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Newsletter

July 2013

Hello everyone,

I thought I would take this newsletter to clarify how the work exchange option works. A couple of years ago I created the option that if members helped out at the farm for a half day during the season, they could get a \$50 reduction in the share price. We have held a couple of "Weeding Party" afternoons on two Saturdays in July over the past couple of years. Some members have also helped in the greenhouse in the spring and with the fall harvest, as well as other special projects. The basic idea is if you contribute about 4 hours of your time at some point in the season, you can reduce your share price by \$50.

This year, family life and the extra teaching I am doing doesn't seem to allow us to have weekends available to host any weeding parties. So I put the call out for help in our fall carrots, and thank you for those who have come out, and we have saved some carrots rows for those of you still wanting to come out. **So this is a general call that if you are able to come for half a day anytime, there is weeding that needs doing.** Just let me know at least a couple days ahead of time. You can call or email. You may be working by yourself or with us, depending on what day you are thinking of coming and what else we are doing. The garden is six acres, and we are trying to keep on top of the weeding more than we have before, so there will always be something to weed. Our system with the horses is definitely making the weeding more manageable, as working share member Mark Mariash noticed, the garden has never looked so clean, but it will take a few years for the full impact of the system to take effect... which means we still have a lot of weeds to contend with.

If weeding is just not your thing, we also have a building project that maybe a couple of members could take on... During the wet spring, before we could get on the ground, we spent some time building a gazebo type structure in the middle of the garden (see the picture below). It is meant as a place for people in the garden, recognizing that since we are not having any pick-ups at the farm, we need a place for people to feel like they can be in the garden when they are picking flowers or cherry tomatoes. It is a place to put your stuff, to sit in the shade (not yet) and enjoy a drink of water, it is also set up for us to stir the Biodynamic preparations for soil and plants. Now it only needs a roof. We are a bit too busy at the moment to keep working on it, but if anyone wanted to take this project on as their work contribution... that would be great!

Another project is wood chipping. We had some of our cedar trees in the back of the farm logged this spring, and there is a great deal of brush that could be turned into wood chips. If a couple of people were interested in that, we would need to arrange that a bit ahead of time so we could rent a chipper.



If your summer is too busy, we will also need help with some of the storage crops. These are crops that are all harvested at once and stored. The first one to come out will be the garlic in the next couple of weeks, then the onions in early September, then the squash towards the end of September. And all through the month of October we will be harvesting the root crops. I will post on the farm website the times when we will be working on these crops, but keep them in mind.

This work exchange option is for two reasons. First it helps us with tasks that call for the saying, “many hands make for light work.” It is also a way for you to get more connected the farm and to your food. I also recognize that life is busy, and if you cannot manage it, it is just a matter of paying the full share price. If you have any questions about all this, just ask.

As for the season so far, it has been one of challenges and triumphs. The cold wet spring has had its impact. A few of the crops, the fennel, radicchio, and frisee, responded as if they had seen winter and have tried to go to flower early. To get any crop at all, we have been harvesting them on the small side. Another challenge with the early crops was pest problems. The first three lettuce plantings and the peas seemed to me not to be growing.... I could see the crop there, but it just seemed to be in hibernation mode. It turned out that a couple of geese, who I saw hanging out in that area, though have never had any problem with, were just taking little bites off of every single plant, keeping them small. By the time I realized what had happened, the geese were long gone, but had set all the plants back. Then in the same area a groundhog moved in and kept snacking on the same plants! Once I caught the groundhog, the plants could re-grow. This is why we have not had any full size lettuce heads yet this year. Luckily we were experimenting with a new system for cut lettuce which has been a great success, which will continue this season, and we will build on next year.

One of the triumphs I wrote about in the last newsletter with the new horse cultivation and bed preparation technique. This has been a major positive change for the farm. The challenge came in shortly after the last newsletter when my lead horse, Molly, injured her leg. I’m still trying to figure out what is wrong. I had to switch to mainly using the Percheron team. I had been afraid of plowing with this team, as they tend to go very fast and don’t like to stop and stand still. With

all the rocks we have on our farm, I was concerned that they would throw me off the plow, or break something, or both. I found however that I could walk behind the plow even though it is a riding plow. Sure enough within the first twenty minutes of plowing with them, we hit a rock and the plow went flying in the air! But we were able to keep going, and this team turned out to be great at plowing.... But then the older Percheron mare May also developed a different problem with her leg, which I am also still trying to figure out too.

So the two horses that were not having trouble were Bert and Prince. These are younger horses, and I had been nervous about working them together as they don't get along as well as the others. But to get the work done, I had to try it out. It turns out they are working great as a team. This is a major triumph for me as a horse teamster. The challenge that goes with all this was that while I was figuring out how to work with these different teams, I got behind on the cultivating. This means some of the weeds were able to get bigger and the horse cultivating is less effective than it could have been. This means more work for us, but it is still way better than in other years.

Part of the challenge was also that it happened at the time of year when it seems like everything has to be done at once... it was during our first CSA pick-ups, and when there was a window for cutting hay. A triumph is that the hay looks better than we have had it in years. This is from the weather, but also our management practices finally starting to pay off. The challenge hit when I went to try to bale the first field that was cut and I couldn't get the square baler to tie the bales properly. I finally had a realization that I needed to get a round baler. Baling square bales of hay is a lot of work at a time of year that we, as primarily vegetable growers, have so much to do. When we bale small square bales, we are committing to picking them up the same day and stacking them in the barn. It is exhilarating, but often very stressful work as we are always under a time pressure. The round baler allows the baling to be done by one person, and the bales don't have to be put in the barn immediately, so the pressure is greatly reduced.

More updates to come,

Cory