

# Roots & Sprouts

News and Ideas from the Belmont Farmers' Market

late summer 2008

[www.belmontfarmersmarket.org](http://www.belmontfarmersmarket.org)



*Open rain or shine!*

**Thursday afternoons  
2:00 to 6:30 pm**

**BELMONT CENTER**

**Conveniently located behind  
the Leonard St. stores – in  
the municipal parking lot off  
Cross Street and Channing  
Road – where it's easy to  
run . . . walk . . . bike . . . and  
"SHOP LOCAL" for food and  
all your other needs!**

*In this issue . . .*

**Hmong Farmers at Flats Mentor Farm  
Meet NorthStar Farm's Steve Hancock  
Food for Thought: Internationals enrich  
small scale farming in the US  
Easy and delicious - stir-fried bok choy**

*The Belmont Farmers' Market  
is a member of the Belmont  
Center Business Association.*

## Brave Farming in a New World

*A Visit with the Hmong Farmers at Flats Mentor Farm*

The roots of the Flats Mentor Farm (FMF) program run long and deep and begin with the story of one immigrant farmer helping another.

In the mid-80s, Maria Moreira, an immigrant from Portugal, befriended an immigrant Hmong group living in the Fitchburg area. One day one of the Hmong women approached Maria and asked if she could start a small garden on an unused corner of Maria's dairy farm. Maria agreed and was astonished at the resulting yield of vegetables from the small plot: cucumbers, squash, and zucchini. This encouraged her to rent other parcels of land to other members of the group who were now eager to try their hand at growing vegetables, too.

While she raised her family and ran her cheese business, Maria came to the realization that outside financial support would enable the Hmong farmers to make real economic progress.

The breakthrough for Maria and the Hmong came in 2005 when Heifer International, the USDA's Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES), and the University of Massachusetts Extension teamed up to provide financial support. With the University of Massachusetts acting as their fiscal agent, a program with 501(c)(3) status was formally organized under the name of Flats Mentor Farm. Maria explained that the goal of the program is

"to mainstream immigrant farmers" and, with this in mind, she now has devised a hands-on training program that is sensitive to the various cultures that she works with.

In 2007, there were 50 families in the mentoring program. In 2008 they have already exceeded that number with five Kenyans joining them in June. Maria stated that based on the goals of the program, "success has been achieved when a farmer starts a farming enterprise at the Flats Mentor Farm or anywhere else and is making most of his/her income from farming." Today produce from FMF can be found at Russo's in Watertown, Whole Foods (Fresh Pond, Woburn, Newton, and Newtonville), and at 32 farmers' markets in the Greater Boston area.

### **Who are the Hmong?**

The Hmong are an ethnic group from Asia with their own language and culture. Ancestors of the Hmong were living on the banks of China's Yellow River 3,000 years ago. Due to hostilities in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, they migrated to the mountainous areas of Laos, Burma, Thailand, and China where they remained for over 100 years until the Communist takeover in 1975. The Hmong assisted the U.S. during the secret wars in Laos, and were persecuted after the Vietnam War by the Laotian and Vietnamese governments when the U.S. left Southeast Asia. However, because of their assistance to the U.S. during the war, the Hmong were allowed to immigrate to the U.S.

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# A Bounty of Perennials!

Farmers' Market vendor Steve Hancock sells old favorites along with intriguing new varieties

If you ever need an answer to a question about perennial flowers, speak with market vendor Steve Hancock, owner of NorthStar Farm. You can visit him at his Belmont Farmers' Market stand (at times with his Corgi dog, Monty) and his wide selection of perennials and ornamental grasses that are so delightfully displayed each week. Steve's farm is located in Westport, Massachusetts, originally the site of a large facility that for many years produced hydroponic lettuce. "The area," he says, "is about the size of Foxboro stadium with 17 gutter-connected greenhouses." It produces enough plants that Steve sells wholesale up and down eastern Massachusetts from Truro, Massachusetts to Portland, Maine.

Steve (and his twin brother, who sometimes visits the market) grew up on a farm in Franklin, Massachusetts. Their father had a large-and-small animal veterinary practice on the property. Steve says, "We always had a large vegetable garden to feed the troops and Mom did a lot of canning and made preserves. That's when I got hooked on fresh produce. Picking strawberries never seemed to be a chore!" Steve graduated with a BS degree in plant & soil science from the University of Vermont. "I've been in the 'green industry' ever since. It is truly a labor of love."

Belmont Farmers' Market is NorthStar's only retail outlet so far. Steve says he started with the market list on the Massachusetts

Department of Agriculture site. "Most markets," he said, "didn't know what to make of a perennial flower vendor, but Heli thought it was a great idea and would set the new Belmont market apart."

When you visit NorthStar's stand, you can expect careful advice from Steve about the planting and care of each perennial: where to place your new plant, how to feed and water it, how it's likely to grow. When we spoke, Steve was offering the familiar coreopsis and monarda "Marshall's Delight." He also had some magnificent "dinner plate" dahlias in white and purple, and a small, delicate pink delphinium. Steve's plants are very reasonably priced individually, and when purchased in quantity, come with some discount. He will soon have a complete list of his perennials for you to place a special order.

When asked about caring for perennials later in the hot summer, Steve emphasizes watering long and deep to encourage deep roots, cutting spent flowers, and removing yellow leaves. He's always happy to talk about the care and feeding of plants, so do stop by his NorthStar stand.

— Jane Sherwin

*Note that Steve also carries organic, fresh hen's eggs from Case Mill Farm in Westport. He calls them "rainbow eggs" because each is a slightly different tint, beautiful pastels from beige and pink to a very soft green.*

## Coming Attractions . . .

### Musical Performances

Aug. 7<sup>th</sup>- Violinists Julia L. and Mirella B.

Aug. 14<sup>th</sup>- Powers Music School Classical Guitar Trio  
led by Jay Rosenberg

Aug. 21<sup>st</sup>- Karen Allendoerfer and her daughter Helena

Aug. 28<sup>th</sup>- The Lockett Family Trio

Sept. 4<sup>th</sup>- Saxophonist Leslie W.



**August is "T-Month."** Wear a Belmont Farmers' Market "tee" or carry a BFM "tote," and you'll be eligible to win some dandy prizes at the BFM drawing on . . .

**August 21<sup>st</sup> celebrating Mass Farmers' Market Week.** Look for Angelato, Kitchen on Common and more special local guests. The month ends on . . .

**August 28<sup>th</sup>** with a salute to our pet companions. Check our website or the electronic newsletter for details.



[www.belmontfarmersmarket.org](http://www.belmontfarmersmarket.org)

## Belmont Farmers' Market Committee

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## 2008 Vendors

- **Angelato** artisan gelato and sorbetto made in Belmont
- **B & R Artisan Bread** handcrafted loaves made with natural ingredients
- **Coutts Specialty Foods** jams, jellies, applesauce, relishes
- **Crystal Brook Farm** fresh goat cheeses
- **Dick's Market Garden Farm** produce
- **The Farm School** organic vegetables, fruits, flowers, soap, grass-fed meat
- **Fiore di Nonno Cheese** handcrafted fresh mozzarella
- **Glutenus Minimus** gourmet gluten-free cookies
- **Hmong Farms at Flats Mentor Farm** fresh produce featuring Asian vegetables
- **Herb Lyceum** specialty herbal plants, herbal products, and foods
- **Hutchins Farm** certified organic plants, vegetables, herbs, small fruit and apples
- **Kimball Fruit Farm** vegetables, fruit, pies, honey
- **Merrimack Valley Apiary** special honey
- **Nicewicz Family Farm** apples, peaches, plums, berries, vegetables, flowers
- **NorthStar Farm** perennial plants and fresh organic eggs
- **Sassy River Sauces** savory sauces without the fat
- **Shootflying Hill Sauce Co.** dessert sauces
- **Stillman's at the Turkey Farm** grass-fed meat and freshly-cut flowers
- **Stuffie's Pastries** cupcakes and a signature almond bar
- **Thoreau Foods** organic cereals, toppings, smoothie boosters
- **Trooper's Treats** all natural dog treats
- **Underwood Greenhouse** potted plants grown in Belmont
- **Waverley Place** flowers, herbs, and perennials grown in Waltham



## Food for Thought

*Residents share their passion for fresh food, farmers' markets, and good living*

*This month **Roots & Sprouts** features the Hmong farmers at Flats Mentor Farm in Lancaster, Massachusetts. The growth of other organizations across the country from Minnesota to California to support sustainable agriculture, build on immigrant knowledge and expertise, and protect and preserve land use for farming provides us with food for thought and hope for the future of farming in the United States. We offer a selection of a few other organizations in the northeast for you to consider:*

### **New American Sustainable Agriculture Project (Maine)**

NASAP provides information, training, tools, and resources to recently resettled refugee farmers and immigrant farm workers from the world over now living in Maine. NASAP's primary goal is to deliver focused outreach and technical assistance, including educational programs, to limited-resources immigrant farmers, helping them to build successful Maine farms that are consistent with their cultural and lifestyle aspirations.

### **New Entry Sustainable Farming Project (Massachusetts)**

The New Entry Sustainable Farming Project (NESFP) is a non-profit partnership that assists immigrants and others with agricultural experience to apply their skills in their new environment and become commercial farmers. Currently the project supports 36 farmers of Southeast Asian, West African, and Latino origins on farm sites in Dracut, Massachusetts. NESFP provides services such as locating farmland, education, training, business/enterprise development, and production and marketing assistance. Funded entirely by grants and donations, the project

provides opportunities for economically disadvantaged farmers, preserves farmland, and promotes New England agriculture.

### **Nuestras Raíces (Massachusetts)**

Nuestras Raíces is a grass-roots organization that promotes economic, human, and community development through projects relating to food, agriculture, and the environment.

### **New Farmer Development Project, Greenmarket (New York)**

The New Farmer Development Project (NFDP) identifies, educates, and supports agriculturally experienced immigrants in the NYC region to establish economically and environmentally sound, small-scale farm operations. Their work helps to preserve regional farmland, strengthen farmers' markets, and expand access to high-quality, locally-grown farm products.

If you had any doubt about the energy and enthusiasm going into small-scale, sustainable farming, just type "new entry farming" into your Google bar and press enter!

### *What's fresh in late summer*

apples  
arugula  
beets  
bell peppers  
blueberries  
bok choy  
broccoli  
cabbage  
carrots  
cauliflower  
chard  
corn

cucumbers  
eggplant  
garlic  
grapes  
green beans  
herbs  
hot peppers  
melons  
okra  
onions  
peaches  
peppers

plums  
potatoes  
radishes  
raspberries  
salad greens  
scallions  
shelling beans  
spinach  
summer squash  
tomatillos  
tomatoes  
zucchini

(continued from page 1)

### Farmers Song Vang Yang and Nou Yang

Song and her husband, Nou, came to America in 1980 as refugees from Laos. Before fleeing Laos, Nou lost his parents, brother, and younger sisters during the violence in that country. They spent many months in a refugee camp in Thailand before being sent to Providence, Rhode Island. In 1983, Song and Nou moved to Massachusetts to join relatives already living in Leominster. For many years they worked hard, seven days a week, in a plastics factory to provide for their nine children.

Before the war, Song and Nou both farmed in Laos. Upon arriving in Massachusetts, they searched for a place to grow their food. Through one of their relatives already farming on Maria Moreira's land, they also obtained permission to rent some of her farmland. The next year Song and several other Hmong refugees began gardening, and, with the help of their entire family, produced enough food to feed all their family members. Twenty years

later, many of the original Hmong gardeners have made the transition to becoming commercial farmers. Song has been a commercial farmer for five years and is very happy to be able to pass on to her children her knowledge of farming and her culture's farming tradition.

Song explained that they started planting late this year because of the rainy spring. Since May 18, they have been out in the fields every day from sunrise to sunset. The Flats Mentor Farm does not use any form of herbicide, which means that all of the weeding is done by hand. The Yangs grow a variety of vegetables including cilantro, lettuce, onions, bok choy, water spinach, and pea tendrils. Which vegetable does Song like best? She points to the lush pea tendrils and admits that they are her favorite. She says they are delicious both in stir-fry and in salads.

—Carlha Vickers

Carlha Vickers writes for EdibleBoston and Farmers' Market Today and lives in Belmont. Translation for interviews provided by Kao Her and Zoe Lukens of Flats Mentor Farm.

### Addendum from the Roots & Sprouts team:

It may be of interest to note that from 2002-2003 Song and Nou participated in a beginning farmer training course through the New Entry Sustainable Farming Project (NESFP) based at Tufts University. NESFP provided production training, farmers' market assistance, pest management guidance, irrigation pipe and pumps, and other small equipment to help the farmers prior to the time the group achieved 501(c)(3) status as Flats Mentor Farm.



## Bok choy: a super stir-fry!

*Bok choy (Chinese cabbage) makes a wonderful stir-fry. On a summer evening after a trip to the Farmers' Market, what could be easier? Although classified as a cabbage, bok choy is more like celery without the stringiness. Its popularity comes from its light, sweet flavor, crisp texture, and nutritional value. High in Vitamin A, Vitamin C, and calcium, it is low in calories.*

### Stir-Fry Bok Choy with Mushrooms

- 1 large bok choy, well rinsed and shredded, cut on the diagonal
- 10 ounces mushrooms (shiitake or portabella)
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 tablespoon minced garlic and/or ginger
- 2 teaspoons soy sauce
- ½ teaspoon molasses or honey
- 1/3 cup water or broth (cold)
- 2 teaspoons cornstarch



Clean mushrooms, slice thinly. Mix soy sauce, sweetener, water, and cornstarch and set aside. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in big skillet or wok. Add bok choy and stir constantly for about 5 minutes until somewhat translucent but still crisp. Remove from pan. Add rest of oil to pan. When hot, add mushrooms, garlic, and ginger, and stir constantly until mushrooms soften and become juicy. Dump bok choy back in pan, give the sauce a stir, and quickly stir it into the veggies. It will thicken as it gets hot, glazing the vegetables. Optional: stir in cubed tofu and dinner is ready!

Adapted from [www.about.com/chinese food](http://www.about.com/chinese food)