



# MSU STUDENT ORGANIC FARM FARM NEWSLETTER

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February 22, 2006

## ***In your share this week***

- Kale (yes, really this time, not a collards switcheroo like last week)
- Komatsuna
- Head lettuce
- Stir fry mix
- Cabbage
- Turnips
- Radishes
- Carrots
- Onions
- Garlic
- Potatoes

## ***Announcements***

Here is part 2 in our 3 part series contextualizing the CSA share price adjustment. This piece is by Laurie Thorp one of the farm's faculty advisors.

### The Consequences of Cheap Food

Laurie Thorp

Last week Jeremy announced that we are reviewing the share price and factors influencing how we set the share price. As we reviewed the current situation, one of the items that we discussed is how we are doing relative to establishing a fair price that reflects the complete value of the food we produce. It is our desire to cultivate a community that fully values food rather than cheapens it.

One of the most frequently asked questions I hear following any talk on organic agriculture is, "Why is organic food so expensive?" Those of us working in sustainable agriculture typically respond with, "Why is conventionally produced food so *cheap*?"

As Americans we have come to expect cheap food, yet remain blissfully ignorant to the long-term consequences of cheap, abundant, fast food. And so, increasingly I am asking students to ponder the question: what are the environmental, social, and economic consequences of cheap food? Unfortunately all of these "costs" remain largely hidden to the average consumer making it easy for us to walk through the aisles of the grocery store and remain oblivious to the larger systems of oppression and degradation at work beneath the surface of our food.

Lately my mantra has been, “all this talk about fair trade coffee (this is a good thing, don’t get me wrong) but what about fair trade food?” It has become fashionable to order your latte fair trade, but why not carry this beyond the borders of your barista? When was the last time you inquired into the working conditions for all farm laborers? How about making pastured pork as fashionable as fair trade coffee? What are the environmental consequences of cheap eggs, cheap milk, cheap lettuce?

John Ikerd, in his essay *The High Cost of Cheap Food* states that our never ending quest for cheap food is the root cause of the transformation of American agriculture from a system of small diversified, independent family farms to a system of large-scale, corporately controlled agribusiness. When we bargain shop for cheap food we are selling out our rural farm communities and the freedoms this entails. Current accounting tells us that less than 20% of our food dollar goes to the farmer. The larger portion of your food dollar is spent on packaging, processing, transportation, and marketing. Value-added we are told. But are these the values we hold dear? At what price to the planet? Do we truly value quick and convenient food more than local and seasonal? I don’t think so. Robert Kennedy Jr. in his book *Crimes Against Nature* reminds us that in a true free-market economy, “when you make yourself rich, you enrich your community.” The problem with cheap food in this global free-for-all is that we have *externalized* the costs of production onto our environment, onto the backs of farmers, onto farm animals, and ultimately our community. Please know that as we seek to identify a fair CSA share price we are working to value our food, our farmers and this glorious planet that supports us all.

#### The Best of the Midwest (The persimmon meets the parsnip!) Welcome Reception!

If you read the annual "State of the Farm" (we will have print copies at the farm or check your email) you will learn that we will soon be welcoming a new member to the Farm Management Team! Corie Pierce, a former New England gal that has called California her home the past few years, will be working to create curriculum for a new undergraduate program in organic farming. We would like to host an informal welcome reception during her first distribution, March 1st. If members would be willing to make a small dish to share, little appetizers, soup, desserts, casserole, whatever you like...we would like to encourage everyone to say hi to Corie and linger for just a little bit to chat with each other. Feel free to email Liz [monroeel@msu.edu](mailto:monroeel@msu.edu) or Charlotte [wilks@msu.edu](mailto:wilks@msu.edu) with any questions!

#### Reminder

Jay Tomczak, SOF assistant manager, is designing an edible forest garden at the farm that will someday provide you with fresh fruit, nuts, berries, perennial vegetables, flowers, and herbs. We will need some help to make this garden a reality. If any of you would be interested in donating \$10 to go toward the purchase of a tree or shrub, contributions by March 1 would be appreciated for this year’s plantings. Checks can be dropped off at CSA distribution. Information on these concepts can be found at <http://www.edibleforestgardens.com>. Please contact Jay with any questions at [tomczak1@msu.edu](mailto:tomczak1@msu.edu) or (616) 293-7208.

## ***What you always wanted to know about... KOMATSUNA!***

Komatsuna, also known as Japanese Mustard Spinach, is a relative of the turnip family. The name comes from Komatsugawa, an area in Edogawa Ward just east of downtown Tokyo where it was first grown on a large scale. Komatsuna's dark green leaves are rich in calcium and can be prepared like spinach when the plant is young or like cabbage when it's more mature. Although komatsuna can be found in grocery stores year-round, winter is the best time of year to enjoy this versatile vegetable as it is sweeter when harvested during the cold months.

Komatsuna is a very popular ingredient in Japanese cooking. It can be pickled, steamed, stir-fried or used fresh in salads. When it is in-season, the Japanese use it in place of shredded cabbage and as an ingredient in udon noodles, bread, smoothies and ...ice cream!

If you can't eat your komatsuna right away, soak the leaves for 10 minutes in ice water, dry using a salad spinner and store in a plastic bag in the refrigerator. Make sure the greens are dry or they will turn into slime. If you don't have a salad spinner, gather them in a tea towel and shake until dry.

### ***Food Facts***

- Eating fruits and vegetables is common weight-control advice.
- Generally, fruits and vegetables have fewer calories per serving than most foods making them a good substitute for higher calorie foods!
- The beneficial effects of fruits and vegetables are considered to derive mainly from high content of fiber, antioxidants, minerals, folate, and phytochemicals. The greatest benefits occur when we eat a variety from the five color groups: dark greens, whites, reds, yellows, blues/purples.

### ***Recipes***

#### **Komatsuna Salad with Fruit**

12 oz Komatsuna, washed and dried well  
2 tbs peanut oil  
2 tbs corn oil  
1/2 cup coarse chopped whole almonds  
1/2 tsp sugar  
1 tsp ground ginger  
1/4 cup lemon juice  
1 apple, cored and diced  
1 cup seedless grapes, halved  
1/4 cup sliced chives

1/4 cup fresh dill  
salt and pepper to taste

Directions Fry almonds in peanut and corn oil 1-2 minutes. Drain and reserve oil. Add sugar, ginger, salt and pepper to warm oil and gradually whisk in lemon juice. Toss komatsuna, apple, grapes, chives and dill together with dressing. Chill and serve.