

Into the Future

By John

So I will dive right back in from where I left off last week, which was stressing the need for diversity for a farm to be truly sustainable. When we think of sustainability we not only consider the idea of having a profitable business model that allows us to be good stewards of the environment. But we also think of part of sustainability as being as self-sufficient as possible. In the long term it means coming as close as we can to creating a closed farm system meaning that we can bring all off-farm inputs to a minimum. To do this the farm must be in near perfect balance. I say 'near perfect' because all ecosystems and individual organisms are inherently dynamic, being constantly in flux things are in need of constant adjustment to be kept near to balanced. Our dream farm we think would make a near perfect CSA with the ultimate goal of having a full diet CSA, going far beyond just vegetables and chicken. Doing this will take our lifetimes but here is what we imagine, approximately in the order we imagine rolling them out after we get our own land. Vegetables of course, basically as you are accustomed to by now but adding more crops and varieties along the way. This includes the construction of hoop houses that will allow us to extend the season for a full complement of greens and other crops almost year-round availability. We will also continue to raise chickens and as early as next year I think we will add a few pigs to our farm. Adding bees will be a high priority allowing us to keep our own pollinators while offering honey to our members. When we have our own land we will also be able to move beyond annuals and plant perennials. This means a much better selection of herbs to start, and over time adding things like asparagus and rhubarb. One thing that really excites me is adding a full complement of fruit to our farm and offering a fruit share. I would love to have a small orchard with apples, peaches, pears, nectarines (my favorite fruit) and plums and of course a press to make fresh cider. Obviously this wouldn't be available for several years but we would want to put in the orchard as soon as possible when we are on our own land.

WHATS ON DECK

It's that time of the year, lots of heavy things. Potatoes, carrots, beets, onions and winter squash will all keep coming in. Cabbage, broccoli and cauliflower will hopefully make an appearance soon. We have lots of green tomatoes picked, while not nearly as tasty as a summer tomato we think some will carry over into October, even after the pepper and eggplant finally give up the ghost.

Strawberries, raspberries and blackberries would be available much earlier. After the vegetable ground is ready and the orchard is in we will invest in pasture and hayfields. We hope to get laying hens in either a permanent or mobile henhouse but with plenty of access to the outdoors either way. We would introduce cows to our farm. At first we would likely buy in steer to finish on the farm and butcher in the fall. Maintaining a cow-calf herd or dairy animals requires a lot of infrastructure and equipment to care for animals through the winter and isn't likely possible for some years down the road. As we are developing these systems we will be improving our vegetable systems all the while. We will improve our storage facilities significantly allowing us to distribute winter shares at least once a month and perhaps every other week from December through April. We imagine this phase of our farms growth taking at least 10 years. If you are still members in 2021 you could have access to 35-40 weeks of vegetables, 15 weeks of fruit, a dozen eggs every other week as well as chicken, pork and beef. The next 10 years will see a whole new evolution in our farm. We imagine investing heavily in our animals in order to maintain our own herds. This means a proper barn for the cows and pigs, fencing, hay fields and hay equipment. Chickens and pigs tend to be pretty hungry and I would much rather grow grain for our animals which requires yet more infrastructure and equipment. This phase though will set us up for what we think will be the farms true maturation. At this point we have the basic infrastructure to make the leap into a true full diet CSA. First, this would mean producing milk and eventually processing the milk into other products like, butter, cream, yogurt and cheese. We would

also expand into dry beans and small grains eventually moving towards actually baking bread. We are not sure exactly how long it would take to get us to this point but it makes me a bit giddy to romanticize about it. I absolutely love the idea of eating tomatoes fertilized by the same animal that made my cheese, or having bacon with hints of the orchard that the pig helped clean up or an herbed bread with herbs, honey, flour and oats from our own fields. I could go on forever but there are few things more gratifying than having a meal where you produced everything but the salt. This is ambitious and it will take a lot more talent and dedication than just Lidia and I alone to make our dream into our reality. It will take dedicated workers, well-trained apprentices and the employ of artisans to help make the finer things like cheese and bread. But most importantly it will be you, our CSA members present and future that will build this farm. By you alone will we have the income, support, involvement and help to make Fazenda Boa Terra true to its mission.

Recipe of the Week

African Sweet Potato Stew

1 large onion, chopped
2 garlic cloves, minced
1 bunch kale, leaves separated from stem and chopped
6-8 plum tomatoes
1 hot pepper, minced (optional)
1 can (15oz) garbanzo beans
½ cup raisons
2-3 large sweet potatoes, peeled and diced into ½ inch pieces
1 tsp. ground cumin
1 tsp. curry powder
1 tsp. salt
½ tsp. pepper
½ cup couscous
2 cup vegetable or chicken stock

Using a stew pot over medium heat, fry onion, garlic and kale stems until the stems are limp. Add tomatoes, hot pepper and chopped kale leaves. Continue frying for about 2 minutes. Add garbanzo beans (un-drained), raisons, sweet potatoes, cumin, curry powder, salt and pepper. Cook for 3-5 minutes. Reduce heat to med-low. Using a large spoon create a well in the center off the pot by pushing the mixture to the sides of the pot. Add the couscous to the well, patting down until wet adding chicken or vegetable stock over the couscous. Cover in simmer over low heat for 25-30 minutes more. Season further to taste and serve.

Featured Item

This week you will be getting the first sweet potatoes of the year. I love sweet potatoes if for no other reason than it allows the botanist in me to come out and dispel the scientific misnomer of calling a sweet potato a yam. The word yam was affixed to the sweet potato as a marketing term in the Southeast US some 5 or 6 decades ago. But it is quite likely that you have never had a yam and perhaps never will. Sweet potatoes and yams are not even distantly related. Considering their botanical categorizations, apples and oranges are closer cousins. While sweet potatoes are smooth and sweet swollen root, not a tuber. So it's not actually a potato either. A yam however is a tuber meaning that it can store all of the energy and genetic information in and underground reproductive structure allowing it to produce another generation asexually. Yams are scaly, odd shaped and very very starchy. Thanks for indulging a diatribe. Whether you call it a sweet potato or yam, it is considered to pack the most nutrition per row foot of any typical vegetable crop. Do not store sweet potatoes in the refrigerator, they will spoil rapidly. If possible, keep the in a dark place (or in a brown paper bag) between 55-60°. If not an option, store them in a brown paper bag in a cool spot for up to a month depending on the conditions.

News and Notes

- Inver Grove and Bloomington Members: The farmers markets will end October 13th and 15th respectively, one week before the last CSA distribution. If you are unable to make it to farm to get your last CSA share or Winter Storage Box on Friday October 21st and 28th please let us know so we can make other arrangements.
- If you would still like to order a Winter Storage Box Let us know at your CSA distribution or order online.
- In the next few weeks we will have Enrollment forms available for the 2012 season. They will be available online but hard copies will be available at you site.
- We have plenty of remaining smaller chickens in the 3-4 pound (Cornish game hen) range. If you are interested in ordering any smaller chickens they are still available