

THE TIPI TIMES

March 8, 2012, spring newsletter

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HERE IS OUR BEST GUESS FOR THE FIRST CSA BOX THIS YEAR:

Asparagus
Spinach
Green garlic
Lettuce
Rhubarb
Arugula
Spring radishes
German butterball potatoes
or mushrooms

We will announce the first delivery date around May 1.

We expect to begin deliveries on May 17 (Evansville, Madison area) and May 18 (Janesville, Milwaukee area). However, we might start one week earlier if this warmth persists. Registered members, watch for an email from us around May 1.

Fresh optimism, fresh seedlings.

It is impossible to be a pessimist this time of year. All our jobs seem easier in the buoyant spring weather. Steamy hot weather? Mud? Really, did that happen last year? Our memories are selective. We began seeding our earliest crops in the greenhouse three weeks ago. Onions were first, followed by lettuce. We've puzzled over the warm weather. Will it last or will it be followed by punishing snow and cold temperatures? We started seeding earlier than usual this year, in hopes that the sustained early warmth predicts an early spring. The ground has already thawed, and is unlikely to re-freeze deeply again. I guess we'll see.

We enjoyed the winter, despite the lack of snow and winter sports. We took our kids on a two-week trip to Arizona and California this winter. What a fabulous area! One highlight was a visit to the Hopi and Navajo reservations in northeastern Arizona. The landscape, culture, history and geology are all stunning. We visited a special Navajo site called Canyon de Chelly. This deep but hospitable canyon feels like a different world when compared with the dry terrain up on the surrounding mesa. The Navajo farm the canyon bottom during the summer. The canyon is lined with 1000-year-old Anasazi ruins, some perched up on narrow cliffs. So cool.

There's work for us during the winter, of course, washing and shipping roots and cabbage that we harvested last fall. Our stored carrot crop ran out earlier than usual. It was a respectable harvest, but demand was high this winter. We just made our final deliveries to our store customers last week. There are some cabbage and rutabagas left to sell to Willy Street Coop, but that's it. We're moving on to the new season.

Beth

New menu service.

We will try something new with recipes this year. Local chefs/entrepreneurs Pat Mulvey and Laura Gilliam have started a company called Local Thyme, which will prepare CSA menu plans for a fee. The menu plans and recipes will be specific for the produce we pack each week. The goal is to help our CSA members prepare their CSA produce in new, satisfying ways. We are one of five farms that Local Thyme has chosen to work with this season. Many of you already know Pat as an editor of recent editions of the Asparagus to Zucchini cookbook. She and Laura are really fun to talk to about food! We hope to work with Local Thyme in two ways:

1. You will be able to sign up separately for Local Thyme's menu service. They will prepare complete menu plans and recipes for each CSA box that we send, at a cost of \$60 per season. They will post the menus on-line each Thursday afternoon, and will accommodate any "splits" that we send, eg. eggplant OR broccoli. I'll send more information about Local Thyme once they open their enrollment.

2. Local Thyme to provide a recipe for our newsletter every week or so. I find that I gravitate to the same types of dishes each season. I love sour flavors, so there are lots of recipes with lime or vinegar. I will continue to test and provide recipes as well, but we are excited at the opportunity to diversify the recipes in our newsletter.

I will continue to upload our old recipes into our on-line archives. There are still five years to upload!

See below for a sampling of what is happening on the farm right now.



(left) Maggie plants peppers with our precision vacuum seeder. This is a good job for a very pregnant lady. (right) The vacuum seeder drops one seed in each cell. Maggie seeded 37 pepper flats today, enough to plant 1/2 acre of bell peppers. The flat looks infinitely long in the photo, doesn't it? That's how the pepper field feels during September harvests.



(left) We are putting the finishing touches on our new greenhouse. Steve needs to run LP lines for the heater, then build benches for the plants. The work must be completed in two days so the greenhouse is ready for the next batch of seedlings. They are already planted, so this deadline is nonnegotiable. I guess it's time to remove the lawn chairs and the ping-pong table. The greenhouse was a lovely haven on sunny days this winter. (right) Simone O'Donahue thins lettuce seedlings in our main greenhouse. We use this greenhouse first each year because it is small and efficient to heat. You can see young lettuce and onion seedlings behind Simone.



(above left) I patrol the rhubarb patch each spring to check for fresh signs of growth.
(above right) The fat red buds are emerging!

Beth

Job openings for new farmhands. We plan to hire several new farmhands this season, as a few of our steady workers have moved on. We are looking for rugged, fit individuals to work for us this season. The work is 40 hours per week. Do you know anyone interested in farming this year? If so, have them call us to talk about the job and pay, at 608-882-6196.

Crew gossip. Most of our experienced farmhands are returning to work for us again this year. However, few workers have moved on to new adventures this season, hence the need to hire new workers. Anne Drehfal and Eric Friedericks have started their own farming businesses. Hugo Paiz and his family have moved too far away to commute to our farm. Ken Kelly is spending time in Colorado this year. Maggie Schley will have her second baby any day now. It is bittersweet to lose workers after so many years together. Some plan to return in future seasons. It is exciting to see employees start their own farms. I was floored by the influx of young farmers at the Upper Midwest Organic Farming conference last month. (I gave a talk on CSA management.) Organic farming feels very dynamic right now.