a taste for them.

Corn was mentioned by a couple of members as a vegetable they would like to receive. We agree that's it has become a summer staple. We have tried in the past to grow it with barely a modicum of success. But we may try again, land willing and season forgiving.

Some said they would have preferred their vegetables without a side dish of politics in the newsletter or email coverletter. We weren't aware that we were political. It doesn't seem to us that food, a healthy environment, good government and peace are necessarily akin to one political leaning or another. But that said, those that know us, know something of what we believe, and if you ask us, we'll tell you. But we will be on the lookout for any devious attempt to inculcate.

There are some members we will lose this year. They've told us so. The reasons vary from cost to moving out of the area. One thought we gave too much food and another thought we didn't give enough. We guess that is something we have to learn to accept: we can't make everyone happy all the time — as much as we would like to.

That's the survey in a nutshell. If anyone would like a copy of the results, we would be happy to put a pdf together and email it to you. Let's us know.

CSA SIGN UP

We thank the people that have already signed up for the season as that money is literally our seed money which now approaches \$3,000. Nearly 90 percent of our farm expenditures occur before we put a seed in the ground. In the "old" days of farming a local bank would cover the operating expenses for a farm with a revolving line of credit. So that is one of the most important things about supporting a farm through a CSA membership, the members become the George Bailey Building and Loan providing a wonderful life for farmers like us.

We are at 20 percent of our goal of 175 members. The price for returning members is \$420 and it can be paid with one check for the full amount, 2 checks with one for the current date and the second one dated for July 1st, or, just write as many post-dated checks as you like as long as they add up to \$420. Post-dated checks eliminates collection book-keeping for me during our busy farming season. Also remember that through the generosity of our members over the years we have an Assistance Fund that offsets up to \$100 of the cost. The Assistance Fund is self-policing, so there is no need to call us first if you feel that you need the funds.

Our best marketing, like many small businesses, is word of mouth. So if you know of anyone who maybe interested in joining a CSA, please tell them about our website www.pineholdgardens.com where a brochure and sign up form can be found under the CSA tab. Thank you for supporting us.