



Farm Notes

CSA Newsletter

Vol. 24 No. 1

May 28 - June 1, 2023



POTOMAC VEGETABLE FARMS
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Community Supported Agriculture

by Hana Newcomb

Thank you for being part of the community that supports our farm! If you are a new CSA member, you will get to know us over the next 25 weeks, through our vegetables and our stories, meeting us at the farms and the markets. We are especially excited to grow vegetables for our CSA members - you are the people who chose to commit to a whole season of whatever we can produce. You are our most cherished customers.

Tony and Hiu Newcomb, the founding farmers of Potomac Vegetable Farms, planted the first corn seeds in some rented fields in McLean in 1962. We have been growing delicious vegetables ever since then, with increasing success and decreasing amounts of stress and struggle. As the farms of Fairfax and Loudoun Counties have filled up with houses and businesses, surrounding us on all sides, we have kept planting seeds, hiring excellent help, and having such a good time doing it.

We plan to keep farming for generations to come.

It's always an interesting challenge, growing vegetables. But the even bigger challenge is running a business - all the moving parts of making and spending money, managing people, keeping all the equipment going, staying relevant. Fortunately, vegetables are always relevant - all we need to do is figure out how to grow them well, sell them all, and pay the bills.

We have been incredibly fortunate. The founding farmers landed in an area that has good soil, plenty of rain, and lots of customers close by. We are strong, mentally and physically, and we work hard to build community all around us. Along with the four generations of Newcombs who are still farming along (well, the youngest ones are keeping us company), we have a hard-working group of multi-talented farm workers who keep it all running smoothly.

Eat well, stay healthy, and keep cooking! That is how you can support our efforts this season and beyond.



photo courtesy of helen

Many hands making light work of weeding beets. How many farmers can you count?

Milkweed Capers

Recipe for Milkweed bud capers (adapted from Sandor Katz's "Wild Fermentation"), shared by Michael Vercillo

1. Correctly identify milkweed, *Asclepias* sp. (very important, as there are some inedible look-alikes, such as dogbane) and find an abundant stand of it
2. Wait until the flower buds sort of look like capers - they will be tightly bound and entirely or mostly green. It's okay if they are a little pink, I just like them better when they are green. Harvest them by snapping off the cluster of buds, leaving some for the butterflies
3. Make a brine with 45g (~3/4 tbsp) sea salt and unchlorinated water. Mix well.
4. Fill a glass pint jar about 1/2 - 3/4 full of milkweed buds. Add a couple of sliced or crushed heads of garlic, as you like.

5. Pour the brine into the jar, leaving an inch or so of headspace.

Optional, but recommended: weigh down capers with a (clean) rock, a glass weight, anything nonmetallic and food safe that will keep everything submerged

6. Leave the jar on your kitchen counter with the lid screwed on. Release the pressure by unscrewing the lid every day or 2 as the fermentation happens. Enjoy the bubbly!
7. Taste after a few days. They are done when they are to your liking. Move to the refrigerator when you want them to stop fermenting.
8. Enjoy as you would "normal" capers - in pasta dishes, as a garnish for fish, in salads, etc.

*Instead of milkweed buds, you can alternatively use nasturtium pods--and probably a whole host of other edible flower buds and seed pods!



photo courtesy of hc



photo courtesy of helen

Lucky pup at market scored his favorite treat: KALE

Practicing letting go – of expired row cover.

Why I Farm (Here and Now)

Why I farm (here and now) is hard to explain.

But if you spent one day here, you would want another.

If you were to work alongside Ciara, accomplishing much and laughing often, then maybe you'll understand. If you were to see Rachel's art, which is everywhere, then maybe you'll understand.

If you were to converse with HC, you would learn much while also getting through to the heart of things, and then maybe you'll understand. If you were to feel Michael Bradford's steadfastness

and gentle encouragement, then maybe you'll understand. If you were to be in the presence of Stephen and his family of Roses, then maybe you'll understand. If you were able to team along with Blaze and feel the energy he imparts, then maybe you'll understand. If you were to find yourself in the company of Maggie and Sam, who thoroughly appreciate and advocate farming as a lifestyle, then maybe you'll understand. If you were able to meet Helen, and feel how enjoyable it is getting to

know them, then maybe you'll understand. If you were to share the table with Fireside Farm, and witness how there is no separateness between anyone sharing land and communion, then maybe you'll understand.

A haiku:

days of paradise
new friends smile and drink
water
then the evening comes

-Brandon Walker

Meet Our Farmers (With More to Come)



Michael Vercillo, he/him

Michael moved to the Wheatland neighborhood recently after teaching and working at an educational farm and boarding school in Vermont for the past five years. He began working at PVF West last fall, soon after arriving. He is excited to be working on the farm and feels grateful to be able to tap into the deep knowledge and experience here on this land. A couple of his favorite things he has learned here include how to prune blueberry bushes and how delicious the flowering stalks of collards and kale are.

He chooses to farm because he finds being in tune with the seasons and the arrivals and departures of various plants to be deeply fulfilling and grounding. His time on the farm is helping him orient to and feel

connected with his new home. He also loves cooking and has been blessed (and cursed) with the knowledge of just how much better fresh vegetables grown in healthy soils taste. His favorite vegetables are whichever ones are in season at the moment. And garlic. He is a fermentation nut and incessantly talks about all the fruits, vegetables, and wild foods he wants to ferment. This is met with mixed levels of enthusiasm from fellow coworkers. Currently he is dreaming about cabbage for sauerkraut, milkweed pod capers (check out the recipe in this newsletter), and lacto-fermented hot sauce. Fellow farmers are currently trying out several nicknames for him as a way to distinguish him from the other beloved Michaels of PVF. None has stuck so far, but we'll keep you posted.

Helen, they/them

I'm returning to PVF for my second and a half season farming ever! Farm years are confusing, don't ask. This season, you can find me working on the farm in Vienna three days a week, in Wheatland one day a week, and at the farmers market on Sundays. I keep coming back for a lot of reasons, but mostly because I just can't imagine going inside for a job! Sounds tough! Also because vegetables are so cool, these farmer pals are so great, and I have a lot more petting of farm dogs to do before I go somewhere else. This season I'm hoping to learn as many secrets as possible about all my lovely coworkers as we work the hours away in the fields. Perhaps I will also learn another thing or two about what it takes to make a farm successful. I bring a hunger for gossip, a healthy balanced attitude of complaints and joyfulness, a passion for getting gains, and an incomprehensible list of dietary restrictions to this farm. This season I am joining the Barefoot Nation and am currently working on building thicker skin so I may walk on these gravel roads without limping around foolishly. Thoughts and prayers for my feet are appreciated. I'm looking forward to seeing some of you lovely CSA members around the farm as the season passes!



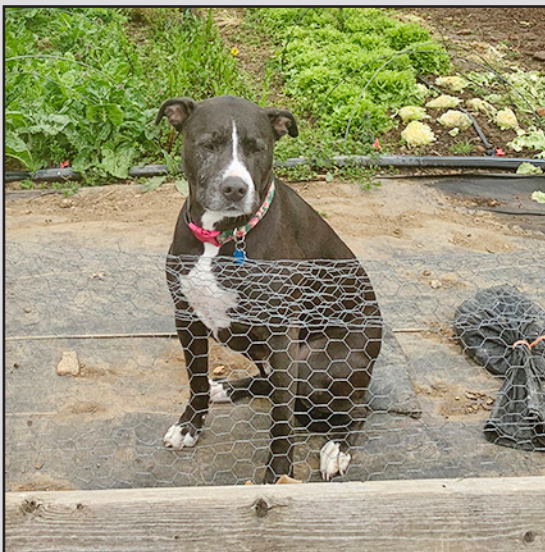


Ciara, she/they

Ciara has been farming at PVF since 2013 when she was in college learning about sustainable agriculture. She started farming full time, year round in 2017, and moved out to the PVF Loudoun farm November of that year. She manages the winter tunnels in Loudoun where we grow a good portion of the fresh food for our winter CSA. In the spring, summer and fall they're generally running morning meetings, working with, teaching and learning from the crew, and doing any problem solving or logistics massaging that invariably needs to happen over the course of a farm day. This is an exciting year for Ciara because it's the first year that she's brought her dog, Bean, to work with her every day. This season she's learning the nitty-gritty of how to take a field from cover crop to cash crop and back to cover crop.

When Ciara isn't farming they like to dance, sing, cook, crochet, collage, hang out with Bean (walking or laying on the couch are two favorites), listen to audiobooks, peer pressure their friends into doing karaoke, and write.

Hi, my name is Bean. I am 7 years old and I love to go to work. All day long I am farming! I find creatures in the cover crop and dig holes in the tunnels. I sniff around the buildings and find delicious rotting things to roll on in the woods. Every day I run along with the tractors and the golf carts, and I am faster than both of them. I used to sleep all morning and go on walks when Ciara got home from work, but now I am so tired at the end of the day, so when I get home I go right to sleep and wake up excited to farm again. This year I will learn not to step on the plastic in the field (why?? Confusing).



Rachel Udall, she/he/they

Three seasons ago I was born inside a PVF cabbage. They tried to sell me at market but the customers wouldn't bite, even after I was marked down to \$0.25/lb (a steal!). Carrie and Hana brought me back to the farm and graciously allowed me to stay, and their act of kindness magically transformed me from a cabbage child into a real boy. Three seasons later and I am still here enjoying all that farming has to offer and painting all the wonderful things I see - look out for my work in future newsletters! (Seriously, LOOK OUT... if you stare too closely you may become trapped in the painting and I don't know how to get people out of there yet). This year I hope to learn how many more weeks we're gonna have [insert vegetable] for. Farmers

market philosophers have begged this question for ages untold and this is the year we finally discover the truth. Cheers to a wonderful season and a wonderful farming community! Xoxo

