

What did you do with your produce share? - Week 5 and 6

Dear all,

As you noticed, we got an abundance of corn last week and this is a perfect example how CSAs work: as members we get to enjoy the bounty of big harvests, and sometimes have to deal with small ones. Since Crooked Sky Farms is quite diversified in terms of growing locations as well as crops and customers, Farmer Frank has been quite successful in eliminating extremes, yet each week we get the taste of what exactly is ripe in Southern Arizona right now. And when something is in season, it is time to feast on that, and sometimes that alone! This too is the essence of the “eat locally” movement (for more information see for example Gary Paul Nabhan’s *Coming Home to Eat* and <http://www.localharvest.org/>). And the news from the farm is that Farmer Frank is starting his fall crop planting!

So, what did you do with all that corn? Dean and Sharon grilled it while still in the husk, silks and all, after soaking for a while (even 20 min will do), until the outer husks start looking dark. They served it with butter and a spicy Mexican herb mix. I made Calabacitas with a Creole twist: Cut a few pods of okra (see note below) into rings and fry in oil, then set it aside. Sauté a cup of cut onions in olive oil with a tablespoon of Cajun Creole spice mix (paprika, onion, garlic, black pepper, lemon peel, chili pepper, allspice, thyme, cloves, mace, red pepper, bay leaf) until the onions are tender. If you want you can also add a pork sausage to the sautéed onions. Add a cup of corn kernels, 1 summer squash, 1 red bell pepper, both cubed, and 3-4 tomatoes (or a small can), cover and simmer for about 10, 15 min. Add the fried okra and some cream cheese and/or cream to your liking (or omit both), and heat through. You can also add some pre-cooked (or grilled) shrimp or beans for extra protein. Add chopped parsley or cilantro and spoon the mixture into warmed-up corn tortillas. Pour some salsa verde over the tortillas and sprinkle with cheese. The mixture is also nice served over rice.

Here are some facts about okra (Tucson CSA; University of Illinois Extension):

Okra, along with watermelon, came to the New World in association with the slave trade. The word “okra” derives from a Ghanaian language. It was eaten year-round in the past. During the summer it was prepared fresh, often stewed with tomatoes, dipped in batter and fried like a fritter, or added to gumbos. For winter use the young pods were pickled or sliced and dried like fruit. The seeds were roasted and ground to make coffee. Besides green okra, Farmer Frank also grows an heirloom variety known as Texas Hill Country Red. It is drought-tolerant and an excellent pickling variety, but it can also be sliced and eaten raw in salads. Many people dislike okra for its sliminess, but cooked over high heat with enough room for it to brown instead of stew, okra loses the juices that cause the slimy texture. For crisp okra, fry or stir-fry it; for soft, moist okra, stew it. Another trick for avoiding okra’s sliminess is to let it completely dry off after washing it, and before cutting it. Either let it dry off by itself or dry it with paper towels. Okra is a powerhouse of valuable nutrients. Nearly half of which is soluble fiber in the form of gums and pectins. Soluble fiber helps to lower serum cholesterol, reducing the risk of heart disease. The other half is insoluble fiber which helps to keep the intestinal tract healthy decreasing the risk of some forms of

cancer, especially colorectal cancer. Nearly 10% of the recommended levels of vitamin B6 and folic acid are also present in a half cup of cooked okra.

I have so far tried it fried Cajun style (dipped in a beaten egg and rolled in cornmeal mixed with salt and Cajun spices), and Tuscan style (combine 1½ cups of all purpose flour, 2 cups of beer, ½ cup of cold water and 2 teaspoons of sea salt in a bowl, and let rest for an hour or so, then check for texture: it should be smooth and have the texture of heavy cream, if not, adjust ingredients; this is a recipe for batter used for fried zucchini flowers, vegetables and herbs, adjusted from de Blasi's A Thousand Days in Tuscany). Betsy found a recipe for pickled okra on the Internet and has already tried it out. Amounts should be adjusted, but the recipe calls for 7 jars. You will need pickling jars with appropriate lids. Clean okra, trim stems and dry. Put hot pepper and/or garlic clove in the bottom of the jar, and firmly pack okra into the jar. Add dill (a teaspoon). Boil a qt of vinegar, ½ cup of salt and 1 cup of water, and pour the boiled mix into the jar. Lid tightly. Do a boiling water bath for 10 min. Then leave unopened for 5 weeks.

I would also like to pass on a favorite recipe of Sharon's for preparing eggplants (from <http://www.chinatownconnection.com/hot-garlic-eggplant.htm>):

4-6 eggplants

1 t chopped fresh ginger

1 T chopped fresh garlic (use 4-6 cloves if you really like garlic)

1 T Hot bean paste (available from Chinese grocery shops – check label to make sure it has no added oil – most don't; Sharon didn't have any so she just omitted it)

2 T soysauce (adjust down for sodium restriction)

1 t sugar (or sucanat)

1 t salt (again, adjust for low sodium version)

1/2 cup soup stock or water

1 T chopped green onion

Cut eggplant into finger sized pieces-cut lengthwise, then into quarters etc. Saute with some water in a non-stick pan/wok, until soft. When soft, remove from pan. On low heat, cook garlic, ginger, and hot bean paste for a minute, then add salt, sugar, soysauce and stock/water. Return eggplant to the pan and cook for about five minutes until garlic is soft and a sauce forms. If sauce is too thin, thicken with 1t corn starch mixed with 2t water. Serve over white/brown rice.

Last but not at least, there are some membership issues we need to deal with.

First of all, we are up to 9 members now, and are still willing to include a few more people so spread the word! However, Betsy will not be able to continue picking up our produce for ever, and we have to start thinking about how to deal with our pick-ups. Some options so far are that we rotate going to the farm (whoever goes to Phoenix for other business; they should be at the farm by 3 pm, sooner on Fridays, and each trip has to be coordinated with the farm); or designate one or two people to do it on a more regular basis (I volunteer to do this, however there will be times I will not be here).

We still have 7 weeks to go to the end of the summer session, and Betsy will do the pick-up on July 18 and July 25. I will take the next three pick-ups (if we assume we stick with Fridays, that would be August 1, August 8 and August 15). Then I leave for 3 weeks, which means we need a driver for August 22 and August 29, as well as the first and potentially also the second week of September (both of them, though, are already in the fall session). After that, I will be happy to resume the pick-ups. So please let me know who could do the pick-ups and the distribution while I am gone so that we can arrange it!

We would also like to suggest we start thinking about chipping in some gas money to whoever goes and does the pick-up; even if we rotate, inevitably there will be somebody doing it more often than the others. In that way we help covering the gas money, while the time spent for the pick-up, division and distribution of produce among the members is still done on a volunteer basis but the farm usually throws in an extra melon, onions or some other produce for the inconvenience. Betsy and I suggest a contribution between 2 and 5 dollars per a pick-up, but please let Betsy or me know what you think, either by email or phone. My number is 387 3132, and Betsy's 387 3896 (for the time being, weekends only).

Since I am leaving before the end of the summer session, I would like to ask you to start thinking whether you want to sign up for the fall session – preferably we would have that information by August 15 but if you feel that this is too soon please volunteer to take over the organization.

Please give the small green baskets to either Betsy or me. And if you are not at home during delivery (Friday evening) please leave a cooler outside your home with some ice to make it last until you are ready to get your food.

Buon appetito!

Nina