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Thank for the Trip

From John

Well, here we are at the end of another season. It seems hard to believe that we have already gone through 20 weeks of veggie deliveries already. Especially considering what an awful start we had to the season. In the end I think it turned out to be our best yet. There were some setbacks and failures as there always will be when you grow over 40 different crops, but in the end many of those crops were something we don't feel bad about being really proud of. We hope you have enjoyed the produce we have been able to provide for you as much as we have enjoyed growing it. That being said, we can't deny being happy to have another season come to an end. After many months of nonstop grinding, our bodies and minds remind us that it is time for a break. Though, we will continue to be as busy as ever over the next several weeks.

We know that some of you have missed the past few newsletters. While there is certainly reason there isn't any excuse other than my own awkwardness. We have important news about our future and I have struggled greatly in putting it out there. Last year at this time we were struggling after being kicked off our land and spent the fall in a mild panic not knowing what the future would hold and how we would keep farming the way that we want to. At the end of this season we will be moving our farm once more. We had an amazing opportunity fall into our laps that we had to accept. It is such a fantastic break that I have been more than just a little embarrassed to even talk about it especially knowing it could be a difficult conversation.

It wasn't anything we were looking for; it's a project that we got headhunted for. We were approached by Wisconsin dairyman Gary Zimmer who is a respected farmer and author who has for many years dreamed of changing

ON DECK

Nothing obviously. But you can still order a storage vegetable box here.

the way we farm and pass that knowledge on to others. He is also on the board of trustees of Taliesin Preservation Inc. (TPI) in Spring Green Wisconsin. Architecture buffs will know that Taliesin was the farm and home of Frank Lloyd Wright. For years they have wanted to start a vegetable farm there and have someone manage the land and restore the historical land use that was in place when Frank was alive. Gary and Taliesin have been trying to bring their vision to fruition for almost 2 decades in hopes of giving the farm a purpose again. Purposing to use the land and buildings to change the face of agriculture by creating a model farm where aspiring and experienced farmers alike can come to learn. It would be a place that holds workshops, field days and conferences, grows fruit, vegetables and animals and houses apprentices in a top-notch apprentice program to prepare the next generation of farmers for success. There would be a farm to table restaurant and a commercial kitchen to process value added goods like pickles, ketchup, beans and canned/frozen vegetables from the farm. The vision and commitment has been there for a long time but what it lacked was the right farmers for the job. When we were approached about being those farmers we were a bit skeptical but as the details came out, we realized this was the opportunity of a lifetime. We have worked our fingers to the bone for over 10 years now waiting for just such a break.

It has been a bit overwhelming to have someone as well respected as Gary at a place with the historical weight as Taliesin come to you and tell you that they want to build a model for the future of organic agriculture around your approach and methods of farming. It's a weighty responsibility but we are nothing if not ambitious and we believe that we are up to the task.

It is a long-term project but over the next couple of years there are a few things that we will accomplish. The primary objective is to get a vegetable farm up and running. To do that, Taliesin is building a small pack shed and workshop, putting up a greenhouse installing an irrigation system, providing us a house on the farm and the kitchen at the architectural school onsite will buy produce and provide us meals for the busiest months of the season. In return we will start doing the work to reestablish the old apple orchard and vineyard, rebuild the old piggery, do some pasture renovation and reestablish the contour strips as they once were. We will also work with their tour guides to help increase agro-tourism at the farm as well as help with the development of the farm school. Gary will help fund some of the infrastructure projects and will put up the money for us to buy the equipment we need and provide a small stipend so that at long last Lidia and I can work together fulltime while we are getting the farm up and running. The equipment money will be in the form of a loan that will be paid back to Gary. We still have to finalize the details of the loan because Gary told us 'just write up anything you want and I'll sign it' and I have been back and forth for weeks and weeks on just how to go about it. He isn't looking to make money from the investment but wants us to keep meticulous records so that our investment and production model can serve as a model for future beginning farmers. Using our business plan as a template, future farmers would be able to have a solid plan to take to the bank to get start-up capital.

For us the best part is that we will still run our farm as an independent business. Plus I will no longer need a day job and Lidia and I will work together all day and we can be 100% dedicated to our farm (and the thought of having someone cook us meals with our produce during the season seemed pretty awesome).

It really wasn't a hard choice to take a gamble on ourselves, we had to take advantage of this opportunity. The difficult part has been deciding what do to about our CSA members. We have been going back and forth about it but came to the decision that it is best to move on. We tried and tried to pencil it out and we just don't know how to make it work. We would need more members to make sure

that the truck was filled to the hilt each week and we would have to hire a driver because it is a 600 mile roundtrip and would likely be a 14-16 hour day to make drops in the Twin Cities. We hate the thought of abandoning you but we just don't see how we can make it work financially. We also don't think that people join a CSA to buy produce that was trucked in from hundreds of miles away each week. While our heartstrings are pulled back to the TC Metro it just isn't sustainable economically or environmentally when there are so many good farms so close that can provide as well as we. It isn't easy to walk away but it seems the best choice.

We have been so appreciative of all of you and so many others in our farming community. It isn't just our members, but dear friends we have made within our farming community that we are uprooting from as well. It's sad and a little scary for us, yet we have much to be thankful for. Linda from Gardens of Eagan and Allison from the Organic Field school who have ever been our allies and cheerleaders and gave us our chance to get started. Jenifer from Humble Pie Farm who volunteered many hours to help Lidia in the pack shed and in the field and her husband Mike that has helped us with markets when family matters have pulled us away. Rachel (and Rachel before her) that have helped us at our market stand for the past 3 years. All of our site hosts that have opened up their homes and businesses to us and allow the CSA to function. Our members that came to our aid when we were kicked off our land. Keri who allowed an unknown startup to join the market in Bloomington. Constance who organized neighbors, members and friends to raise money for our financial aid fund. Just to name a few. And we are especially thankful for all of our CSA members whose support has allowed any of this to happen at all.

While we know that we are disappointing many of you, we hope that you know what you mean to us. From the outset we have had the mission of changing the face of agriculture, and it appears that we may have the chance to do just that. If we do go on to do amazing things, it will be by you that we ever had the opportunity to do so. We will ever in your debt. Thank you all so much!