

AJO COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE



Winter 2008/09 / Week 10 of 12

Editor: Nina Altshul, Proofreading and Layout: Peter Altshul

This week's planned harvest: Arugula, Citrus (Farmer's Choice), De Cicco Broccoli, Detroit Red Beets, Dried Beans (mixed varieties), Herb Mix, Red LaSoda Potatoes, Ruby Streaks Mustard Greens.

Cooking demonstration: During the pick-up time this Friday (between 6 and 7 pm), Bruce Secker will be preparing a green risotto and a salad (see recipes section), so come and hang out with a great chef and sample some good food!

Spring season sign-up: Please sign up for the Spring Season as soon as you can (checks are due by the end of February) so that gas money contributions can be calculated. Half shares and half-season shares (6 weeks) are available upon request.

End of the season Potluck: February 27. Bring a dish, preferably local and seasonal, or a drink to share and enjoy with other people in the group...

An interview with "Farmer Frank" Martin – Part 1

Why are you a farmer?

Farmer Frank has always thought of himself as a farmer, even when he only had a garden. He enjoys farming tremendously, and for many reasons. Seeds, for example, have enchanted him since he was a very little boy. He finds them magical: here is this small thing, hard but alive, you put it in the ground and you get food. The incredible thing is their size – he puts a few seeds in the palm of his hand, where they almost disappear and look like black dots, and says that there are 12 seeds here, and they will produce 12 heads of cabbage, so they go from this tiny thing to 60 pounds of food. "Not even David Copperfield can perform that kind of magic," says Frank.

Where does the name Crooked Sky Farms come from?

When he decided to start farming in South Phoenix in 1999, he was once visiting Arivaca, AZ. As he was driving around, he took a dirt side road called Crooked Sky Road, and when he came to the end there was a man chopping weeds. He asked him about the name of the road. The man explained that it comes from Indians (Pima and Papagos) who used to live here, because when you look at the sky along the rugged mountain range there, it appears crooked. That sounded good to him, so he took the name for his operation.

Where do you grow our food, and why?

The farmland on the fringes of Phoenix is really fragmented now, so he is leasing 4 different locations in urban Phoenix, ranging from 10 to 40 acres. He also has a property in Duncan, AZ, on the Arizona-New Mexico border, and just recently bought in Virden, NM, 3 miles away. These two properties lie at 3600 feet in the Gila River Valley, where the climate is different, and can thus grow things like chile and bell peppers much easier than here in the valley. He has 15 people that work for him all told. He says good help is really hard to find because it is hard physical work, and you have to work Monday to Friday all year around, except a week between Christmas and New Year. It is not easy to find people who are also interested in working on the farm, since Frank believes that you have to put your heart in it, just like with any other thing you want to succeed in

Why did you decide to grow things naturally?

He grew up in Phoenix, in a really poor family in a house with no running water or electricity; his father worked on farms that used a lot of chemicals and was a very sick man; when his father died, the doctor said he did not die just of any particular thing but because there was so much "garbage" in his body. Frank understood from a very early age that chemicals are not good for you – his father was working in cotton fields, and back then they did not let workers leave the fields when the crop dusters

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came; they only put a sleeve to their nose for the time when the plane was above them, and then went back to work. At that time they did not fully understand the dangers of chemicals. Frank too was sickly when he was young. He would always throw up when the crop dusters came, and his father was concerned because the hard-earned food was being thrown away (when he threw up). So from very early on he saw that the only way to go was without chemicals, organic. As a young boy he read his mother's Organic Gardening magazines, where he learned (among other things) about composting. Frank says that most people who did organic gardening or farming in the 60s were considered to be crazy hippies, but he understood from being around chemicals and watching people get sick that organic is the only way. "If you spray bugs with poison, they will die, but you will eat that too," he says. "Organic means a different kind of thinking; things need to happen in one natural circle, and we are all in the same circle, bugs, plants, us." With this kind of thinking, it does not matter to Frank even if the bugs are killed with legal organics (pesticides allowed in certified organic farming); they are still taken out of the circle. Copper sulfites, for example, are considered legal on a registered organic farm, but once they are sprayed, they enter the water system, go back into the rivers etc., and something will eventually pick them up, either fish and turtles in the Gila River or humans, so it just can't be good to grow perfect carrots, but kill something along the way. He believes in stewardship of the land, where you take care of the land, plants, animals and people.

What can we expect in the next few months?

Greens are coming up really well, but they have been struggling with carrots this winter. The first batch had too many weeds among them to make it viable (just too labor intensive to pull them all out), so they plowed it and replanted, and now the cold temperatures are keeping them down. We will be getting broccoli and cauliflower for the rest of the winter season. In the spring season we can expect carrots, cauliflower, kohlrabi, probably artichokes, and perhaps even some rhubarb if all goes well since rhubarb is proving to be really hard to grow here.

Spinach-Beet Salad (Bruce Secker)

1 lb. of washed spinach, torn into bite size pieces
3 med. beets, boiled for 15-20 min., cut into bite-sized pieces

Lemon vinaigrette (see below)

Toss the spinach and beets with vinaigrette. Serve on salad plates.

Vinaigrette

6T olive oil

3T fresh lemon juice

1t sugar

salt and pepper to taste

Combine all ingredients and add as needed

Green Risotto (Bruce Secker)

2C water

1 qt. vegetable or chicken stock

2T olive oil

1T butter

1 med. onion, finely chopped

2 C Arborio Rice

1/2 C dry white wine or dry sherry

1 lb. spinach, chopped

1 C loosely packed basil (optional)

1/2 C parsley, flat-leaf preferable

coarse salt the freshly ground black pepper

1/4 t nutmeg, grated or ground

1/2 to 2/3 C grated parmesan cheese

Bring water and stock to a boil, then reduce heat to low to keep warm.

In a large skillet, heat oil and butter over medium to medium-high heat. Add onions and sauté 3 minutes. Add Arborio rice and sauté 2 or 3 minutes more. Add wine or sherry and allow liquid to be absorbed, about 1 minute. Add 1/2 the stock or broth and reduce heat slightly. Simmer, stirring frequently until liquid is absorbed, then add more liquid, a bit at a time. When liquid is absorbed, add more.

When risotto has cooked almost to al dente, about 18-20 minutes, fold in spinach, parsley, and basil if used. Season risotto with nutmeg, salt, and pepper and stir in any remaining broth. Risotto will cook 22 minutes, more or less, total. Stir in cheese and serve immediately.