



News from Provident Organic Farm



www.providentfarm.org

Season 4, Week 21

“dedicated to a safe, just, and sustainable food system”

October 24th–30th, 2005

The following article was submitted to Jay from Betty Ford, a CSA member from Ocean Pines

Agriculture facing its own Katrina

By Jimmy Westerfeld

McLennan County Farm Bureau President

Texas Agriculture, October 21, 2005

<http://www.txfb.org/TexasAgriculture/2005/102105/102105opinions.htm>

Agriculture today is facing a major catastrophe not experienced since the Dust Bowl days of the Great Depression. Based on expert economic projections, for the first time in decades, many U.S. farmers cannot possibly "cash flow" a crop or crops for the year 2006. Bankers are saying "No." Many of us will not be able to farm this year or the next. The doubling and tripling of fuel and petrochemical prices are the last link in a chain of bad economic events.

Since Aug. 29, the entire world has been focused on the aftermath of the terrible destruction of Hurricane Katrina. Then, to make a terrible tragedy even worse, Hurricane Rita slammed into Southeast Texas and Western Louisiana on Sept. 24.

These two storms had an impact on the nation's fuel refining capacity, increasing prices beyond an already dismal situation. In agriculture, we cannot pass these prices along as other industries do. Ultimately, it means the numbers don't add up. If we can't show positive cash flow, we won't get our operating loans.

For farmers, a Katrina-like disaster is building. It will soon swamp many family farming operations. Astronomical fuel prices, fertilizer and chemical costs have reached the point that even a modest profit is impossible.

Farmers are receiving the lowest price for commodities that myself or most farmers can remember. Farmers are a proud group, usually not willing to protest. This time, I hope someone is listening. We are literally at the end of the turn row. That's a metaphor for desperation. Agriculture is in serious trouble.

A friend of mine and long-time Central Texas farmer sums up the current crisis in a unique way: "It's a lot easier to do nothin' for nothin' than somethin' for nothin'." Why invest huge amounts, work from daylight to dark and struggle for a profit when you know you have no chance?

What if, one by one, many farmers are forced into the painful decision that they can't afford to plant this year and the next? How many such decisions will it take to produce, nation-wide, the bare grocery shelves brought about by Katrina and Rita?

Granted, food can and will be imported. If we allow American agriculture to wither and die, that will be our only choice. If this sounds familiar, it's exactly what we did with energy. Does anyone like what they are paying at the pump now? Do we really want our food supply at the mercy of producers outside our own borders?

With this dismal prospect in mind, we can begin to view the federal farm program as an investment in keeping farmers on the land and preserving the ability to feed our own people at a reasonable cost. Congress and the Bush administration have proposed drastic spending cuts in the federal farm program, while preserving lavish pork barrel spending. Are our priorities really that far out of whack?

U.S. agriculture can feed the world if the profit is there. The federal farm program is a safety net that equally protects U.S. farmers and consumers. Under the current protectionist trade policies in the world, there is no way to farm without it. Drastic cuts would take us down a policy path that is dangerous for our food security. I don't believe we really want to go there.

Jay's response:

Betty,

We already know anything coming our way from Texas is suspect. Additionally, any opinion expressed by a Farm Bureau (known in the organic community as the Harm Bureau) President must be understood as being surrounded by fear. That is what conventional agriculture is founded on. I do not follow their woes very closely, but as I understand it, their profit margin is almost wholly in the hands of gov't subsidies. The prices they receive for commodities are, at best, only pennies above production costs for the largest, most "efficient" corporate farms. They are so heavily dependent of petroleum products, not only in the form of fuel, but insecticides and herbicides also, that they will be hammered by the rapid and extreme rise in those costs. I agree, many of them are living in downtown Doom City. 2004 was the first year in our history that we were a net importer of food, we can't feed ourselves anymore. The gov't answer to this is to expand export markets. *(continued on back)*

Have you lost your glasses? Glasses were left behind at the Newtown pick-up location last week. Collect them this week or contact Susan Brazer.

REMINDER: There will be a meeting at the farm on Sunday, Oct. 30th at 2 p.m. to discuss possible remedies to the problems the CSA faces in its present form. All members welcome.

Smart small farmers are finding ways to diversify their way out of the predicted mess. Robert Rodale predicted 15 years ago that the successful farm of the future will be an average of about 14 acres growing diverse crops for local markets. Westerfield repeats the Farm Bureau mantra about American farmers having the responsibility and ability to feed the world. If you read between the lines, he says that it is only possible if the gov't pays them to do it. Farmers are on welfare, plain and simple and some of them spend the winter months in Hawaii. Robert Rodale's granddaughter, Maria, was asked once why she thought organic food was so expensive. She answered, "Because it reflects the true cost of growing food".

Every year we lose the equivalent of the state of Delaware in farmland to development. The population of the world is growing. Less land, more people won't work for very long. The future of farming belongs to diverse, intensely managed small farms operating on current solar income supplying local markets.

Thanks for sending me the article,
Jay

African Sweet Potato Stew

1 large or two med. onions, chopped	½ cup raisins
2 garlic cloves, minced	1 tsp. curry powder
6-8 plum tomatoes or 1 can tomatoes with juice	1 tsp. salt
1 minced hot pepper, or dash of hot pepper flakes	½ tsp. black pepper
1 bunch Swiss chard, stems and leaves separated	½ cup couscous
1 can (15 oz.) garbanzo beans or chick-peas	2 cups water or chicken broth
2-3 large sweet potatoes, peeled and diced in 1/2 inch pieces	

Fry onion, garlic and white stems of chard until barely limp. Add tomatoes, minced hot pepper if using, and chopped greens and fry a bit. Add garbanzos, raisins, sweet potatoes, cumin, curry powder hot pepper, salt and pepper. Cook a couple of minutes.

Use a large spoon to make a deep well in the center of the mixture in the pot. Put the couscous in the well and pat it down until it's all wet, adding a little water or chicken broth if necessary to cover. (This is important or couscous will not cook properly.) Cover tightly and simmer gently until couscous is done, about 25 minutes. Adjust seasoning.


Trish Mumme, Farmer, Garden Patch Produce CSA, Alexandria, OH

Nauris-Omenasalaatti (from *Sundays at Moosewood Restaurant Cookbook*)

1 c	peeled and grated raw turnips or rutabaga
1 c	peeled and grated tart green apples
1/2 c	chopped fresh parsley
juice	of one large lemon
1 tbsp	vegetable oil
--	salt and pepper

Combine everything, toss, cover, and chill.

From Easton member Codie Chaudoin: I am lazy and like to chop the parsley in the food processor, then switch to the grating blade and grate everything. This is supposedly a Finnish dish.



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three years of Provident
Organic Farm CSA may be
found on our website:**

www.providentfarm.org

**Recipes are indexed by
individual vegetable.**

Comments & Contributions

We welcome your comments and contributions, including recipes!

Please send to ubuubok@comcast.net

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