

STUDENT ORGANIC FARM CSA NEWSLETTER March 17, 2005

In your share this week:

- Baby Salad Mix*
- Cabbage
- Carrots*
- “Vegetable Flower” (see story below) Napa cabbage and/or Komatsuna
- Onions
- Garlic
- Scallions*
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- Herbs: Fresh oregano* or dried herbs

*items with a star were harvested from the hoopouses; the others were in cold storage or from the field (some leeks, root veggies, etc. still under mulch in the fields)

Announcements: Lots of community events coming up!

1. The documentary "The Future of Food" will be screened at the East Lansing Film Festival on Saturday April 2nd, @ 1:30pm. Tickets for individual films are \$7. More info on the film festival can be found at www.elff.com The following link is to the description of "The Future of Food"

<http://www.elff.com/programs/2005/index.php?page=thefutureoffood>

2. Youth Gardening Workshop – Saturday March 19th, 9:15am to Noon – Dwight Rich Middle School – Lansing – \$5 registration fee. (For more info contact the Ingham County MSU Extension in Mason @ 676-7207)

3. Cultivating Year Round School Gardens – Friday March 25th, 9am to 5pm – Gunnisonville School, 1754 E. Clark Road, Lansing, MI – \$30 registration fee. – For more info see <http://www.hrt.msu.edu/outreach/SchoolGardens.htm> (this one is co-presented by John and Laurie of the SOF with Gunnisonville teachers)

4. Other CSA Farms in the Area: As you know, the MSU SOF has a long waitlist for CSA membership. If you know someone interested in CSA around Lansing, there are three other farms in the area offering CSA this year. They are Giving Tree Farm in north Lansing, Wildflower Farm in Bath, and Owosso Organics in Owosso (closer to Flint, sort of in the area). Please pass their contact info on to friends looking for a CSA (or if you'd like to try out a different CSA for the “normal” Michigan growing season – their CSA season is usually 20-30 weeks long, as opposed to our 48-week season)

1. Giving Tree Farm, in north Lansing, close to Dewitt.
Farmer: Sue Houghton
Phone: 517-482-8885
Email: susangivingtree@earthlink.net

2. Wildflower Farm, in Bath
Farmer: Phil Throop
Phone: 517-641-4761
Email: wildflower@michcom.net

3. Owosso Organics, in Owosso
Farmer: Pooh Stevenson
Phone: 989-725-3151

This is a link to Local Harvest (www.localharvest.org), a wonderful resource on the web for locating CSA farms, farmers' markets, farm stands, pick-your-own operations, and more. They even handle membership for participating CSA farms. Follow the link below for more info.

<http://www.localharvest.org/search-csa.jsp?lat=42.735836&lon=-84.48376&scale=2&ty=6&r=mb>

They already have 1335 CSA drop-off points listed across the country, and since the above search page went live about a week ago, they've served more than 1000 CSA searches to the public.

5. MSU and Student Organic Farm Alumna Andrea Corpolongo offers a "Foraging Foray: Spring Salad Stroll" **Saturday April 2nd 2005 at 12:30 pm**

At the Bunker Hwy Canoe Livery in Eaton Rapids

- Learn to responsibly harvest and prepare common "weeds" to make a nourishing spring salad
- Discover the food and medicinal value of plants you thought were pests such as dandelion, chickweed, chicory, and plantain
- Receive a handout with valuable information about ten common spring edibles and recipes for salads, main dishes, teas and more
- Share some delicious Pine Tree Tea

The cost is 20\$ per person (5\$ for children 10 and under) and the program lasts approximately two hours, space is limited so please call soon

For More Information or to Reserve a Spot Call:

Andrea Corpolongo, Experienced Forager, Botanist, and Chef
517 663 1224

Interview of the Week– Hey if you're willing to be interviewed, email Emily at reardone@msu.edu
(We could use some more roving reporters out there to interview each other....)

Each week we'll interview a student farmer, a CSA member, a farm volunteer, or one of the many MSU staff and faculty who help keep the farm running.

Well, this week our superstar volunteer is none other than Liz Driscoll! Liz, a Master of Horticulture (Summer '04), works hard at the Michigan 4-H Children's Garden as their Education Coordinator. She loves doing programs with school and family groups, and hopes to get more kids engaged out at the farm. Her dream is to develop a program to bring together CSA members and school groups! Any takers?!:) When she's not grazing on chocolate mint and begonias at the Children's Garden,

Liz enjoys tending to her favorite herbs; rosemary, basil, sage, calendula, lemongrass, lemon verbena... (I think she could have gone on for hours). She also loves mountain biking, backing, and canoeing. And... she is excited to start biking to work on her new road bike... Go Liz!!! So what is in store for the future??? Well she is definitely looking forward to another exciting summer of "Garden Chefs" (talk to Liz for more info), and can't wait for her herb garden to emerge again! Liz and her spud man of 22 months, Jared, are not quite sure what their future holds for them, but she knows it will always involve working with kids and gardening!

What's up at the farm? Labor Issues?

Some folks have asked "why all the requests for volunteers lately? Are we desperate for labor?" The answer is no, we're not desperate for labor, but we are desperate, in a sense, for a connection with you, our members! Volunteering is an easy way to get to know your farmers, your farm, and to have a hand in producing your food. The newly-formed CSA Core Group met again last week, and discussed the option of a work requirement for CSA membership. Several CSA farms do have a work requirement for its members, and we're considering the pros and cons for our farm. If we and the core group decide that a work requirement makes sense for us (i.e. it will actually help the farm operate AND provide a better connection between the farm and our members AND a volunteer will coordinate work requirement organization AND it seems equitable for everyone involved), we might ask you for help in areas ranging from planting and weeding to fundraising to stuffing envelopes to planning parties to proofreading.... You get the idea – if you have a black thumb, or no transportation, or limited time, for example, you won't be asked to do farm work! There's lots of options on the table. We and the core group will keep you updated.

In the meantime, we've asked for help watering on some weekdays and on Sunday. That's because that of all the student farm workers who have transportation (car), none are available to work those mornings. That's part of student farming – if we all have class, no one's at the farm. If you pass near the farm on your way to school, work, or church, or anything else in the morning, and have 30 min or so to spare, you can help out your farm immensely by stopping by to water. Please call the farm phone at 517-230-7987 if you can help out any morning, including weekends.

If you want to volunteer, please call first. We are usually at the farm from about 8-4, and Thursdays 8-7 p.m, but sometimes we come in late or leave early, or aren't there. To make best use of your time, make sure we know when you're coming, so we can make full use of this "mutually beneficial relationship" that is CSA. Phone first: 517-230-7987 (not email).

New or Unusual Vegetables in Your Share this Week

So what is "vegetable flower? Some of you long-timers may remember it from last year, but for those of you new to vegetable flower, it's a southeast Asian delicacy. The story goes like this: A couple of years ago, a Bailey scholars class visited the farm for a work day. In the class was a Hmong student who, while the rest of us were happily ripping out old bolted and flowering Chinese cabbages, discovered that that was nearly the same vegetable that his mother prepared in traditional Hmong cuisine and started *harvesting* the flowering shoots instead of *composting* them, like we were doing. The original name for the plant his mother grew and cooked translates as "vegetable flower." We've all tried it, and it is indeed a delicacy. *Bolting* refers to the stage of growth when a plant (which we normally harvest just for leaves) sends up a flowering stalk, in preparation for seed production. Since most consumers aren't used to bolted vegetables (and some, like lettuce, just taste bad), usually farmers consider bolted heads of lettuce, cabbage, choy, etc. a loss, and till them under or send them to the compost pile. Part of the beauty of CSA, as you've probably discovered, is the opportunity to try crops in different states and stages of growth than you normally find in the supermarket. For example, baby salad greens are all the rage in stores now, but not so long ago, it was unusual to find "baby" anything in mainstream stores. The only "bolting" vegetable we usually see in stores is broccoli (which is of course the stalk and flower buds of the plant), and sometimes broccoli raab, or rapini, if you're lucky (we'll grow those this year! Yum!).

You are probably among the first and only consumers in the US (in the Midwest, anyway) to enjoy other bolting vegetables. The stems of bolting Chinese cabbages, Komatsuna, Mei Qing Choi, etc. are crisp, tender, juicy, and sweet and delicious. We enjoy munching on them while working in the hoopouses, and we hope you'll enjoy them as well. Some of them are downright beautiful (doubles as a bouquet?), and all make excellent stir-fry, steamed greens, or fresh snacks. Bon appetit!

For more info on new or unusual (or common and usual) items in your share: I just found a seasonal guide to locally grown vegetables and fruits on the web, produced by Cornell University, so even though it's from the northeast, the seasonality of food is about the same. It's an excellent resource, listing crops alphabetically by season, and it contains much of the same information as *Asparagus to Zucchini*. So if you're still waiting for a copy of that valuable cookbook, check out this web site in the meantime. <http://www.nutrition.cornell.edu/foodguide/archive/index.html>

Recipe Ideas

The following was contributed by Charlotte Wilks, in honor of Oregano. The recipe that follows makes me think of summer and all that fresh corn and tomatoes... if you have frozen corn and canned tomatoes, that'll do, too. Hold onto this recipe until July, just in case.

Oregano Rediscovered

This story begins long ago and far away. I grew up in the suburbs of Philadelphia in a family of five, my parents and two older siblings. Since both of my parents worked, the rule of the household was – first one home, cooks.

When I started seventh grade, suddenly I was first one home. This responsibility suddenly opened up a whole new world for me, a world I am still exploring and still delight in to this day.

I quickly progressed from the mundane recipes of our household into wanting to expand my repertoire. My brother's friend was Italian and one Saturday his mother agreed to come over to our house and teach me how to make spaghetti sauce from scratch! I had never done anything like this before and will never forget the experience.

One of the ingredients of Mrs. Rao's sauce was, of course, oregano. This was a brand new taste for me and besides, I felt so grown up learning to use herbs! For the next six years, until I started college, I was chief cook for my family. I used oregano extensively, so much so, that in fact, over the course of that time, I became absolutely sick of oregano and began omitting it from every recipe that called for it.

Now let's move forward to summer, 2004 and my first season as a member of the Student Organic Farm. When we first began to receive oregano in our shares, I didn't even use it. Then in the fall I was making a Mexican dish for my daughter. Oregano seemed to be an integral ingredient in the recipe. And, of course, I had all this organic oregano from the farm, so... I made the dish, put it in my car, and drove over to my daughter's house. During the drive, the car was filled with this incredible aroma. I kept trying to identify it, because it seemed very unfamiliar. Then suddenly, it hit me – the oregano! I had kept a portion of the casserole for my husband and me to sample, and it was wonderful.

The organic oregano, in my opinion, in no way bears any resemblance in taste to the bitter oregano that I purchase at the store. It seems like a completely different herb to me. Now I can barely get enough oregano from the SOF to keep up with the demands of my kitchen. I try to use it judiciously so that I won't overdue it again.

I wanted to share this with you for many reasons; to highlight one of the many items we receive from the SOF each week; to encourage any of you who may not be using it to try the oregano; and also to be open to the fact that we all change over time and that things of the past may become new and a source of delight to us once again.

In case any of you are curious, this is the recipe that led to the rediscovery of the wonderful taste of oregano for me. It's from *The Complete Vegan* cookbook by Susann Geiskopf-Hadler and Mindy Toomay.

Baked Rice with Black Beans, Corn, Tomatoes and Epazote

2 jalapeno or serrano peppers	1 can (28 oz) whole tomatoes
1 teaspoon cumin seeds	1 2/3 cups vegetable stock
1 tablespoon oil	2 cups fresh or frozen corn kernels
1 medium onion, chopped	2 cups cooked and drained black beans
1 1/2 cups uncooked long-grain brown rice	1/2 cup chopped epazote leaves (or 1 tablespoon dried)
2 cloves garlic, minced	1/2 teaspoon salt
2 teaspoons dried oregano	

Finely mince chilies (remove seeds if you prefer) and set aside. Crush cumin seeds and set aside.

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Heat oil in stockpot or Dutch oven. Saute onion for 3-4 minutes. Stir in rice, then add garlic, oregano and cumin seeds; saute 3-4 minutes. Add undrained tomatoes and stock, then stir in the corn, beans, chilies, epazote and salt.

Bring mixture to a strong simmer over high heat, then cover the pan (or transfer to covered casserole dish) and bake for 45 minutes. Remove from oven and allow to stand at room temperature for at least 10 minutes without disturbing the lid. Serve hot. Enjoy!

NOTE: I made this dish without epazote because I couldn't find it, even at VanHouten's. Does anyone know where I can find this in the Lansing area? I imagine the recipe would be even better – although the taste might be quite different – if it were added.

And one last note on cabbage – I hope you all aren't sick of cabbage yet. Please let me know if you have favorite cabbage recipes. I want to recommend fermentation: try sauerkraut! It's simple, delicious, and just weird enough to be an adventure in the kitchen and/or basement and/or root cellar if you're that fortunate. Check out the directions in *Root Cellaring* by the Bubels, or if you have another favorite kraut recipe, please send it in. We've been enjoying kraut we made in November, and it's still delicious, right out of the crock in our relatively cold basement. Try making kimchee with the napa cabbage this week – a slightly different twist on the cabbage fermentation, and equally delicious (try adding scallions, shredded carrots, hot chiles, etc.). Happy fermenting.

Thanks so much for reading. I hope you are enjoying the salad especially – this time of year it really starts growing again in the hoopouses, and it's heartening to watch the plants come back to life and start kicking it out again. Just beware, there have been several aphid sightings on the lettuce, in particular, and on some of the other greens in the salad, as well. We do wash the leaves when there's heavy aphid pressure, so be sure to a) use the salad up in a timely manner, as wet leaves don't keep as well as dry ones (but we didn't want anyone to be grossed out by the aphids, so we'll go ahead and wash it), and b) wash it well yourself before eating, because I'm sure we missed some. Cheers.