

Tractor Brain

From John

It's funny how our assumptions can be so easily challenged if not turned on their heads all together. I spend a lot of time in the seat of a tractor, more than thirty or forty hours some weeks between any of the three farms you can find me at any given time. I had been passing a lot of the time using my great new hearing protectors with an audio jack to listen to mp3's or the radio. But I broke the cable connecting to my phone. Then I broke another one after that; realizing that the manufacturer clearly wasn't thinking of the agrarian worker in the design phase. More to the point, without the distraction of music or chatter I can be out there for hours at a time with no company other than the roar of the engine and my own garbled mind unleashed upon itself. The same effect has been known to affect those who spend hours weeding. One vein of my random ruminations this week was on farmers and adversity. I was thinking of the disasters I have seen in the past. Fires, floods, injuries, personal tragedies and accidents of all manner which all farmers face at some point. I was thinking about how in all of these instances I have witnessed I have never ceased to be amazed at the farmers resolve to cope. It's almost as if they can just add it to their to do list and go about their normal routine. The cows still need milking and the vegetables still need to be picked and packed in time for market. If the milk parlor is flooded or the packshed caught fire the farmer will just adapt and figure out another way to get it done. The farmer always has an answer. This incredible doggedness can be seen in farmers the world around such that you might think almost nothing can ruffle the farmer's feathers.

Not more than an hour or so after my self-aggrandizing imaginations of the noble and true farmer, the one true folk hero to all

ON DECK FOR NEXT WEEK

You will continue to receive a variety of greens as promised. We will start to get into more bunched goods like turnips and possibly even the first carrots of the year and summer goods like squash and zukes with the first cukes not far behind.

mankind I discovered a fatal flaw in my postulations. In none of my scenarios of the cool and collected farmer was I thinking of their reaction when it is their crops or livestock at stake. The loss of these can wilt the heart of the man or woman whom has spent so many countless hours tending to their stock and crop. What caused me to realize this wasn't so much a disaster as a major problem. Perhaps the feeling of my gut reacting to a non-disaster that illustrated so brightly that perhaps I should be a bit slower to lay accolades upon myself and fellow farmers. There is a word out there that I have a feeling you will be hearing a lot this summer. You will hear it at the farmers market, you will hear it from other CSA farmers and likely on the TV and radio. That word is 'cutworm.' Cutworms are almost always around, occasionally damaging or killing a plant or two but rarely present a problem. However, conditions have been ripe for a once in a generation infestation. With the unseasonably dry and warm fall in 2011, unusually warm winter continuing into an abnormally mild spring; the sheer numbers of eggs and the success of those eggs in hatching is wreaking havoc in many fields across the Midwest. They will feed on most anything. Many corn and bean farmers have seen their wonderfully early planted corn fields leveled; many are mixing soil pesticides in with the RoundUp and replanting their fields into beans. Many bean fields aren't faring much better. Over the past ten days or so they have been content to feast on veggies. On our property, Gardens of Eagan has seen some heavy damage and here at Fazenda Boa Terra, we are not unscathed. When we pulled back our row cover we found very

heavy damage to our peppers and early tomatoes. Just a week prior I was planning on staking and tying our tomatoes. Today they look several weeks behind schedule. We lost probably 25% of the first planting and about 75% have moderate to severe damage. Luckily we have 2 more plantings that we will be watching like hawks. We have also seen about a quarter of our peppers killed with more taking damage. This yield loss will inevitably be felt, though we have been able to replace some of the lost plants. They have also destroyed at least one planting of sweet corn and the first basil. Looking at what is now a sad little field in our eyes, so filled with promise shortly ago and illustrated vividly a contradiction to my image of the ever unwavering agronomist. These sights brought into question everything I that I know about vegetable farming. It gets you right in the gut. We have always had little tolerance for failure or a job done poorly. Of course we have had failures of sorts and made plenty of mistakes, but for some reason this particular specter seemed to hit us right in the place where confidence resides. I for one certainly didn't feel calm, collected, and confident or at the ready with any answers and explanations. How we could have let this happen? What did we miss? Why didn't we see this coming? What did we do wrong?

In the end though, perhaps we did prove to be that stoic farmer that will never allow a difficulty to get in the way of the task at hand. After a little while off feeling bad for ourselves we sucked it up, made a plan to deal with it and got about our day. Everything is going to be just fine, just chalk it up to another lesson in life and love learned the hard way. This is not a disaster. This is just farming.

News and Notes

- Volunteers, if you would like to start getting a little dirt time in just let us know. You can come out just about anytime with the exception of Thursday afternoon, Saturday mornings and Sundays.
- If you would prefer to get the full color newsletter electronically, let us know and we can save some printing.

Featured Item

Broccoli Raab will be in your share this week. We failed pretty badly with the raab (also see rabe or rapini and many more variations) last year so we are happy to have a nice crop out there to add just a little more variety in the greens heavy springs shares. It is very high in vitamins and minerals, especially iron as you will tell from the bitterness. To store: keep wrapped in plastic or bagged in your crisper drawer for up to 5 days. Do not wash until ready as it wilts easily. You can blanch and freeze for longer storage if desired.



A pleasant view, a truly gorgeous potato field!

Recipe of the Week

Broccoli Raab and Garlic Scape Pizza

1 bunch broccoli raab
1-3 garlic scapes, minced
1 cup ricotta cheese
1/2 cup shredded mozzarella
olive oil
sea salt and pepper to taste
red pepper flakes
pizza dough/crust, prepare as you wish

1. Preheat oven to 450 degrees.
2. Trim bottom off broccoli raab and cut into bite sized pieces. Blanch in boiling water for 3 minutes. Strain and pat dry.
3. Sauté garlic scapes and broccoli rabe with olive oil in a skillet over medium high heat.
4. Spread ricotta cheese over pizza dough, arrange broccoli raab and garlic scapes, then mozzarella. Season with salt, pepper and red pepper flakes.
5. Bake for 10 minutes, until the cheese is melted and the crust is a light golden color.

Remember it's a pizza so get creative with any toppings you can imagine.