

Meet Jenny Wooster from Picadilly Farm

Jenny Wooster worked at Waltham Fields Community Farm in 1998 for her first farming experience, and again in 2001, taking on the role of Farm Manager. In 2006, Jenny and her husband Bruce purchased Picadilly Farm in Winchester, New Hampshire, and have developed a high quality, certified organic vegetable operation. For the last five years, WFCF has worked with Jenny and Bruce to supply our farm with selected crops to supplement what we can grow ourselves on our limited acreage. We are thrilled to expand our partnership in 2011, and caught up with Jenny to share her memories and thoughts.

WFCF: What did you like most about working at Waltham Fields Community Farm?

Jenny: I am grateful for the Farm's commitment to providing lots of space for different people to learn and do meaningful work. Stumbling onto those fields in Waltham was one of the luckiest things that ever happened to me. When I first visited the Farm in the spring of 1998, I had a college degree in Anthropology and Women's Studies, plenty of office work under my belt, a bike to scoot around on, and absolutely no farm experience.

WFCF: What are some of your strongest memories from your time with WFCF?

Jenny: I remember being sent out one day to harvest collards, and I innocently picked all the Brussels' sprout leaves! A community gardener and retired college professor, Joe, helped out a lot. Marina and her girlfriends from Crete rocked out the weekly CSA harvest (I learned to say "hello", "thank you", and "63" – the number of shares we harvested – in Greek, but my gentle insistence that the vegetable is called a "cucumber" rather than a "cucumberger" never took root). And of course, I will never forget the Farm's founder, Oakes Plimpton, regularly chiding me for hiding the vegetables from him under the row covers! In the midst of all these characters, a quiet love for growing food as part of a community set seed in me.

WFCF: How would you describe how WFCF has changed since you worked there?

Jenny: When I started, the farm was a scrappy, weedy, hidden spot – even many of the community gardeners right next door didn't yet know what was happening. Since then, there has been a sea change – the farm is highly productive, wonderfully organized, and consciously engaged with the community it serves. Its reach is far beyond what I imagined a decade ago, though Dee Kricker and a handful of other folks back then clearly had a vision. Watching the farm really take root has been a delight.

WFCF: What are the most important aspects of the relationship between our two farms?

Jenny: Given the world we live in, urban-rural farm partnerships make a lot of sense for farmers, for eaters and in terms of all-around sustainability. At Picadilly, we have dozens of acres of prime farmland, in the midst of a sparse rural population. The opposite is true in Waltham – lots of demand for the farm food, with every row foot of growing space at a premium. Having us grow potatoes and winter squash for the WFCF shares the last few years – two land-intensive crops that we have the equipment to handle – has been an easy fit. Of course, part of the ease has been about our personal enthusiasm for the WFCF mission, about the genuine support of WFCF staff for our success, as well as eye-to-eye perspectives about growing practices. In 2011, we've decided to expand our relationship to further enhance each farm's CSA program and WFCF's mission.

WFCF: What sustainability initiatives are you focusing on right now?

Jenny: Soil is by far the most valuable and vulnerable natural resource on our farm. So we're focusing on soil conservation and soil building, with two macro approaches. First, we've been

working on increasing the soil's biological activity and improving the balance of nutrients for crop growth. We take more than one hundred tons of living matter (food!) off the farm each season, which means we need to pay attention to building a soil that is resilient and healthy for the long haul. Crop rotation, fallow periods, cover crops, compost, biological stimulants all play a part in our long-view soil building plan. Secondly, our light, sandy soils are prone to erosion into the gullies around our field edges. Erosion control often means planning for the "big" rain storms, the ones that we all fear are becoming more common in the face of climate change. To keep our topsoil out of the nearby Connecticut River, we've been working with the Natural Resource Conservation Service of USDA to implement a multi-year plan that involves repairing existing spillways and digging drainage trenches, and taking vulnerable field edges out of row crop production and into permanent shrubs and pasture. We've only been on this land for five years, and we have plenty more to do and to learn!

2011 Program Highlights

100 More CSA Shares Available through Picadilly Partnership

Half-Price CSA Shares Available for Low-Income Households

\$50,000 Goal for Food Access/Hunger Relief Distributions

NEW Full Day Farmer-for-a-Week Program for 4th-6th Graders

Newbury College Takes on Food for Sprout

Culinary students focus on local food and lots of it!

Get ready to reap the benefits of a new partnership with the Newbury College Roger A. Saunders School of Hotel & Restaurant Management at Sprout – our silent auction fundraiser and spring celebration – on Saturday, April 9, at the Charles River Museum of Industry. We are so pleased to be working with Assistant Professor Paige Haringa and her Ethics of Eating class to bring you delicious food creations made with deep attention to local and fair-trade products and preparing enough food to keep our crowd happy! As students explore a range of food system and food access issues, Waltham Fields Community Farm is thrilled to take part in their education through engagement in our service learning program and support for our charitable programming.

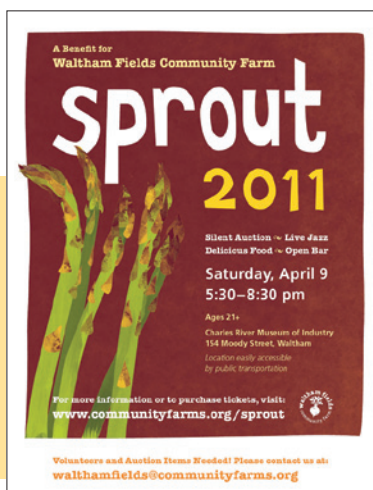
You too can help us make Sprout 2011 better than ever:

- **Please join us** – tickets go on sale in early March – check www.communityfarms.org/sprout
- **Donate an auction item** – sports tickets, special experiences such as classes and getaways, and restaurant gift certificates wanted! Contact claire@communityfarms.org

Save the Date: Sprout 2011

**Saturday, April 9th
5:30-8:30pm**

**Charles River
Museum of Industry
154 Moody Street
Waltham, MA**



From the Board

"Well, before I graduated from high school, I'd see farmers working together... Now it's only our family working, because now you have to drive eight or ten miles to work cooperatively with another farmer. You don't have those close bonds with neighbors anymore: eating together and living together and playing and working and all that. That's pretty much gone."
– Jim Knopik, Knopik Family Farm. Excerpted from an interview in "Farm Together Now", by Amy Franceschini and Daniel Tucker

Last fall Claire and the Waltham Fields staff brought us a plan for 2011 that featured four year-round farmer positions. With the high demand for our CSA, plans for season extension, and individual donations and philanthropic grants to support our food access programs, we could justify roles for all four farmers and enthusiastically approved. The farmers – Amanda, Andy, Erinn, and Dan – are thrilled to have the opportunity to work as a team. It's an opportunity that is becoming less and less common as the industrialization of agriculture progresses.

As many of you know (and may have experienced first hand), a big challenge for us over the past few years has been meeting the demand for our CSA shares while maintaining the community-oriented feel of our CSA pick ups and our commitment to having a substantial portion of our produce go to our food access program. This year we are able to expand our CSA by about a hundred shares, giving all the patient families who have been on our wait list the chance to sign up. We are able to do this because of an increased partnership with Picadilly Farm, which has provided some produce for our CSA for several previous seasons. In collaboration with Picadilly, we will be able to meet more of the demand for local, sustainably grown produce.

These two examples of Waltham Fields' growth this season are due to the dedicated work and creativity of our staff and the generous support of our community.

Thank you for your participation and donations to our food access and education programs. I look forward to seeing you at Sprout in April!

Rebecca Nesson, Board President

Thanks to our Student Volunteers this Winter!

Marketing, lesson planning, Sprout organizing...who says there is nothing to do around here in winter? Thanks to a fabulous group of students helping with education and outreach initiatives - Katie Cavanaugh and Julia Jenko from Bentley University, Laura Van Tassel from Tufts University, and Shannon Baillie from Austin Prep School – we're buzzing along and feeling prepared for the season to come!

Waltham Fields Community Farm

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