



This Week's Word From the Farm

Week of 8/11/08

What's In Your Box?

- Melons
- Tomatoes
- Sweet Corn
- Pears
- Eggplant
- Summer Squash
- Carrots
- Broccoli
- Yellow Wax Beans
- Cucumbers
- Salad Greens – Baby Romaine
- Garlic
- Shallots/Onion
- Basil

Dear Friends,

The correlation between the demand for food in the United States and environmental degradation could not be clearer. Habitat destruction and fragmentation, the displacement of native species and the introduction of exotic species, pollution of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, soil erosion, the persecution of predators, the release of genetically modified organisms, and the overexploitation of nonrenewable resources for food production and distribution are among the many consequences of modern agriculture. Farming and ranching now involves about 65% of the land in the lower 48 States and are primary contributors to the list of threatened and endangered species. The U.S. Department of Agriculture reports that farming and ranching activities have contributed over 70% of the species listed as threatened or endangered on the Endangered Species List.

I'm proud to be a farmer, and proud to be part of a movement away from large monoculture farms growing for distant markets towards community-based and ecologically-minded farming. For many years now, I've imagined a country in which cities and towns are surrounded by a satellite of small farms producing fruits and vegetables, meats, and milk for local consumption. Nevertheless, I don't take it as a given that small farms and ranches will necessarily solve all the ecological problems being created by large farms and still feed the growing population of the world. I do believe that large farms can be operated on sound ecological principles and in such a way as to sustain environmental quality while providing food. There are quite a few good examples of environmental stewardship on large farms all across the United States that offer a great deal of promise as new models of sustainable food production. Notwithstanding a few good examples and a lot of thought being applied to the problem, however, we are a long way from tangible solutions.

Riverhill Farm is probably a good example of community-based food production. We grow a great deal of food on this small acreage and all of it is sold within ten miles of the farm, the majority of it on the farm itself. We adhere to standards for organic production, and in some measures may exceed those standards. All the same, many questions remain. Is it economically viable? Is it environmentally sustainable? Is it physically sustainable (in other words, how many years can we work this hard)? We hope to be able to continue farming long enough to sketch out some answers to these questions—even if the answers are only partial ones—and contribute in our own small way to finding solutions to some of the problems facing the world at this time.

Recipes of the Week:

Cucumber Salad

¼ cup apple cider vinegar
2 tablespoons water
1-3 teaspoons honey
¼ teaspoon Dijon mustard
4 medium cucumbers, peeled, thinly sliced
6 thin slices onion

Mix the vinegar, water, honey to taste, and mustard in a glass mixing bowl. Add the cucumber and onion; toss until well combined. Marinated for at least 30 minutes at room temperature or refrigerate overnight. Serve cold or at room temperature.

Broiled Eggplant with Crunchy Parmesan Crust

Slice eggplant (either Asian or Italian) in ¼ inch thick slices. Spread mayonnaise sparingly on both sides of each eggplant slice, then dip the slices in grated Parmesan cheese, thoroughly coating both sides. Arrange the slices in a single layer on an oiled baking sheet and place under the broiler until golden brown, about 3 minutes. Flip the slices and broil until golden brown and crunchy on top and the eggplant is soft, about 3 minutes more.

This can be served as a crunchy-crusting appetizer, a side dish, or topped with your favorite marinara sauce for a main course.