



Sogn Valley Farm

CSA Newsletter August 16-17, 2016

www.sognvalleyfarm.com

Greetings,

It is with excitement, and a smidge of anxiety, that Karin and I prepare to head to Vermont for my sister's wedding. The thought of leaving the farm for a few days in August of our first growing season always seemed risky, but alas, I only have one sibling, and there's no way I'd miss her wedding!

I'm thankful to have Laura, David, Karl, and Jimmy (a hardcore volunteer) to keep the ship afloat while we are gone. Since we are leaving on a Thursday, CSA operations will be unaffected. The main agenda will be harvest, wash, and pack for farmers' markets, and staffing our stall on Saturday and Sunday at the downtown St. Paul Farmers' Market.

In other, less happy news, last Sunday I woke up to load the truck for the farmers' market and found that all of our produce in the cooler was frozen solid. The temperature was 21°F, even though the thermostat was set at 36°F. It doesn't happen often, but apparently even brand new thermostats fail :(Thankfully, we didn't have 75 CSA shares in there ready to deliver, and we didn't have thousands of pounds of cabbage, carrots, and other storage crops in there, like we will in the fall. And all of our tomatoes and peppers are in a different room in the cooler, and were just fine. So it could have been a lot worse. Needless to say, I will be installing a temperature alarm that alerts me via smartphone if the temperature goes out of a prescribed range.

Survey Summary

Thanks to everyone who completed our mid-season survey. It looks like about 2/3 of you filled it out—a great response rate. We wanted to give you a summary of some of the common themes, and explain how we will use this information in the coming weeks and years.

What's in the box?

Heirloom tomatoes: We tried to include some ripe and some that will be ripe after a couple of days on the counter. Eat those with darker color and softer flesh first.

Mixed cherry tomatoes: A blend of Sun Gold and red cherry tomatoes, perfect to halve and put on your salad.

Red bell peppers: These 'Ace' bell peppers are slender in shape and one of the earliest varieties to turn red. Some of them haven't turned 100% red, but they should be sweeter than the bell peppers you received last week. A few people may receive an orange pepper, too :-). Use some colored peppers in this week's recipe.

Red potatoes: We were able to dig these mechanically with a brand spankin' new antique potato digger. Check out the short video I put up on Facebook. We also washed them using a barrel washer, which gently tumbles the potatoes around as jets of water spray off the soil. Barrel washers are really designed for long, slender roots like carrots and parsnips, but do a decent job on potatoes. It tends to cause a few scuffs on the potato skins, but this shouldn't be problematic for short-term storage. It beats scrubbing them all by hand! Use potatoes in this week's recipe.

Watermelon or muskmelon: The seeded watermelons are a classic open pollinated variety called 'Sugar Baby.' Melons and watermelons are the best quality when they mature under dry conditions—lots of rain during this phase dilutes the flavor and causes other problems. We received 3.5" of rain late last week, and ended up having to cull over half the watermelons we harvested. As a result, we are putting muskmelons into some boxes instead. We'll do our best to make sure all members receive a watermelon in the next week or two.

Garlic: We've included some more of the same variety you received a couple of weeks ago—'Music.' Use it in this week's recipe.

Sweet corn: This corn—although from a different planting than the corn you received two weeks ago—is showing the same tip fill issues seen previously. I have some ideas as to why this is happening, and plan to tweak my management next year to produce bigger ears with better pollination at the tip. But, like last time, it's quite sweet and tender. Try using some in this week's corn chowder recipe.

Leeks: Use in this week's recipe, or as a tender, more flavorful alternative to onions in other cooked dishes.

Cucumbers

Salad mix: Summer heat has been hard on lettuce, as it is most years in Minnesota. We plant heat tolerant varieties, but still lose a significant portion of our crop to bolting due to heat and water stress. This salad mix has proven a bit more resilient.

Snacking peppers (full shares only): These colorful mini-bell peppers are fun to look at and great to eat. The seeds are mostly clustered below the stem, rather than adhered to the wall, so they can be eaten by taking shallow bites.

On Deck

Some of the items you'll likely see in your box over the next 1-2 weeks.

Carrots — Poblano peppers — Broccoli — Beans — Muskmelon or watermelon

Most of you (73%) are first-time CSA members, and on the whole, seem to be satisfied with your experience thus far. Almost all respondents felt that the taste and quality of produce was very good—we're pleased to hear that! Many of you expressed encouragement and gratitude, which was uplifting to read in the middle of our first season. Overwhelmingly, people are enjoying reading these newsletters and using the suggested recipes, so we'll continue to spend time on that each week. As a reminder, newsletters are all posted on our website under the CSA tab.

We received a lot of constructive feedback, and we hope to make some improvements this year, while other changes will have to be implemented in future years (e.g. more fruit, different pick-up locations/times). Karin and I read each of the comments carefully. I can't address all of the feedback here, but there are a few common themes that I'd like to share with you.

There were several comments about the quantity of produce in each box. In a few cases, people were expecting more produce each week. To be transparent about our process for deciding how much to put in each box, I'll explain it. The share price works out

to an average of \$28 and \$16 per week for full and half shares, respectively. I have a database of the retail values of all produce items we sell—comparable with what we receive for them at farmers' markets, and roughly on par with prices at food co-ops. For example, green onions are worth \$2.00/bunch, slicing tomatoes are \$3.50/lb, and lettuce is \$3.00/head. That's the starting point. Then I take 15% off—think of this as the interest payment to thank you for paying for your share at the start of the season. We aim to put an average of \$28 or \$16 worth of produce in each share, after the 15% discount. The table to the right shows the calculated value of each weekly share so far this season. As you can see, the first couple of boxes were a bit light (as we expect at the start of the season), but some boxes were worth quite a bit more than the target amount. While it's not economically sustainable for us to consistently provide 50-60% more produce than what was paid for, this is the aspect of a CSA where members share in the bounty when it exists. There could be some weeks, or some years, where weather disasters wipe out some crops and CSA share sizes are reduced—that's the other side of the coin, where members share in the risks of farming.

Week	Half share value <i>Target: \$28/wk</i>	Half share value <i>Target: \$16/wk</i>
1	\$22.95	\$13.43
2	\$23.55	\$15.38
3	\$26.56	\$17.15
4	\$38.46	\$20.14
5	\$32.00	\$19.56
6	\$28.90	\$19.22
7	\$28.26	\$20.55
8	\$37.57	\$22.47
9	\$29.11	\$19.06
10	\$41.52	\$23.26
11	\$52.53	\$31.02
Total	\$361.41	\$221.24

I understand that the expectations of some members about the quantity of produce may not have been met, the reality is that the value delivered so far has been above where it should be based on the share price. Including this week's share, we are 61% of the way through the Summer Season, and have delivered produce worth 68% and 71% of the prices for full and half shares, respectively. Also, just keep in mind that we are certified organic, which increases our costs of production, along with the prices for our produce. We are open to feedback for next year—if most members would prefer more produce in each box, we'd be happy to deliver that, but it would require raising our prices.

Another common theme was about quality and pick-up times. A few have said that some of the greens and herbs didn't seem as fresh as they would have expected, and that they suspected it may have to do with the time sitting unrefrigerated at the drop site. We do keep all produce refrigerated until it is delivered, so I suspect there may be some deterioration to highly perishable crops while waiting at certain pickup sites. This is mainly a concern for members who consistently pick up their shares towards the end of the pickup window, presumably after work or other evening obligations. The challenge for us is that we also had some members convey that they'd like to pick up their shares *earlier*. If the pickup locations had refrigerated spaces to hold the shares, this wouldn't be an issue, but that's hard to come by. In future years, we'll work with pickup sites to try to work out ways to keep produce cooler—perhaps an insulated blanket draped over the stack of boxes? We might also add more locations with varying pick-up time windows.

Lastly, a few of you mentioned that you would like more opportunities to interact with the farm. While options like "work shares"—where members work a few hours a week on the farm in exchange for their share—is not really in our purview right now, we would also love the opportunity to meet more of you face-to-face and share our farm with you. To that end, we are announcing an end-of-season potluck and farm tour! So, save the date: **Sunday, October 2, 2016 from 4:00-7:00 pm**. More info at <http://sognvalleyfarm.com/events/>.

Thank you all for being a part of our CSA, and for letting us know what's working well and where we can improve. We hope to see many of you here at the farm this fall.

Sincerely,

Dana

Summer Corn Chowder

This light summer chowder makes use of several items in this week's box. And if you have any serrano peppers leftover from last week, throw them in this dish!

Ingredients

1 Tbs. grapeseed or other vegetable oil
2 medium leeks, cut into medium dice (about 2 cups)
3 medium ribs celery, thinly sliced (about 1 cup)
1 large red or yellow bell pepper, cut into medium dice (about 3/4 cup)
1 large clove garlic, minced
Jalapeno or serrano pepper, minced
1 lb. potatoes (unpeeled), cut into medium dice (about 3 cups)
3 to 4 medium ears fresh corn
1 quart lower sodium chicken or vegetable stock
1-1/2 cups half-and-half
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
Garnishes: scallions, chives, hot sauce, cheese, bacon

In a 5-1/2- to 6-quart heavy-duty pot, the oil over medium heat. Add the leeks, celery, bell pepper, and 1 tsp. salt. Cover and cook, stirring occasionally, until the vegetables soften, 6 to 8 minutes. Uncover and continue cooking until the vegetables start to brown, about 6 minutes more. Add the corn, garlic, and jalapeño and cook, stirring, until corn is softened, about 2 minutes. Stir in the potatoes and 1 tsp. salt.

Add chicken stock and bring to a gentle simmer over medium-low heat, cover partially, and cook until the potatoes are very tender, about 15 minutes.

Depending on the desired thickness of the soup, transfer up to two cups of mostly solids to a blender or food processor. After blending, add back into the pot. Season to taste with salt and pepper and serve with garnishes.

Modified from <http://www.finecooking.com/recipes/summer-corn-chowder.aspx>