

# Farm Notes

## CSA Newsletter

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Potomac Vegetable Farms

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## To Be or Not to Be

### CERTIFIED...

After many months of deliberation and a tiny bit of hair pulling and heart wrenching, we have decided to try NOT being certified organic. The important part of that statement is that we will drop our certification, not our being organic. But, by law now, if we do not continue to be certified by an accredited third party certification agency, then we are not allowed to use the "o" word anymore. We plan to continue farming the same way, or better, than we always have. Here's how we got to this new place...

We've been certified since 1990. The process was through a Virginia farmers organization, then through the state.

Basically, the process of certification has become tougher, more complicated, much more expensive, and more painful. The paperwork burden has increased dramatically. We are supposed to be able to show on paper where any random tomato found in your bag was grown - exactly which patch - and everything that happened to that plant from seeding in the greenhouse, to transplanting, hoeing, mulching, staking, harvesting, transporting and finally being put in your bag. We grow so *many* kinds of vegetables, planted multiple times throughout the season in different patches, and on different

farms. To keep track of the movement of each tomato feels impossibly complex.

We must remember why certification came about in the first place. It was designed for consumers in a retail setting to be able to know something about the food in front of them. It was a way for wholesale growers to tell their consumers, whom they do not know or ever see, how they grew that product. Wholesale growers tend to grow large acreages of many fewer crops. We market gardeners, who know and see our customers, have much more complicated operations and don't need a third party to represent ourselves in the market place.

It will be sad to be separated from our historic "organic" label. This was never the intent of the federal guidelines, but it is the unexpected result. Many small farms have opted out of the certification process, mainly due to the magnitude of the documentation task, and there are many new possible label words floating around. We'll just have to see which one suits us, as we continue to grow vegetables in the same old, organic way.



# In Hindsight

We have been packing and distributing bags since June 14. Twenty-three weeks – about six months. In those six months, you have probably experimented with a lot of unfamiliar vegetables, and struggled with the occasional deluge of greens. We try to keep things interesting, with variety, but we also try to keep a steady supply of staples coming. Here is a record of what you ate (this is a Tuesday share at the stand, very similar to any other share) and the number of times it appeared in your bag:

## Summershare (16 weeks)

Garlic curls	3
Lettuce heads	6
Salad mix	3
Broccoli	2
Mei Qing Choi	2
Tatsoi	1
Spring onions	3
Onions	10
Kale	1
Cucumbers	8
Zucchini/squash	6
Basil	10
Sugar snap peas	1
Kohlrabi	1
Swiss chard	5
Beets	5
Cabbage	2
Garlic	11
Escarole	2
Eggs	2
Potatoes	11
Tomatoes	11
Cherry tomatoes	6
Beans	8
Peppers	7
Parsley	1
Herbs/cilantro	1
Komatsuna	1
Watermelon	1
Carrots	2
Figs	1
Arugula	4
Choi Sum	1
Autumn Poem	3
Eggplant	2
Butternut squash	1
Celery	1

## Autumnshare (7 weeks)

Winter squash	4
Potatoes	7
Peppers	2
Beans	1
Choi Sum	2
Arugula	6
Green tomatoes	1
Lettuce Mix	4
Rapini	1
Eggplant	1
Sweet Potatoes	3
Kohlrabi/Celeriac	2
Napa cabbage	2
Mispoona	3
Cabbage	2
Celery	1
Red russian kale	3
Bok choy	2
Collards	1
Tokyo Bekana	1
Carrots	3
Leeks	1

It wasn't completely scientific – some of you may have had Napa cabbage only once but got three shares of kale instead, but this is our record of your weekly menu planning challenges. Congratulations on surviving another season of eating local, organic vegetables, and living with the results of monsoons and an early frost. We haven't had weather like this since 1992!

## Conservation, Recycling, and Re-Use on the Farm

On the farm, as in other parts of our society, we think a lot about how to conserve resources, to recycle, and re-use materials. To conserve our soils, we plant on the contour, use grass strips to minimize runoff, plant cover crops on ground not in vegetables and during the winter. To conserve water, we use trickle irrigation instead of large overhead sprinklers, mulch with straw and hay to preserve moisture, and have a few rain barrels.

Unlike many growers, both conventional and organic, we have not used black plastic to warm the soil early in the season, or suppress weeds through the year. Since we don't use herbicides, we must control weeds by tractor cultivation, hand hoeing, and mulching with leaves and hay. This organic mulch provides food for soil organisms as it decomposes and is great habitat for beneficial spiders and insects. Unlike black plastic that heats up the ground, organic mulch keeps the soil surface at a more constant temperature.

We are considering using black plastic on a limited basis for early plantings next year to see if we can increase early production of squash, tomatoes, and peppers. We don't look forward to the frustrations of laying it on less than perfectly level ground, or to pulling it up and putting it in the landfill at the end of the season. We stopped using it in the 1980's when we saw black plastic made from petroleum was part of the problem of US dependence on foreign oil as well as use of a finite resource.



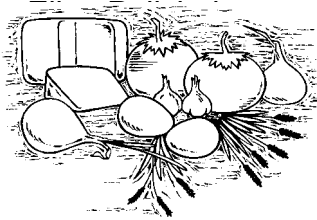
Besides the issue of using black plastic, we think a lot about how to use less of these materials that add to our waste stream. We ask you to give us your used shopping bags, both paper and plastic; and your still usable egg cartons. We have picking and packing containers and planting flats that can be used multiple

“One man's trash...” We recycle leaves, as mulch. In the photo on the front page, we turn leaves and hay and manure into gold when we make compost.

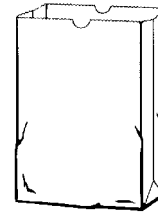
times. We use newspapers for packing and for mulch, used baler twine for trellising though buying new nylon trellis is nice every few years.

We consider the cost, source and disposal, and the benefits of buying and using off-farm inputs as we think of what we need. We try to minimize the amount of waste that leaves the farm by recycling inorganic materials. We use animal manures from our horses and chickens, donated leaves and spoiled hay, but actually buy cow manure to make our special compost. Vegetable trimmings and waste go into our household worm bins and to the chickens.

Even though our scale of inputs and outputs may be larger than your average household, it might be interesting to think of what happens at your house.



**IN THE BAG**  
**Potomac Vegetable Farms**  
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**Potatoes Squash Carrots Arugula Choi Kale Cabbage Garlic**

**Arugula Walnut Salad**  
Serves 4 – 6. Good for company!

**3 T. lightly toasted walnut halves**  
**4 cups arugula**  
**1 ½ cups shredded radicchio**  
**1 yellow pepper, sliced into thin strips**  
**3 T. extra virgin olive oil**  
**2 T. minced red onion**  
**1 T. fresh parsey, minced**  
**1/8 t. sea salt**  
**1 T. balsamic vinegar**  
**¼ cup freshly squeezed orange juice**

**Preheat oven to 325° F.**

- **. Toast walnuts on cookie sheet for 5 minutes or so. Don't burn.**
- **Wash arugula well. Tear into bite-sized pieces. Put in a medium-sized bowl.**
- **Add shredded radicchio, yellow pepper and cooled walnuts, toss gently.**
- **In a small skillet, heat 1 T. olive oil. Add red onion and sauté until soft. Sprinkle salt over onion and add parsley. Stir.**
- **Just before serving, add remaining olive oil and vinegar and heat through. Remove from heat and add orange juice. Pour over salad, toss very gently, and serve immediately on individual salad plates.**

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**Roasted Potatoes with Garlic**

**3 T. butter or olive oil**  
**1 pound potatoes, scrubbed (if the potatoes were bigger, you would slice them lengthwise into halves or thirds, but these potatoes are fine left whole)**  
**6 garlic cloves, thinly sliced**  
**salt and pepper**

**Preheat oven to 400° F. Lightly butter a shallow baking dish, place potatoes in dish with garlic and coat with small pieces of butter or a drizzle of olive oil and season with salt and pepper. Add a few tablespoons of water to dish and cover. Bake until tender, 30 minutes or so. Remove foil and bake 15 minutes more until brown on top.**