



Notes From The Field - Tina Martin, Provident Organic Farm Observations by A Farmer's Daughter

Each August not only ushers in bouts of hot weather, but tempers rise and patience diminishes; however, it is this time that we need to remember that the CSA model has a purpose much bigger than our own personal struggles with nature. As farmers, our purpose is to do our absolute best to provide you with delicious, wholesome vegetables and establish a sense of community amongst our shareholders.

I am Jay Martin's daughter, Tina, and have worked on Provident Organic Farm for the past three summers. Personally, when August arrives, I am ready to call it quits. I cannot wait to return to an air conditioned classroom to listen to lectures about protein kinases and genetic mapping. I do cherish my summers on the farm and I will miss the long, hot, labor intensive days that leave one with a feeling of great accomplishment. Perhaps the days of chasing chickens and shoveling endless piles of compost with a thousand mosquitoes swarming my head will not be missed but nonetheless, I could not ask for a better summer job. Sure, my dad and I butt heads. My brother, sister, and I all worked for the man, and trust me, it is no easy task...as some of you may imagine. His temper is terrible, his mood swings are unpredictable, but he is my best friend and I am completely behind what he and the other farmers are trying to accomplish with this CSA.

This year is the first year the CSA has been a multi-farm model. It definitely throws a few wrenches in the works, but in my eyes, it has greatly relieved a lot of pressure on any one farmer. Although it is tough to work together sometimes, especially when the hot weather arrives, I have really enjoyed being able to see each farm in action and see how dedicated everyone is to providing you with the best produce available.

Each farm brings something different to the table. Lisa and Pat have a very positive and easy-going approach to farming. It's very refreshing to go to their farm and see them work so hard while raising their little girl and having fun at the same time. I imagine this is how it was for my siblings and I growing up on our farm.

Ted and Julia and their farm-hands amaze me. They are so ambitious and work so incredibly hard to make their farm successful. They have taken on so many different projects including pigs and chickens while managing the largest produce supplying farm in the CSA.

Then there is Kelly...where do we even start? If you know Kelly, you know that she is one to make you laugh. I worked with Kelly for three years on our farm and no matter how terrible the job was and how hot and tired you were, Kelly would make me smile. She recently started a farm on her own and although this is no easy task, Kelly has provided the CSA with some beautiful crops.

Last, but not least, there is Craig. If everyone were as kind as Craig, there would be virtually no conflict in the world. All of the produce that Craig supplies is absolutely perfect. You can tell by looking at his perfectly arranged bunches of asparagus and squeaky clean scallions that he truly takes pride in what he grows.

Although I have always valued locally grown organic produce, being a part of this 'farm family' has made me appreciate even more the contributions of others and the dedication everyone has shown. After my dad got sick a couple of years back, it was absolutely necessary that he cut back on his physical labor. It is because of each of these farmers that this was possible so I thank each of you for that.

Farm life is tough; the hours are long, the days are hot but there are a lot of perks that come with it and being able to share the season with these people is one of them. Although the season is not over, it is for me, as the semester quickly approaches, so thanks everyone for a fun season!

Onward,
Tina

For back issues and more information, go to
<http://www.providentorganicfarm.com>

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Non-Organic Organic Food by Jim Hightower

When it comes to a healthy diet, I am not a purist. Too late for that, because I grew up eating such culinary concoctions as toasted sandwiches constructed of Spam, white bread and that oddly orange, oddly spongy cheeselike stuff known as Velveeta.

As an adult, I even have been irresponsible enough to serve as a taster, judge and promoter of Spam creations that were served at a now-defunct annual event held in my town of Austin, Texas. Called "Spamarama," the festival featured unspeakable and (often un-swallowable) dishes made from the gelatinous, pink potted meat, including - get ready to gag - Spam ice cream.

So I am not quick to criticize every little diversion from 100 percent wholesomeness. For example, even though I've been an early and ardent advocate of organic production, I recognize that there are certain times when processors of organic foods (from beer to cheese) are unable to get essential ingredients that are produced organically. Thus, non-organic hops sometimes are allowed in organic beer. Indeed, the original law creating the U.S. Department of Agriculture's "certified organic" program recognizes such realities, allowing up to 5 percent of a certified product to consist of non-organic ingredients. This exemption, however, was not intended to be a free-for-all loophole for dilution of the USDA's organic standard. Two strong caveats were attached to that 5 percent allowance. First, any non-organic substance has to be approved by the National Organic Standards Board. Second, the explicit intent of the law was for producers and processors to be in active pursuit of all organic ingredients, moving away from synthetic and non-organic substances as quickly as the real things could be found. Enter from stage right: corporate agribusiness and Barbara Robinson. With the phenomenal growth in consumer demand for organic products, such giants as Kraft and Dean Foods have rushed to capture this multibillion-dollar market, except they don't want to play by the rules.

Big Food found its enabler in Robinson, who was chosen to administer the organic program during the George W. Bush years. Consulting regularly with the corporate powers, Robinson has brought synthetic after synthetic under the organic label. At the start of the certification program, 77 non-organic ingredients were on the allowable list, which was supposed to shrink as time passed. Today 245 ingredients are listed.

Likewise, the program was supposed to set uniform standards for how organic foods are produced. Yet 65 of the standards recommended by the board since 2002 simply have been ignored by the administrator. For example, the board proposed specific rules to ensure that organic dairy farmers provide "access to pasture" for their cows, but Robinson's team has refused to implement the proposal. Thus, a giant milk purveyor such as Dean Foods (Horizon dairy products) is allowed to sell "organic" milk from cows that are confined in factory conditions rather than allowed to graze in open pastures. By failing to set rules that apply to everyone, the USDA is permitting private, for-profit organic certification firms to create their own standards, which means corporate interests can shop around for the most lenient certifiers.

You might think that the USDA would see the organic labeling program as a way to earn consumer trust in the integrity of these products. But, no. Robinson told The Washington Post that the label's main purpose is to "grow the industry." A consultant to Kraft Foods eagerly added his amen to her loosey-goosey regulatory ethic. "We don't want to eliminate anyone who wants to be a part of the organic community," he explained. What a neat idea! We can expand organic production simply by eliminating that bothersome "organic" adjective. Who knows; Spam might qualify for the label now.

Here's a better idea: Let's eliminate Robinson and all of the corporate pretenders. To tell new Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack to do both, call his office: 202-720-3631.

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National radio commentator, writer, public speaker, and author of the book, Swim Against The Current: Even A Dead Fish Can Go With The Flow [1], Jim Hightower has spent three decades battling the Powers That Be on behalf of the Powers That Ought To Be - consumers, working families, environmentalists, small businesses, and just-plain-folks. Original article at:
<http://www.commondreams.org/view/2009/08/05-6>

In Your Share* This Week

Red and Heirloom Tomatoes

Beans

Watermelon

Eggplant

Bell Peppers

*Share makeup is best estimate at publication time.

Note: For preservation tips and additional recipes, visit the CSA website at <http://www.providentorganicfarm.com/>