

Roots & Sprouts

News and Ideas from the Belmont Farmers' Market

July 2006

www.belmontfarmersmarket.org



The Market Opens!

After a brief downpour, the sun came out on June 15 for our market opening, a harbinger of a wonderful season to come. Despite the rainy spring, the vendors' stands were full of ripe strawberries, crisp lettuce, rhubarb, jams and jellies, baked goods and more, attracting shoppers from Belmont and beyond. We look forward to seeing you at the market!

— The Belmont Farmers' Market Committee

Now open!

June through October
Thursday afternoons
2:00 to 6:30pm

BELMONT CENTER
In the municipal parking lot
behind the Leonard St. stores
off Cross St. & Channing Rd.

In this issue . . .

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Meet Busa Farms
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A warm-weather recipe

The Good Earth

A look at soil quality and nutrition

"Food is fabricated soil fertility"—W.M. Albrecht

Fertile soil supports abundant plant life. What creates fertility? A mixture of materials, like clay or sand, along with nitrogen, sodium, potassium or phosphorus, and trace elements like iron, magnesium, sulfur and zinc. Varying combinations of these factors support plants in different ways. It is the foundation of plant health and their nutritive value.

When soil is rich in minerals, the plant that grows in it will be rich in minerals as well. When the soil is deficient, so is the plant. Poor soil increases the carbohydrate content of plants, and rich soil produces plants with higher protein content, more minerals and more trace elements. The same species of plant will differ in its composition depending on the soil in which it is grown.

The first Americans understood the importance of soil quality and planting diverse crops together. When corn was domesticated thousands of years ago, it was planted alongside beans, the vine winding around the stalk. These early farmers knew that the corn stalk provides support for the climbing bean. While the bean deposits nitrogen into the soil, the corn extracts nitrogen from the soil. What one plant takes from the soil, the other plant

puts into the soil. A third plant completes the exchange of favors as squash vines mingle with the corn and bean plants. The long, spiny stems of the squash discourage animals from eating the other two plants. The squash plant thrives in the shade created by the corn. These three sisters of traditional American agriculture—corn, beans and squash—attest to the first Americans' understanding of sustainable agriculture.

Current organic farming also consists of ways that benefit soil fertility and plant vigor. Crop rotation avoids depletion of soil nutrients. Eliminating or reducing the use of chemicals as pesticides or fertilizers also prevents nutrient imbalances. Understanding that monocultures invite pests and disease, organic farmers encourage the coexistence of multiple species of plants, insects and animals. All these practices also preserve the fertility of soil. Working with the systems that nature has established invariably proves beneficial for the soil, for plants, and for those who eat the plants.

Conventional agricultural practices, in contrast, are based on controlling and combating

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Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food

Meet Busa Farms

Each issue of *Roots and Sprouts* will introduce one of our farmers or vendors. We'll tell you about how they got started, how they grow or produce their products, and what they will bring to the Belmont Farmers' Market.

In 1919, John Busa and his three brothers, immigrants from Sicily, bought land and a farmhouse on Lowell Street, Lexington, and started a farm specializing in fresh vegetables for local markets and restaurants. The current owners, Trudy, Dennis and Francis Busa, inherited the farm from their mother, Rosina, John Busa's wife who passed away in 1996. Trudy and Dennis took over running the farm in 1971; Francis joined full time in 1985. The Busa family now farms 9 acres, including greenhouses at the original farm on Lowell Street and fifteen acres of rented land in other parts of Lexington.

All of the family is involved in some aspect of running the farm. Dennis is the farm manager. He raises plants and flowers in the greenhouses and corn on the conservation lands. Fran runs the farmers' markets, works on the farm and buys fruit and grocery items for the farm stand. Trudy works in the greenhouses and at the farm stand, and is the keeper of the family recipes and traditions. Dennis' daughter, Emily, helps in the fields and greenhouses, and operates the seed machine that produces transplants for the farm and greenhouses. Trudy's husband, Doug McGarvie, stocks the produce and items inside the farm stand.

They are committed to the organic methods practiced by John Busa many years ago. He planted a succession of different, complementary crops along with his mainstays of celery and tomatoes to ensure available produce throughout the growing season. This practice also minimizes the need for chemical pest control by avoiding the monoculture that enables pest and diseases to flourish and by hand weeding to minimize use of chemicals.

In addition to their crops of corn, tomatoes and lettuce, the Busa family also offers a strain of Sicilian eggplant grown from the seeds their uncle, Joe Romano, brought from Italy fifty years ago. The Pascal celery they grow today is similar to the celery the farm was known for in the 1920s. They also reintroduced vegetables that have been popular in the past, including Italian pole beans, salad bowl lettuce and heirloom tomatoes.

The Busa descendants continue the family tradition of selling the highest quality greens, herbs and vegetables directly to the public through their farm stands, farmers' markets and community supported agriculture (CSA) memberships.

Busa Farms

52 Lowell St.

Lexington, Massachusetts

www.busafarms.org

An appeal from the Belmont Farmers' Market

Help us buy a bike rack for our shoppers!

Did you know that our market developed out of Belmont Walks/Bikes (BW/B), a community group working to make Belmont more pedestrian- and bicyclist-friendly? A farmers' market in the Town center is one way we can reduce the time spent in our cars shopping for food.

To encourage biking, we are working with the Town to place a second bike rack in the Center. There is one in the empty lot on Leonard Street next to the bank.

You can help us purchase a bike rack for the municipal parking lot area by making a tax-deductible gift to the Town. Make out your check to Town of Belmont with the designation "bike rack in Belmont Center" on the memo line and send to: **BFMC, PO Box 387, Belmont MA 02478.**



www.belmontfarmersmarket.org

Belmont Farmers' Market Committee

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We thank our many volunteers . . . thus far!

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It's not too late to help!

Contact us at

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nature. The results are rather appalling. Large amounts of pesticides and chemical fertilizers are added to the soil and plants, producing crops with lower nutritional content and an increased concentration of toxic substances. Crops doused with fertilizers develop nutrient imbalances that make them susceptible to pests. They then require pesticides, which in turn create more imbalances. The cycle of fertilizers and pesticides gradually and inexorably depletes and contaminates the soil, along with the rivers, ground water and farm workers.

The organic farmer, however, relies on a different cycle, one that begins with the quality of the soil. If the soil is not sufficiently rich in

minerals and trace elements, the farmer adds compost and other natural substances to bring it into balance. The particular makeup of each piece of land must be understood, and compensated accordingly.

Extensive studies of soil quality were first made in the early 1900s and, even then, demonstrated the link between soil fertility and the health of people who ate the crops grown in the soil. A startling example was found in Deaf Smith County, Hereford, Texas. The county had an unusually high proportion of people without dental caries and with overall excellent health, despite the fact that most of the residents did not visit doctors or even brush their teeth. Diligent studies demonstrated that the county enjoyed soil

with a wealth of minerals and trace elements. Furthermore, most people kept gardens and ate plenty of vegetables everyday with little or no cooking. They drank quantities of raw milk from cows that grazed on the local grass. Their diet, enriched in every form by minerals from the dirt under their feet, ensured their superior health.

The nutrients we require to live begin in the ground. The plants use the sun and the soil to manufacture new compounds that sustain all animal life. When we eat the plants or the animals from this chain, we reap all the accumulated benefits of each step. Each link in this chain of life can be strong only when the first, soil, is strong. Good health begins with fertile soil.

– Andres Aguirre

What's Fresh in... July

raspberries
arugula
beets
bok choy
broccoli
cabbage
carrots
cauliflower
chard
cucumbers
eggplant
garlic
green beans
salad greens
onions
peas, snap and green
peppers
potatoes
radishes
scallions
spinach
summer squash
zucchini

Carrots at their best!

Herbed Carrots

- 1 pound new carrots
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 2 tablespoons chicken stock (or water)
- 1 clove garlic, finely chopped
- 1 medium onion
- 1 tablespoon parsley, finely chopped
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper (to taste)
- ½ teaspoon rosemary (dried)
- Cream (as desired)

Wash carrots and cut diagonally into thin slices. Melt butter in saucepan, and add chicken stock or water, sliced carrots, and finely chopped garlic, onion and parsley. Season to taste with salt, pepper and rosemary. Cover and cook over a low heat for 10 to 15 minutes or until carrots are just tender. Before serving, stir in the cream.

I have prepared carrots in this manner for over 30 years. I love it.

– Cartha Vickers

