

CSA Newsletter

WALTHAM FIELDS COMMUNITY FARM

CELEBRATING 10 YEARS OF SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE 1995–2005

A project of Community Farms Outreach

240 Beaver Street, Waltham, MA 02452 • 781-899-2403 • www.communityfarms.org



In Distrust of Movements: Why Our Farm is not Certified Organic

The title of this essay is taken from a wonderful Wendell Berry article that all of you, if you have a chance to look it up on the Internet, should definitely read, and reminds me of a moment during his keynote speech at the Northeast Organic Farmers' Summer Conference several years ago. Mr. Berry was asked by a passionate young farmer whether he did not think that *all* farmland should be certified organic. "Heavens, no," replied the sage of sustainable agriculture, or something to that effect. "I don't want the government coming on my land and telling me how to grow my crops. I want local folks to decide how they want local food grown. And I want them to know it firsthand."

And this, in a nutshell, is the reason that we are not certified organic. We adhere to the National Organic Standards, a set of rules governing organic production put together by a thoughtful group of people at the beginning of the century and now administered by the USDA. We are very much in favor of transparency in agricultural production, the idea that people who eat the food we grow should know what has been done to it and to the land it is grown on. We do not believe in using chemical pesticides or fertilizers, we believe that building good soil makes good food, and we strive to produce the healthiest, most vibrantly alive produce we can grow to give to our CSA shareholders and hunger relief partners. And we support and participate in the Northeast Organic Farmers' Association, the local folks who are doing so much to promote sustainable agriculture in our region. Simply put, we believe in organic agricultural production as one part—a very fundamental part—of the change that needs to happen in our food system.

BUT. We believe that 'organic'—the term that no farm is now allowed to use without the seal of approval from a USDA-approved certifying agent—used to mean, or at least to imply, more than simply a set of production practices. To say a farm was organic almost always used to mean that the farm was small scale, often diversified, selling primarily locally. It often meant that farmer and consumer were engaged in a kind of ecological, economic and social symbiosis, sometimes verging on the artistic or the spiritual. It often meant local economies were benefiting from the farm's sourcing its inputs locally and selling its products locally. It meant that farmland was preserved in small parcels, often including

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woodlands, pastures, wild meadows and streams as well as cultivated fields. It meant communities of growers and consumers engaged in learning how to grow and purchase food more wisely and how to teach others to do so. It meant a commitment to living wages for farmers and farm workers and to fair prices (which often necessarily reflected the hidden costs not evident in conventionally grown food) for consumers.

The ambiguities of 'often' and 'implied', of course, as well as the differing standards that were set by local certifying agents across the country, are part of what fueled the USDA's push to set national standards for organic food. And there's nothing wrong, inherently, in knowing the standards by which the ingredients in a jar of processed salsa or tomato sauce from a company 3,000 miles away were produced. And we all, in our busy lifestyles, eat a jar of canned tomato sauce from time to time, and it might as well be organic, to my way of thinking.

BUT. Imagine knowing firsthand, because you walked the fields and talked to the farmer and put that tomato sauce into jars yourself, how those tomatoes were grown. Imagine the benefits to our communities if we all, collectively, take active responsibility for knowing the economic, social and ecological conditions in which our food is grown instead of relying on the USDA to give us a small fraction of the true picture. That's why even most organic farmers will tell you that they'll choose local food over organic food 90% of the time if they have to choose. And that is the most important reason why our farm is not certified organic: to make the complexities of the food system a little more evident, and to make you ask questions and to make us answer honestly, without the benefit of some standards to hide behind. We want our own little community of growers and consumers to set our own standards of what sustainable agriculture really means, and to try our best to live up to those standards.

Enough soapbox. Enjoy your veggies.

—Amanda, for the farm crew



Tomatillo Sauce

from Sundays at Moosewood Restaurant

12–14 fresh tomatillos
2 Tbsp vegetable oil
½ cup chopped onion
1 large garlic clove, minced
1 serrano or other chile, minced (or to taste)
1 tsp ground coriander seeds
¼ tsp sugar
1 tsp chopped fresh cilantro
salt to taste

Remove papery husks from tomatillos. Cover them with water in a saucepan and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer about 5 minutes until they can easily be pierced with a fork. Drain and puree in a blender or food processor.

In a small skillet, saute onions, garlic, chile, and coriander in oil for 5 to 10 minutes. Add tomatillos and cook gently 5 more minutes. Add sugar, cilantro, and salt.

Tomato Soup with Indian Spices

Submitted by shareholder Jeanine Jenks Farley

8 medium tomatoes
3.5 cups water
1/2 teaspoon butter
1/4 teaspoon pepper
1/4 teaspoon chili powder
1/2 teaspoon cumin
1/4 teaspoon ground ginger (or minced fresh ginger)
1/4 teaspoon garlic powder (or minced fresh garlic)
salt to taste
plain yogurt, for garnish

1. Cut the tomatoes into quarters. Cover with water. Bring to a boil. Cook until tomatoes are tender.
 2. Add other ingredients. Mash tomatoes as needed.
 3. Serve hot. Garnish with yogurt.
- That's it! Simple and tasty. If you are a purist, you can strain to remove tomato skins and seeds.

To reach us:

Amanda Cather: farmmanager@communityfarms.org
Ellen Gray & Matt Kochka: asstgrowers@communityfarms.org
Marla Rhodes: developmentmanager@communityfarms.org
Volunteer Coordinators: volunteer@communityfarms.org
Newsletter Submissions: newsletter@communityfarms.org
CFO Board of Directors: board@communityfarms.org

A Tip for Storing Greens

Submitted by shareholder Jen Shepherd

I learned from my mother-in-law the best way to store any kind of greens (lettuces, chard, herbs, etc.). When I get home from the farm, I wash all of my greens. Without shaking off the excess water, I place them onto a laid out kitchen towel. I fold the towel so that the greens are nicely tucked in and then place it into a plastic shopping bag, and then into the fridge. This keeps my greens fresh, crisp, and ready for eating for the entire week.

What is Purslane?

Purslane is an edible weed that grows at the farm. It lies flat on the ground and has cylindrical reddish stalks with succulent leaves that look like miniature jade plant leaves. Take as much as you want and help to weed the farm!

Shareholder Suzanne Sukiasyan calls purslane “dandur.” She steams it, stems and all, in a little water for 5 minutes and then drains it and adds garlic and a little vinegar. She eats it as cooked greens.

Here's a recipe from the Web:

HAM AND PURSLANE ON RYE

*2 slices rye bread toasted or plain
(or you can use whole wheat, pumpernickel, or sour dough)
A few slices good quality ham
A handful of fresh purslane, stems included
Mustard/horseradish mix
(no yellow dye, please)*

Instead of lettuce or pickles on this ham sandwich, you're using fresh purslane. It's quite flavorful. The slightly crunchy flavor of the crisp, succulent purslane stems helps to make this a satisfying sandwich.

Purslane:



Community Farms Outreach is a nonprofit organization dedicated to farmland preservation, hunger relief, and education.