

The Oak Hill Farmer

www.oakhillfarm.net
farming in balance with nature mid-December 2009

Meals on Wheels

The farm's "leftovers" enhance senior's meals throughout the valley

Meals on Wheels of Sonoma has been serving nutritious, hot and tasty meals to Valley residents for over 30 years. We are an all-volunteer organization and receive NO Government funding. We subsist on the \$20 per week we charge clients who can afford to pay. (Currently 40-45% cannot pay; the percentage of nonpaying clients has never been higher. Notwithstanding this fact, we have never turned anyone down for inability to pay.

We are currently serving our maximum number of clients which is 60. (Each client receives two meals per day.) For our entire history we have prepared the meals on the rather small and antiquated commercial kitchen which we rent from Trinity Episcopal Church. It is because of this limited space that we can serve no more than 60 clients.

For over 10 years, our meals have been greatly enhanced by the organic produce provided to us free of charge by Oak Hill Farms. Every Monday morning we pick up tons of seasonal veggies from "The Red Barn". We sort through what we can use for the week and then FISH (Friends in Sonoma Helping) picks up the rest. FISH, in turn, prepares



bags of fresh produce for their food give-away clients. Their number of clients has increased tremendously in the last few years.

The produce is beautiful. Eggplant comes in white, purple, speckled maroon. Carrots are super sweet. Broccoli, dino kale and other greens enable us to serve great food loaded with anti-oxidants. With so many different veggies to choose from, we never get bored with the same old stuff. We can be creative in our menus, and also change them in a moment, depending on what we receive from Oak Hill.

During the summer months we are able to process bushels of tomatoes into fresh tomato sauce for use in the winter. We have a freezer loaded with pesto sauce made with Oak Hill fresh basil. During what we call the "dread zucchini season", we use our over 100 recipes for everything from cake and bread to salads and sandwiches using the various varieties of summer squash Oak Hill provides. 🐦

If anyone wants to contribute????!! As Susan & I always say, we have never turned anyone down! Our address: Meals on Wheels of Sonoma, P.O. Box 622, Sonoma 95476.

It's December. The hives stand straight in front of the backdrop of dripping wet oak trees. No bees are flying on this cold and rainy day. They are all inside, bunched up into tight clusters. This way, they can remain warm while consuming very little honey, their source of energy. By placing the ear against the side of a hive it is possible to hear the very soft and comforting hum the bees produce. You know that the queen is at the heart of the cluster, nicely protected. She is not producing eggs these days. But she'll start laying eggs soon after the winter solstice. At first, she will produce only a few dozen eggs per day, and then gradually more in anticipation of the spring that is still a few months away.

What could be telling the queens that it is time to resume egg-laying? Some say that it is the increasing length of the days. But how can this be, when this is barely measurable, when the weather is gloomy and when the queens spend their life surrounded by thousands of daughters inside dark hives? This is one of the

countless mysteries of the hive that haven't been solved yet.

Tomorrow may be one of those bright and sunny winter days. If the temperature reaches 50°F and if the wind calms down sufficiently, some of the bees will fly out to forage on the eucalyptus tree bloom. Given the chance, they'll perform "cleansing flights". Cleansing flights? Yes indeed, as bees are very clean animals. They normally do not defecate inside the hives. In addition, they remove from their nest any foreign material, any bee that may have died or that may be sick. These potential sources of disease are transported away from the hives as soon as the weather permits. This is one of the defense mechanisms of the colonies against diseases. And, considering that the several thousand individuals that form a colony live in very tight quarters, it is a necessity. Also, as long as they have the strength to crawl, walk or fly, sick bees spontaneously come out of the hives. This prevents the spread of their infection to their sisters. For the bees, the ultimate goal is


always the same: the health and the survival of the colony. Maybe there are some good lessons that we can learn here!

Besides routine visits to the apiary to check on the "bee condos", as Gael humorously calls the hives, the beekeeper needs to prepare for the spring. Some equipment may have to be built or repaired. Nothing complicated, all pleasurable tasks.

Don't forget to enjoy some honey. At this season, you may want to try it in *vin chaud**, of course!

Happy Holidays to all of you from the Labesques!

If you think that keeping a few beehives might be something you'd like to do, now is the best time to learn the basics. You'll be ready to have bees when spring arrives. Maybe I'll see you in class, at Santa Rosa Junior College!

* *Vin chaud*: Heat some good red wine, add a cinnamon stick, lemon or orange zest, spices, and finally a little honey and French accent to your liking. Sip by the wood stove with good company. 

BARN BUZZ

Until Spring

What will we do without you all winter?" Well... you can stock up on winter squash and make great lasagnas and soups and pasta sauces. Butternut, delicata and kabocha all store well for the winter. Or visit the many vendors at the Friday morning Farmers' market in Depot Park, 9-noon. (Oak Hill does take a break in January.) I know, I know. "...but no salad mix!" There's another reason to appreciate that spring will come.

Meanwhile, keep warm and cozy, read good books while the minestrone cooks, watch good movies (Hidalgo will warm you up. It takes place in the Sahara Desert!) And dance in your living room all winter.

The Red Barn staff wishes all of you a new year with enough that is good to carry you through 2010. We will miss you, and as always, want you to know how much we value the support and appreciation you bring to Oak Hill Farm. All the best. See you in April.

Gael and the Red Barn crew

BE ADVISED:

The Oak Hill Farmer is going on vacation. Look for the next issue sometime after January.

Artist of the month series has been well received and will continue.

Before we close December 20th come see the local landscapes of Loretta Loy and Patrick McMurtry for unique gifts to yourself or a friend.

Holiday Vegetables



What is your favorite way to dress up your Oak Hill vegetables for the holidays? Looking in cookbooks and glossy magazines may get you started. Listening to friends that cook may inspire you to try something new. Sometimes family traditions are the deciding factor. Here are some ideas collected from the farm staff and farmers' market customers.

Seth Dolinsky our long time Farmers' Marketeer, is famous for his **Roasted Kabocha Squash** recipe. Preheat oven to 400°. Cut squash into 2 inch pieces and mix with garlic, soy sauce, paprika, salt and pepper, cayenne, diced fresh ginger and sesame oil. Let marinate at least 30 minutes. Roast about 30 minutes, or until just tender but not soft. Stir a couple times to check for doneness and to keep squash from sticking. The excellence of this dish comes from the texture. Do not overcook.

Rebecca Bozzelli, when not managing chickens, the Community Garden Park or selling for Oak Hill on Friday mornings, will **Roast Cauliflower** with a sliced shallot and olive oil plus a squeeze of lemon at 425° for 35-45 minutes. Let it brown slightly and caramelize.

Meals on Wheels suggests: **Delicata Squash with Apples, Onions and Leeks**. Cut squash length wise and seed. Put in a greased roasting pan cut side up. Lightly brush with butter, lemon juice and brown sugar. Pour water into pan 1/10 of an inch high with a couple shots of Calvados (French apple brandy). Roast for 20-30 minutes at 350°. Saute sliced leeks, sliced onions and sliced apples in butter 2-3 minutes. Add 1/2 cup apple cider and Calvados combined, cover and let steep for 10 minutes. Slice roasted squash in half rounds, add to leek apple onion mixture.

David Cooper, the vegan member of the Oak Hill staff, used **Sunshine Squash** instead of pumpkin for a dessert pie on Thanksgiving. His version was naturally, vegan and included an oat crust with maple syrup along with the regular pumpkin pie spices. Excellent.

JJ Crow recommends **Roasted Veggies**. Mix cut up vegetables, mix with olive oil, rosemary and Bragg's amino acids.

Joanne Fillapelo first thought is **Celery Root Remoulade**, the classic French salad, combines raw julienned celery root with mayonnaise, mustard, lemon juice and capers. **Roasted Vegetables**, came up next. Joanne's catering company, Wild Thyme, roasts each veggie separately so they are done properly, then mixes them together with fresh or dried herbs.

Isa Jacoby, creative cook extraordinaire, makes **Collard Roulades**, blanching the collard leaves, wrapping them around a quinoa, sweet potato stuffing. But then again, **Fennel**, Meyer lemon and Asiago cheese with a green salad are nice. Or **Kabocha gnocchi**. And then there are **Delicata maple rings!** (Hollow out delicata and toss with olive oil and maple syrup. Bake in single layer on a parchment covered baking sheet. Yes, you eat the skin too!)



◀ Paul among the greens.

Paul Wirtz

I started working for Oak Hill Farm in 2001. I was hired after running my own business, Paul's Produce, for 13 years in Sonoma. Oak Hill took over my spot at the Sonoma Farmers' Markets and began delivering produce to local restaurants, building on already established relationships.

My responsibilities at the farm...starting from the ground up, even before the seed is planted, I need to assess the conditions of the soil and make appropriate adjustments that will ensure a successful outcome of the planting. Intuiting or calculating with soil tests, helps me determine the proper time and quantities of inputs. Those might be compost, limestone or gypsum, other minerals (there are many), or simply good soil preparation specific


to the intended crop. Compost tea is often used to assure that healthy biology is present to help combat possible pathogens, or to assure that the necessary microorganisms are present that make nutrients available to the plants.

I do most of the seed planting at O.H. but when we do transplant crops, every available hand gets involved. We grow many of our crops from transplants that are started in our greenhouses. Some of those crops include celery, broccoli, cauliflower, herbs, onions, radicchio, peppers, tomatoes, greens and many salad crops.

I do most of the irrigating, with scheduled waterings around the clock in warmer months. Scheduling irrigation around needs for cultivating, weeding and harvest can be tricky. Keeping track of what we have ready to pick, and what is coming is critical for sales. I split my mental capacity between present needs, next weeks', next months' and the next season. Occasionally even the next year or two.

Probably my favorite tasks are the ones that require me to use my creative and practical skills to craft or fabricate new tools that move our efficiency forward. I am most satisfied in my work when I see the process evolving and becoming better for my crew and myself.

I grew up in Wisconsin on my family's large cranberry farm. On a tractor at age 10, mowing the dikes and learning about mechanics and tools, helped enormously when it came to starting a farm.

I have a Bachelor of Fine Arts in painting from the University of Wisconsin, Madison '81. Although I rarely paint, I believe the exposure to art has given me an open minded approach and a profound appreciation of the beauty of farming. 

www.oakhillfarmwreaths.com



Finally! Oak Hill Farm wreaths are now available on-line at <http://www.oakhillfarmwreaths.com/> Perfect for family and friends not lucky enough to live and shop, right at the farm.

The Oak Hill Farmer

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You can find Oak Hill Farm produce on the menu at the following local restaurants: Artisan Bakery ♦ Cafe LaHaye ♦ Depot Hotel ♦ El Dorado Kitchen ♦ Epicurean Connection ♦ Estate in Sonoma ♦ fig cafe ♦ girl and the fig ♦ Grindstone Bakery ♦ Harvest Moon Cafe ♦ Kenwood Restaurant ♦ La Salette ♦ The Lodge at Sonoma ♦ Olive and Vine ♦ Ramekins ♦ Saffron ♦ Westerbeke Ranch ♦ Wild Thyme Catering And in San Francisco: Blue Barn Gourmet ♦ Mamacita ♦ The Tippy Pig ♦ Umami