CSA farms around the region are using their newsletters this week to talk about climate change and how it is affecting us – and you.

We have met the enemy... and he is us

By Dario Fabbri

These words are from a poster made by the American illustrator Walt Kelly. He was the author of "Pogo", a comic strip that had as characters a bunch of little animals living in a swamp. In the poster, Pogo the possum says this simple but meaningful sentence referring to a polluted forest, full of trash and waste. That illustration was made almost fifty years ago, in 1970.

The Swedish girl Greta Thunberg, whose speech at UN congress in 2019 has raised a new, strong concern about ecological issues, keeps saying that we, as humanity, have very little time to make changes. This thought is surely powerful, and it has raised, in lots of people in different countries the will to act. Nevertheless, it has also brought a certain fear among people of my generation: the future has never been so scary. Fear is comprehensible and also justified, but I don't think that it is the right attitude towards this gigantic problem we are facing.

Last May, I and other friends went to Carrara, which is a small city in the northern part of Tuscany famous for the marble that is extracted from the mountains nearby. Every year, on occasion of the Labour Day, the citizens of Carrara organize a march that travels across the streets of the town. During that day, it was denounced the terrible working conditions of the miners - still a lot of people keep dying inside the caves. What also touched me that day was the state of the mountains from where the marble is extracted: they were incredibly consumed.

Over consumption of natural resources, and over production of goods in general, are surely one of the main causes of climate changing. Here in U.S., for example, I've seen a truly exaggerated presence of cars. These are questions that can be solved only by politics. In Italy, since high school, I was involved in politics and I have been part of political groups and collectives. Sometimes it has been kind of depressing to see that people, especially the younger ones, were not that much interested in re-thinking the way we stay and live with each other. But, even if I don't really like this centralization around one single person, especially one so young, Greta Thunberg has been able to make a lot of people concerned about these crucial questions, and in the last year new political groups have born (the one called Extinction Rebellion is one of the most interesting) and I see that political parties, in Italy and in Europe, started to talk about climate changing as the central topic of our days. Now, fear is not what we need: we need instead to be a bit angry, but more important we have to find the courage to make decisions.

"We have met the enemy and he is us" doesn't mean that we are all equally responsible for climate changing, nor that everyone has the same amount of power to make things better. But the problem that we are dealing with now involves individually everyone around the world, and solutions have to be searched together, with the consciousness that they won't be perfect and that they won't keep everyone satisfied.

The fact that I was able to stay here for a couple of months - and I want to say thank you to Hana and Jon for their kindness and hospitality; that I had the opportunity to meet people with culture and backgrounds different than the ones I use to be with; to share with them our thoughts about climate changing and to see how similar our fears and concerns are, gave me the impression that the world has truly been made smaller, and that this new situation of global connection can really help us to save it and make it fairer.
Report from the Climate March  
By Mary Porter

Mary at the Climate March

I had a fantastic day at the 2019 Youth Climate March. There was such a feeling of unity among the protesters. We walked from Marshall Park to the Capitol. The signs were evocative, with frequently searing messages.

We arrived at our destination, taking up about 2/3 of the enormous lawn in front of the Capitol.

The first speeches were tellingly by young Native Americans, speaking of their deep knowledge of the earth and of their deep scars from the genocide brought on them by the Europeans, and of the systemic racism that continues to be a significant reality for all peoples of color in America.

There was much discussion of our need to see the intersectional nature of the problem, how we must address all those relevant issues at the same time or we will not succeed in making this a livable and just planet. And so there was much support for a Green New Deal.

There was a theme of Uniting Behind the Science, echoing what Greta Thunberg said to Congress this week, when she solemnly turned over, in place of her own testimony, the 2018 dire UN Report on the Climate--"I want you not to listen to me, but the Science." Over and over it was emphasized that it is absolutely imperative that we see this as an emergency -- like our house is on fire, which it is.

The youth who led this March are, seemingly, going to be one very decisive factor in our successful battle against this approaching potential cataclysm. They were tremendously inspirational, wonderfully motivational, painful in their recognition of just what might be lost, angry at the adults their inability to see this reality but, perceiving the gravity of the situation--completely determined to lead the world to a transformation.

From an Aspiring Young Farmer  
By Olivia Murphy

When I consider the climate crisis, the question of accessing usable farmland is huge in my mind. I'm originally from the northeast coast of Florida and my family reminds me often that the growing season is quite a bit longer down south, and it never snows- compelling reasons, in their minds, for me to try farming down there. But the worsening storms, high flood risks, and intense heat are factors of obviously monumental importance for a farm business, and when I'm trying to think about what my potential cooperative farming operation could look like several decades from now...Florida seems like the opposite of a safe environment.

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Climate Change from a CSA Customer's Point of View
By Helene Shore

So, it was a very hot Spring and Summer. In fact, the hottest year so far, breaking last year’s record. We talk about climate change, but how does that affect us on a very basic level? Let’s talk about food.

We all love our CSA and I, for one, have been a PVF CSA member for years. I think of the CSA as a gift to my senses every week. I love the colors, the textures, the smells and, of course, the taste of those delicious veggies.

There are things that I look forward to every year. Strawberries in May that are succulent and so sweet that they are addictive. I have been known to eat several quarts a week when Heinz used to sell his delicious strawberries by the case. After two years of extremely wet weather and crop failures, I no longer have the pleasure of gorging myself on his strawberries because he no longer grows them.

One of the highlights of my summer is always those beautiful PVF tomatoes. Juicy, sweet and so tasty. So many tomatoes that I would can or freeze them to have the smell and taste of summer in the winter. What happened when it was so hot this year? Shorter tomato season, and disappointment for me, and especially for PVF, I am sure.

Spinach, normally filling the CSA room in May with that bright leafy green color. This year? Too much heat and flooding rain. Again, shorter season, less spinach. Supermarket spinach grown by huge agriculture corporations just doesn’t taste the same. See a pattern here? This is what climate change looks like. Less food, shorter growing season, and a change in what can be grown.

It is predicted by the International Panel on Climate Change that our agriculture will less abundant by 10% to 15% in the near future. That amount is frightening to me; just think about what it means for already food-insecure people in our community and beyond.

Climate change is here. We need to change our behaviors in dramatic ways if we are to slow it down. I for one, want my strawberries back, my tomatoes, spinach and other seasonal vegetables in abundance and for as many weeks as possible. Let’s take action and do something about it now.

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Farms will continue being places of refuge and resilience for so many people. There’s no perfect farm location, and that always has been and would be true without the existence of extreme climate change, but it seems like young farmers in my age range, and especially the generation behind me too, are going to face all the usual issues of land access and the unpredictability of weather, in addition to some never-before-seen intensity. I’m not just thinking about the exorbitant price of land, proximity to marketing outlets, available infrastructure, viability of the soil, etc. I’m also thinking about what particular characteristics of the farms of the DMV area will make them more or less vulnerable to volatile weather patterns. And it feels overwhelming to try to predict that.

We know that climate crisis is manifesting for farmers in extreme ways that differ by region, floods in some places, drought in others, probably fungal and disease pressure could explode in humid regions, the list goes on. I know there’s no way to handpick the least-affected zone of the country, and that would be one cold and insincere way to choose where to put down my life’s roots anyway.

I feel absolutely tied and committed to this place now, so I don’t mean to write from a totally dark place. I feel confident knowing that farmers can (and are!) cultivating relationships that are strong and we will rely both on our place-based and far-reaching communities for support. At this point, it’s certain that we will experience the symptoms of a warming climate, and yet farms will continue being places of refuge, resilience, and survival for many.
Idealism Is Perhaps the Best Answer
By David Giusti, Second Spring Farm

Yesterday Greta Thunberg arrived in New York City, via sailboat after a two-week trip here from Sweden. She’s a 16-year-old activist known for organizing student strikes to protest inaction on climate change. *The Guardian’s* live updates about her arrival in the harbor and the subsequent press conference sure did surprise me. I don’t think the news story was so much about the fact of her arrival, but the *method* of her arrival--by sailboat! That was the only way to traverse an ocean without burning fossil fuels.

Greta’s boat trip is an example of change *outside* the current system, rather than within the confines of our current expectations. But her trip is merely an *example of* that change--a way to show the kind of bold thinking we’ll need in order to get ourselves out of this mess. Despite the idealistic statement of her arrival, two sailors will fly here from Europe to bring the boat back east. It seems that even an idealistic teenager can’t avoid the downstream effects of something so modern as a transatlantic commute to a meeting.

I can’t help but compare all this to the ideals surrounding CSA. Whether it’s supporting ecologically sane growing methods or reducing the carbon footprint of food transportation, many people join the CSA, at least in part, for environmental reasons. And, just like Greta made major changes to live out her values, some people join a CSA to make a small change in their lives to live out their own values. In turn, people reasonably ask how I can make small changes to CSA bag packing to make it more in line with our environmental principles.

It feels ecologically sound for food travel only a few dozen miles from farm to plate compared to across the country, but my back-of-the-envelope math indicates that a full tractor trailer uses the same amount of fuel to move a vegetable across the country as my inefficient, partially-full delivery van uses to drive a vegetable around DC. People tend to think more about the fuel used in tractors, but the overwhelming majority of fossil fuel used by the farm is used to drive the food to the CSA pickup site.

As I see it, the real issue here is that there are no good alternatives with the way our world is set up. We can do what we can to change the inputs to the system, but the modern society we’ve developed is not a regenerative, balanced system. Since it’s our consumptive, non-regenerative system that got us into this climate disaster in the first place, there probably isn’t any solution to it that involves substituting one input for another while keeping the same system intact. If only it were so simple!

Greta Thunberg has been an accidental environmental activist for a year now, the face of the next generation of climate activism. She says, “In a way, I am more optimistic, because people are slowly waking up and people are becoming more aware of the situation. But also ... one year has passed and still almost nothing has happened.” The best we can do may be to live our ideals as thoroughly as possible while not losing sight of the ways our own actions fall short of creating the change we wish to see. Even if that means throwing convention out the window and traveling by sailboat.

Notes from Deep in the Tunnel
By Isabel Hulkower and Megan Seldon

Have you ever been at a farmers market in May and seen a stand full of tomatoes? Though they’re not technically in season this early in the year, this modern marvel is a result of using tunnels. These are above ground structures similar to a greenhouse that allow crops to grow in soil while staying protected from outside conditions.

Tunnels have become increasingly popular in modern farming. Even farmers who are not trying to artificially grow crops through winter using exploitative means have employed them as a means of defense. Climate change has rendered weather patterns erratic and unpredictable. Most crops have a short and specific season when they thrive. Beyond temperature, tunnels can protect from hail, pests, disease, snow, and buckets of rain, which all have come and decimated the plants in our fields that are left unprotected.

Within the last few years, PVF has added about 7 tunnels to the landscape of our two farms. We’ve even discussed not growing heirlooms next season because the conditions are so inhospitable even with the tunnels. Tunnels are a way of adapting to our predicament. They make us slightly less vulnerable to the fickle whim of a changing climate. But this is a symptomatic approach. Real action is needed to prevent this chaotic weather from derailing generations of old farmer practices. We’re in uncharted territory, where our hard-fought knowledge of growing in a region is less dependable, and we cannot rely on technologies as a solution.