

# The Oak Hill Farmer

MARCH 2009



Welcome to the first edition of the *Oak Hill Farmer* in many years. We hope you find enjoyment and learn something with each issue. Our subject matter will change, from land use issues to the best ways to cook a parsnip. We will introduce our staff and their varying tasks that make this business hum. Each issue will also list what produce and flowers are available and what is happening in the field. We are also interested in what you think and what farm-related subjects interest you. Feel free to contact the newsletter through e-mail at [candied@vom.com](mailto:candied@vom.com)

Farms are a unique part of a community and each farm is unique. Decisions we make affect the larger neighborhood, from diet to watershed. We passionately care about the environment. Much of what we do impacts more land, with a bigger footprint, for a longer period of time, than the average household. Farmers are the stewards of much of the landscape in Sonoma County and a connection to our sustenance. It is a responsibility we take very seriously. This newsletter will give us a chance to discuss some of the issues we face as the season progresses. ✍

◀ This field at the farm shows a typical spring planting of diverse greens. The white fabric is used for warmth, as a frost barrier and insect control.

## Local vs. Organic: Which Do You Choose?

Editor's note: This article is reprinted from MOSES (Mid-western Organic and Sustainable Education Services) and highlights how lucky we are to have Oak Hill Farm. To see the article in its entirety go to: [www.mosesorganic.org/productioninfo.html](http://www.mosesorganic.org/productioninfo.html).

**A**mericans care about their food, how it is farmed and how far it travels from the farm to their plate. This has spurred the growth of organic and local sales in the marketplace. With increased national awareness and popularity comes attention from national and local press, consumer groups, government and nonprofit agencies. There are both voices of skepticism as well as applause for this consumer concern, and many ask the question: Which one is the better? Local or Organic?

The answer with all its variables can't be straightforward. Ideally, buying local, organic food would be a strong first choice. This encourages environmentally beneficial farming practices in your own backyard while supporting your local farming community. But if that's not an option, how do you choose? The answer does not have to be an ei-

ther/or choice, and it will depend on the values and priorities used by you, the consumer, when buying your food.

Consumers who consciously seek out foods produced locally and know the production practices of their farmers have information they need to make the best choices. As consumers you can read food labels, engage in your local community, and know your local farmers. Consumers can encourage farmers to grow organically and encourage supermarkets to buy local organic food. You as the consumer hold all the power. Put your values into the market, speak up, and things will change. You CAN make local, organic food more available. Many will remember that not that long ago neighborhood groceries routinely sold fresh and local sweet corn, tomatoes, melons, eggs and cheeses on their shelves. Purchasing local organic food for resale in the region where it is produced is not that difficult!

Numerous studies show that organically produced food have higher nutritional content than food produced conventionally (visit [www.organiccenter.org](http://www.organiccenter.org) for more information). Organic farmers continually improve the health and vitality of their soils and animals, which ultimately

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

## STAFF PROFILE

# Candi Edmondson

This newsletter is a perfect way to introduce the staff at Oak Hill Farm to you and since this newsletter is my idea and I will be involved with its production month to month, I will be the first to say "hello".

I have worked for Oak Hill Farm since 2000. Currently, I manage our Farmers Market stand in Sonoma, Fridays mornings year-round and Tuesday evenings beginning in April. I call local chefs who use our produce at their restaurants or in their catering businesses, and coordinate their needs with Paul Wirtz, Oak Hill's


produce grower, and his crew.

I love my work with Oak Hill. I can't think of anything more important than staying healthy and providing nutritious food to as many people as possible in our community. It's worth my support in whatever capacity is needed.

I'm also a big believer in the "local/seasonal" movement. (I don't eat tomatoes in the winter, unless I've canned them.) We live in an area with an enviable climate so we can grow an astonishing array of produce. I see no reason to eat things out of season. I do most of the cooking for my household so I'm always curious about new ways to prepare produce.

What else? I am a painter. I have been lucky enough to have a show at



the Red Barn each spring. I paint the beautiful landscapes around me and all of my favorite things. Painting is a real meditation for me, a way to mentally get away. 

---

## CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

yield nutrient dense foods. Since organic farmers avoid the use of problematic synthetic pesticides, fungicides and hormones, the likelihood of synthetic residues either in or on organic foods is much less. Synthetic preservatives, colors, and flavors are specifically prohibited in organic foods, such as nitrates in meat or synthetic waxes on fruit.

Good health for you is one benefit, and good health for farm workers is another. By buying organic, you're ensuring farm workers are not exposed to harmful chemicals. Organic produce also means good environmental health. The chemical fertilizers and pesticides used in conventional farming deplete the biological life in our soil and can contaminate our water supply. With 97% of rural Americans and one half of all Americans nationwide dependent on groundwater for their drinking water, chemical contamination of the water supply is a real concern, with real consequences. Water contamination is not just a local issue, either. The dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico at the base of the Mississippi River is directly related to Midwestern agricultural chemical runoff, resulting in depleted sea life and highly compromised water quality.

## THE ENERGY ISSUE

Why buy an organic tomato grown cross-country, if you can get a conventional one grown locally? Does the petroleum needed to ship the fruit to the consumer outweigh the benefit of the environmental stewardship of the distant organic grower? Or is there no difference? It is true that trucking food cross-country isn't sustainable, (most of the food we eat travels on average 1,500 miles to reach our plate) but an organic tomato hauled hundreds of miles may still trump a locally grown conventional tomato in overall energy impact.

The majority of energy needed for food production isn't consumed by transportation needs, but by the production of chemicals, synthetic fertilizers and pesticides. Together, the production and use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides consumes 40% of the total energy used in farming, making conventional farming a high cost and less environmentally friendly choice. (More info at [www.sustainabletable.org](http://www.sustainabletable.org)). Overall, organic farms use approximately 30% less energy than conventional farms to grow the same amount of food. (Source: [www.rodaleinstitute.org](http://www.rodaleinstitute.org)).

Although much local produce is sold very close to home, some products carrying a local label have actually put on a lot of miles. Distances can add up as a farmer drives from store to store, farm to warehouse or to regional drop off centers. Those local miles, in the back of a pickup truck or as part of a small load, can build energy costs and environmental impact quickly as the transportation methods are not designed to be efficient or economical like long-distance transport is. We like the image of the local farm truck delivery, or even of customers coming out to the farm, but we need to look at actual figures closely before we make assumptions about various local and long distance transportation costs and impacts. (For more on this issue, see [http://www.salon.com/mwt/food/eat\\_drink/2008/06/24/food\\_miles/](http://www.salon.com/mwt/food/eat_drink/2008/06/24/food_miles/))

## SMALL FARMERS/LOCAL ECONOMIES

The popular phrase "buy local" brings to mind increased diversity and the strengthening of small businesses and local economies. Supporting local farmers, rather than distant organic farms, may appear to be the better choice toward strengthening community and

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4



## Celery Root Fritters

2 eggs  
3 Tablespoons flour  
½ teaspoon baking powder

½ teaspoon salt  
1 Tablespoon lemon juice  
1 medium celery root (1-1½ pounds)

Beat eggs and add flour, baking powder, salt and lemon juice to make a thick batter. Trim and grate the celery root into a medium shred. Add to batter and mix it thoroughly. Fry in hot oil, turning every minute or so, until batter is cooked.

*Note: You can add any vegetable to the batter. One customer at the farmers' market suggests burdock, which certainly adds a nutty quality to the fritter, not to mention the added nutritional benefits.*

## VEGETABLE OF THE MONTH: Celery Root or Celeriac

*Apium graveolens*

**C**elery root is not simply the root of a celery plant but a variety which grows a large root with stubby leaves. The variety we grow at Oak Hill is called Diamont. It is planted in the greenhouse May-July, then transplanted into the field in July, August and September. It is not harvested until late fall, from October right into the following spring. Imagine keeping the weeds away for that long!

Anne enjoys the celery root cooked and served with a remoulade sauce; mayonnaise to which is added pickles and capers, and a Tablespoon each of mustard and chopped parsley, tarragon and chervil. Or, try it served

mashed and mixed with potatoes.

Incidentally, Oak Hill Farm celery root may not look like that sold in the local grocery store. Why is that? Oak Hill takes the time to spray off the knarly root structure rather than simply cut it off. Cutting off the roots exposes the edible portion of the root and dries it out. This celery root should last in the refrigerator for weeks.

### NUTRITION SCIENCE CORNER

Celery root, as it's name implies, is classed as a root or tuber. It is high in manganese, magnesium, potassium, B1 and 6 and vitamin C. Common to all root vegetables, celery root, is mostly carbohydrate (73%), but it also has some protein (20%) and fat (7%). It can be thought of as a

complex carbohydrate. Complex carbohydrates digest slower than refined carbohydrates (white flour) and simple sugars (sucrose, fructose) and, as in the case of celery root, contain dietary fiber which also slows down digestion. Since carbohydrates are the main energy source of the body, the slower they are digested, the more sustained the energy, and less unhealthy blood sugar spikes. This all adds up to a healthy carbohydrate source deserving a place in a balanced diet. The USDA food guide recommends 18% protein, 29% fat, 53% carbohydrates for a healthy ratio of macronutrients. This is a general recommendation that can be modified to fit your unique biochemistry.

--- Ken Niehoff

## FROM THE FIELDS

**T**he greenhouses are filling up. Onions, leeks, radicchio, broccoli and cauliflower transplants are ready to go out into the field at the first opportunity. The first planting of tomatoes have already been divided for a target field planting date of April 1st. Heirloom tomatoes, peppers and eggplant are germinating with a target planting dates of April 15 through May 15th.

In the dry January, we were able to plant many crops including carrots, beets, salad, greens, fennel and broccoli. There are three plantings of peas in the field so far. The most mature is now flowering. Fava beans are about waist high. Harvest begins mid-April. Green garlic is a few weeks away from picking.

The organic soil builder cover crops (legumes and grains) are exploding! It's as though the plants have been waiting all winter for the longer, warmer days and the plants respond with growth above and below the soil. These plants do a tremendous service of mining minerals

and aerating the soil while gathering nitrogen and carbon.

This is the time of year when we take stock of equipment. We've changed oil and done other maintenance for the tractors and trucks. Trucks are getting new tires. Planting and cultivating equipment is next in line.

This season, Oak Hill will be part of an experiment concerning various flowering crops and insectary plantings and their effects on produce crops. The study is being conducted by Monica Cooper, an entomologist with the Department of Agriculture. It should be interesting to observe this study.



## MARCH CROPS

### SALAD GREENS

SALAD MIX, ARUGULA,  
DANDELION, SPINACH, STIRFRY  
MIX, RADICCHIO and TREVIO

### HERBS

ROSEMARY and SORREL

### VEGETABLES

RED BEETS, CARROTS, BROCCOLI  
(decicco), BRUSSEL SPROUTS,  
BURDOCK, CELERY ROOT,  
COLLARD, KALE (lacinato and  
red Russian), KOHLRABI, LEEKS,  
ONION, PARSNIP, RADISH,  
RUTABAGA, SHALLOTS,  
WINTER SQUASH (delicata, sun-  
shine, butternut, spaghetti)

### FRUIT

LEMONS and ORANGES



▲ The Red Barn Store opens Wednesday April 15th at 11 am. Until then, you can find our produce and flowers at the Sonoma Valley Farmers' Market every Friday in Depot Park on First Street West from 9-noon. Sonoma Market also sells our flowers and produce.

#### CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

sustainability. But what is the definition of "local?" Every store or farmers market may have their own definition of local, which may include production within 50 miles, or within the state or region, or even just grown in the USA. Is your supermarket locally owned? Is your favorite farmers market vendor local? Is your community supported agriculture farm (CSA) local? All of these local markets keep food dollars in the local economy to some degree.

Buying organic produce from a distant farm doesn't necessarily mean it comes from a mega-farm. Many small independent farmers ship their products cross-country because they have more product than they can sell locally or they have a product that is not available outside their region. Buying organic from a distant small farm or cooperative may not keep food dollars in your community, but it can help support the health and diversity of small family farms nationwide.


Widespread distribution of organic foods, now even into mainstream supermarkets, expands the exposure, accessibility, and affordability of organic food to more consumers. As conventional farmers and food companies see the success of organics, they are converting their land to organic as well, lessening the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides while improving biodiversity and the overall ecosystem for us all.

There is more to organic than just the avoidance of syn-

thetic chemicals. It is a system that mimics nature and seeks to boost the health of both plants and animals through natural fertilizers and healthy living conditions. Organic certification verifies the land is being treated in a way that continually improves its fertility and the overall environment. Independent third-party certifying agencies verify USDA national standards, ensuring farms follow specific production practices.

Many smaller farmers avoid the tools of industrialized conventional agriculture and may be producing food that meets many of the organic requirements, but these farmers often chose not to become certified. When you know your farmer and what questions to ask, you can be an informed consumer and encourage the type of food production you want to see in your local environment. [Oak Hill Farm has chosen not to become a certified organic farm. Look to another issue of this newsletter for an article concerning the pros and cons of organic certification.]

#### LOCAL OR ORGANIC?

If you don't know your farmer and his growing methods personally, a certified organic label is the next best thing. It is your guarantee that sustainable and environmentally responsible methods were used to grow that food, providing for healthy and vibrant lands, foods and ecosystem, both now and into the future. 

*You can find Oak Hill Farm produce on the menu at the following local restaurants: Cafe LaHaye ♦ Depot Hotel ♦ El Dorado Kitchen ♦ Estate in Sonoma ♦ fig cafe ♦ girl and the fig ♦ Kenwood ♦ La Salette ♦ The Lodge at Sonoma ♦ Murphy's Irish Pub ♦ Saffron ♦ Westerbeke Ranch ♦ Wild Thyme Catering*