

The Newton Farmer

an e-newsletter from
Newton Community Farm



August 2009

Dear Farm Friends,

As farm members and supporters we are much more closely involved in agriculture than people who buy their food only in supermarkets. This month we learn that a healthy tomato is a precious thing, as you will read below. The Farmer in Training program, new this summer, is sprouting nicely; and you have an opportunity to get involved in planning and helping with the farm's Harvest Festival, which takes place in October.

Your editor,

Susan Tornheim

sftornheim@yahoo.com

Notes from Greg Maslowe, Farm Manager

By now most of you have probably already read or heard about the epidemic of late blight sweeping the Northeast. This is a disease that farmers in New England don't normally have to worry much about because our cold winters tend to keep the disease from overwintering in the soil. The spring and early summer of 2009, however, saw what can only be described as a "perfect storm" for creating a late-blight epidemic. First, a number of large chain stores brought infected plants up from a nursery in the South and sold them to unsuspecting homeowners throughout New England. Then we had an extended period of cool, wet weather from late spring through early summer. These are exactly the conditions that allow late blight to thrive, and so it did.



Late blight afflicts both tomatoes and potatoes. In fact, it is the same disease that caused the potato famine in Ireland. It is a fungal disease and spreads through spores that can be transmitted through physical contact with plants, as well as through the air. Once airborne, the spores can spread for miles from a single infection site.

For a while things were looking much better here at NCF than at some other farms in the greater Boston area. Two major CSAs in Lincoln had to destroy their entire tomato crops a couple of weeks ago. Many other farms in surrounding communities also reported that they had to destroy at least part of their crops. Still things looked pretty good here. But with late blight that can change very quickly. The disease can kill a healthy crop in a matter of weeks. For the last two weeks I've been watching in dismay as our first planting of tomatoes has succumbed to the disease. It appears to have found its way into our second and even third plantings (no thanks to the deer, which are moving—and browsing—amongst the tomatoes every night these days). While we might get a small harvest of tomatoes, 2009 is going to be remembered as the year without tomatoes—at NCF as well as most of the other small, organic farms in the area.

So is there anything that could be done about late blight? Conventional farmers have an arsenal (literally) of systemic fungicides at their disposal that can effectively control late blight. Organic farmers are not allowed to use them. (Hum, I wonder why?) What organic farmers can use is copper. Unfortunately, the only way for copper to work (as well as those systemic fungicides we're not allowed to use) is proactively—that is, you have to start spraying it before there's any infection. And therein lies the catch for many of us small-scale, "organic" (i.e., not certified) farmers—we don't want to spray for something that might happen. We often don't want to spray at all!

The University of Massachusetts extension office recommends that organic farmers spray their tomatoes with copper every five days, or every time it rains, whichever is sooner. Has anyone looked outside lately? We'd certainly be spraying more than once every five days if we followed this advice. Not only is this not possible for many small farms because of the time involved in spraying a major crop so often, but copper is, well, toxic. When spraying you need to wear boots and socks, long pants, a long-sleeve shirt, goggles, and a respirator. And while tomatoes thus sprayed can be sold within 24 hours of spraying (!), UMass recommends that harvesting crews also wear long pants, long sleeves, and rubber gloves until the fruit is washed. Sound like something you want sprayed on your vegetables every five days or more often?

It's not something I feel comfortable doing—for my sake, my crew's sake, my customers' sake, or for the soil's sake. A healthy farm depends in part on fungus in the soil that helps make nutrients available to plants. Dumping a fungicide on the soil every five days or less for an entire season (or two, or three, or every year) seems a bad idea if what we're trying to create is a sustainable farm system.

So what are we doing? Like most farms in the area, we're destroying our tomato plantings as they become infected and replanting if possible to try to salvage some value from those beds. It may be extra carrots, or broccoli, or radishes, or greens, but many of our tomato beds will be replanted with something that we can harvest before the hard frosts come. It's the best we can do; it's all we can do. So we're sucking it up and trying to stay cheery as we plow under crops that we've been nurturing since March.

Greg Maslowe
Farm Manager
greg@newtoncommunityfarm.org

Evening at Lumière: A Benefit Dinner for NCF on September 29

You're invited to attend our annual fundraising event at Lumière, a wonderful restaurant in West Newton Square, featuring a special four-course dinner with fresh produce from the farm and wine pairings.

Tuesday, September 29, at 7 p.m.

For more information and to reserve your seat, contact Jerry Regosin (jregosin@aol.com) or download the reply form on our Web site.

[For more information, click here.](#)

Save the Date! Harvest Festival on October 18

Music ** Children's activities ** Farm tours ** Food
Everyone is welcome!

Mark your calendar: This year's Harvest Festival is on Sunday, October 18.

To make it happen, we need volunteers to help out with the Harvest Festival. It's a great way to enjoy the farm and make a contribution to building community around it. We need people to help with planning and organizing, and we also could use help on the day of the event. If you are interested, contact Peter Barrer at pbarrer@verizon.net.



Photo: Romi Selinger and Nina Lokshin at last year's Harvest Festival

[Click here to see more event details on our Web site.](#)

Newton Community Farm Featured on Channel 5 News

WCVB Channel 5 news reporter David Brown visited the farm recently for their Going Green Boston segment. The report showed a beautiful sunny day on the farm, along with interviews with farm manager Greg Maslowe, volunteer Laurie Brownstein, and board member Becca Smillie. If you missed us on TV that day, you can find the video at the link below.

[Click here for the news report from the farm.](#)

Farmer in Training Program Is Growing



The 2009 Farmer in Training (FiT) program started gradually with one excellent and spirited student for the first week and then jumped into high gear with five interested and active students the next week. Because of the program's success and this year's school schedule, we have decided to extend the FiT program into the last week of August and the first week of September. We are full for the week of August 17 but have space in all other weeks. Each student gets an FiT certificate upon completing and graduating from the weeklong program. Thanks to Greg Maslowe and Jenny Craddock for their help in revising the curriculum to make it an even stronger program as we go along.

If you have any thoughts or questions about the FiT program or any other educational programs at the farm, please contact farm educator Yannick Perrette at education@newtoncommunityfarm.org or by cell phone at [917-584-4420](tel:917-584-4420). Happy summer learning!

Photo: Jasper Maslowe and Marissa Krasner deal with carrots in the FiT program.

[For information about summer classes, click here.](#)

Update on Barn Funding for Phase 2

With the leadership of the Newton Farm Commission, we are applying for Community Preservation Act funds to complete the barn renovation and turn the barn's main floor and loft into handicapped-accessible areas to house our expanding education programs. The renovation will include flexible meeting space, a demonstration kitchen, a gardening and history library, bathrooms, and heating for year-round use. We hope this second phase of the barn renovation will be funded to fulfill the vision of the original Community Preservation grant that purchased the Angino property in 2005.

Tour de Farm

NCF was the third stop on this year's Tour de Farm bicycle ride held on August 1. Seventy riders participated in the "outer loop," a 40-mile ride that toured farms in metro Boston. (There was also a 15-mile "inner loop" that visited urban agricultural sites.) Riders began at Franklin Park and rode to Allendale Farm. From there they headed north to Waltham Fields Community Farm, then south to Newton Community Farm. After leaving NCF they headed to the Blue Hills Reservation to visit Brookwood Community Farm and then returned to Franklin Park for the end of the ride. At each stop, riders heard a presentation on the farm and sampled fresh produce from the fields.

This was the third year for the ride but the first year NCF participated. It was a wonderful sight to see 70 riders turning onto Nahanton Street and then pulling into the farm. They were impressed by our operation and enjoyed the fresh beans and cucumbers—perfect for a hot, sunny day.

Recipes

Two new recipes use many of the vegetables that are being harvested this month. Summer Vegetable Soup uses green beans, carrots, summer squash, and fresh herbs. Multi-Bean Salad uses green beans, pac choi, parsley, bell pepper, cucumber, and cherry tomatoes.

[To see the recipes, click here.](#)

Farm Stand

Hours: Open Tuesday through Friday, 3–7 p.m.; Saturday, 10–2 p.m.

Available in August: pac choi (bok choi); other greens like kale, chard, and mizuna; beets; green beans; green peppers; hot peppers; tomatoes, we hope; and potatoes.

Volunteering on the Farm

Drop-in volunteer hours are Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays from 9 to 12:30. Wear work clothes and, if you like, bring a lunch.

CSA members, remember to check in with Tom Libby and record your work hours on the chart in the barn each time you come.

Farm Wish List

wood picnic table(s)

If you can help us with any of these items, please contact Greg Maslowe at [617-916-9655](tel:617-916-9655) or at newtoncommunityfarm@comcast.net. We are a 501(c)3 organization. Your donations may be tax-deductible. Thank you for your support!
