

## Growing Up Together: Oak Hill Farm and the Sonoma Land Trust

by Reta Lockert

In the mid-1970s I managed a bookstore in San Francisco when one of our customers was a student at Antioch West interning with the Trust for Public Land. She announced excitedly that she was meeting with people at a farm in Glen Ellen to start a new land trust. "It's beautiful, and they have horses," she exclaimed.

By 1983, when I started working part-time as the first staffer of the Sonoma Land Trust, I realized the connection. Founder Otto Teller was on the SLT board of directors at the time, and he provided us field office space on the Old Hill Ranch across Highway 12 from Oak Hill. He didn't set too much store by details like monthly financial reports. "Gilding the lily," he averred.

Otto was more interested in the big conservation picture, and had already donated the first property owned outright by the Land Trust—Secret Pasture was 300 acres off Cavedale Road above Oak Hill Farm. In 1985 he and Anne Teller donated a conservation easement to the Land Trust over Oak Hill Farm itself, restricting the use of the ~700 acres in perpetuity, no matter who owns it in the future. The conservation easement, a recorded document that runs with the deed to the property, means the land can be bequeathed, sold or leased to others, but it can never be stripped, filled, logged or subdivided.

In the '80s with part-time staff, the Land Trust owned or held conservation easements over a handful of properties throughout Sonoma County: Little Black Mountain Preserve outside Cazadero, Secret Pasture, Morgan's Hill on Sonoma Creek in Kenwood, Enchanted Wood west of Occidental. And at Oak Hill Farm the Red Barn was on the ramshackle side, and the White Barn was only a place to get out of the rain. The word locavore—no such!



**The Red Barn still standing strong.**

Since that time both Oak Hill Farm and the Land Trust have increased operations exponentially. The farm has a thriving produce and ornamentals business at both the Red Barn and farmers market, the White Barn has had a complete face lift and is a wonderfully functional site for the occasional event (the Sonoma Land Trust holiday party welcomes members each December to the birthplace of the Trust), and owner Anne Teller is among prominent local spokespersons for sustainable agriculture. The Land Trust has 16 staff members, including the Stewardship team, which works with volunteers who visit the farm—and other conservation properties—to assure compliance with conservation easement restrictions. With other public and private partners, we work on saving and restoring landscapes now, not just scattered properties here and there.

The increasing capacities of Oak Hill Farm and the Sonoma Land Trust are interwoven with the growing understanding of people who love Sonoma County about the importance of preserving the beautiful places that so increase our own quality of life.



**A**s I write this, the sun is disappearing behind the oaks that cover the westernmost hill of Oak Hill Farm. Around me the forager bees are quietly returning to spend the night in their hives. I can see Paul beyond the ponds. He is walking through one of the fields. In spite of the distance, you can tell that he loves what he does, that he loves being here. He seems to be examining every seedling individually. We are two hundred yards away from each other and yet we are sharing the moment, savoring a beautiful end to a glorious fall day in a perfect place.

At this point I think that the hives are ready for the cold season, but until spring I will worry about the bees and I will keep wondering how they'll come out of winter.


Honey bees do not hibernate. Unlike most insects, they remain active year-round. Nonetheless, in November they enter a period of relative rest, as most of nature does under a temperate climate. The queens reduce or even stop laying eggs at this

time of year. And so, with few or no young to feed and take care of, the nurse bees are under less pressure. This is one of the reasons for their increased longevity of several months. By comparison, their summer-born sisters only live for a few weeks.

As long as there is no brood in the hive, the bees do not have to maintain the precise 93-94°F temperature that is necessary to incubate the developing young. But they do not let the temperature drop below 50°F anyway. This is to prevent their queen from being chilled. Even though bees are cold-blooded animals, they can generate heat by moving their wing muscles very quickly, by shivering. They find the energy to do this in the honey that they stored in the comb of their hive during the previous months.

One of the most remarkable behaviors of the honey bees is the mechanism they have developed to survive periods of cold weather: Inside a hive, the bees of the colony assemble into a compact oblong mass that we

call a "cluster". The queen is usually near the center of the cluster, with the bees that produce heat. The other bees of the colony form an insulating blanket around them to reduce heat loss. As the bees that are on the outside of the cluster become cold and lethargic, the bees that are warmer drag them inside the cluster, where the cold bees can warm up, and they take their place. This beautiful and considerate conduct ensures the survival of the colony during the cold season.

Since the bees can fare so well in spite of the cold, what is left for the beekeeper to do? It is necessary to perform regular rounds of the apiaries to make sure that the hives protect the bees from the rain. The tools and equipment also need to be taken care of. Besides these routine tasks, it is important to draw lessons from the past year in order to prepare for the next season. But the most difficult of all the tasks are to be patient and to respect the well-deserved period of rest that the bees need. 

## Farmers' Market Faces Change

**W**ednesday, October 21 the Sonoma City Council decided to solicit proposals for new management of the two valley Farmers' Markets for 2010. The decision was made because of complaints about how the market is run.

Sonoma's first Farmers' Market started in the early 80s. Hilda Swartz was hired to manage the market early on. She has managed it ever since. The early years had trouble gathering enough vendors to attract customers. The situation has changed dramatically. Now, more vendors want to sell their wares than space is available, especially on Tuesday nights. Clarification of criteria for who gets a spot at the market and who doesn't is part of the challenge facing Hilda and her board of directors.

To continue as a Certified Farmers Market there are standards that must be met. Sometimes those standards are at odds with what customers, vendors, and City councils want. But that didn't stop the City Council from making many suggestions including these; more local vendors, a board of directors consisting of no vendors, less junk food, eliminate the city's financial subsidy, encourage more competition

among vendors, use the Plaza's back parking lot, transparency, accountability and fairness from the board of directors, eliminate power generators, open up the application process, dismiss vendors that don't show up, and display work of local artists as part of the market.

Ultimately, who runs the market and what the rules will be, are yet to be decided. The council directed staff to begin preparation of a Request for Proposals, hopefully to be circulated in time to make a thoughtful decision about who should manage the next year's farmers' market. This could be Hilda Swartz and the current board, or it could be an entirely new management team. The City Council and the Index Tribune are interested in comments from the community, especially the farmers' market regulars.



## VEGETABLE OF THE MONTH

# Winter Squash

by Paul Wirtz and Candi Edmondson

**H**ere at Oak Hill Farm, we plant 8 varieties of Winter Squash in June, including Acorn, Butternut, Delicata, Pie Pumpkins, Spaghetti, Blue Hubbard and two types of “Kabocha” squash: Black Forest and Sunshine. The seeds are placed directly into the prepared field, not transplanted from the greenhouse. The fruits mature in 85 to 100 days. Once mature, the stems are cut and the fruit cures in the field for at least a week to toughen the stems and skins, increasing its keeping qualities. The fruits are then collected and as they sit, their sugars increase improving their flavor.

Winter squash keeps for months making it a most practical food. Quality is severely damaged below 50 degrees so it must never be refrigerated. They differ in size, color and shape but all have sweet yellow or orange flesh. It's easy to cook. Cut it and take out the seeds before cooking for a dryer finished texture. If the squash is too hard to cut, poke it with a knife to create steam holes then bake it whole. If cut, simply pop it, face down into a 375° oven until the flesh is soft. Small squash, like delicata are done in about 30 minutes. A blue hubbard, on the other hand, may take more than an hour to finish. Squash partners well with olive oil and butter, many cheeses, sage, rosemary, garlic, chili, cumin, coriander, coconut milk, ginger, lime, lemongras, curry, onions, radicchio, apple and quince! Yum!

Once the squash is cooked, it can be served by itself or as part of a more elaborate dish. A curry squash soup is hard to beat on a cold winter night.

Summer and winter squash can definitely be considered healthy foods. They have small amounts of most vitamins and minerals and fairly large amounts of carotenoids. They are a carbohydrate food with a low glycemic load (a rating of how a portion of food affects your blood sugar level). They are high in fiber and water content which makes them a good carbohydrate source for those on a weight reduction diet (filling but not fattening, in moderation of course). Since all squash, but especially winter squash, are carotenoid powerhouses, let's talk carotenoids.

**NUTRITION  
SCIENCE  
CORNER**  
BY KEN NEIHOFF



There are more than 600 types of carotenoids. Some are considered provitamin A which means the body can turn them into vitamin A. All are physiologically important for many reasons. We are talking phytonutrient-antioxidants again; a major reason to include raw and cooked plant foods in a balanced diet.

The carotenoids lutein and zeaxanthin, which are found in the macula of the eye, can inhibit oxidation of cell membranes and protect the eye against UV damage. Beta carotene plays a role in preventing heart disease. Cholesterol cannot clog arteries until it oxidizes, and many studies show that beta carotene can prevent this harmful oxidation. Carotenoids may help protect against cancer because they inhibit cell proliferation and stimulate cell differentiation. Juice from winter squash has been shown to help reduce symptoms of the enlarged prostate condition known as benign prostatic hyperplasia.

Different types and amounts of carotenoids are found in different plants. Try a medley of kale, squash, broccoli, tomatoes and spinach for a working disease prevention team. I counted 10 different types of carotenoids in butternut squash. You'll never get that mix and synergy in a vitamin pill.

Storing winter squash 30 to 60 days shows increased carotene content and higher sweetness. Enjoy your beautiful squash then, choose to eat it when it fits into your menu. Since carotenoids are fat soluble they must be consumed with some fat-containing food for optimal absorption. Also, when you cook squash, you increase the carotene content considerably but lose a little vitamin C.

## STAFF PROFILES




### Rebecca Bozzelli

**F**ood is the main ingredient in my life. Eating it, growing it, preserving it, and selling it. So when I moved to Sonoma over a year ago, I started working the Oak Hill Farmers' Market booth on Fridays.

The farmers' market is a nice way to connect farmers directly with the customer and I take pleasure in seeing what new crops are coming out of the ground and talking with folks about the latest recipes. I would have never discovered parsnip chips if it wasn't for a customer.

### ◀ Rebecca and her chickens at the Sonoma Garden Park

The artichoke is one of my favorite vegetables (beaten only by bacon) and hands down, my favorite flower. Okay, so I know that bacon is not really a vegetable but it goes great with all my favorites, which change according to the season: parsnips, tomatoes, spinach, asparagus. I enjoy eating with the seasons and truly believe food tastes better after looking forward to it for so long.

When I am not at the Friday morning market, I manage Sonoma Garden Park, the Sonoma Ecology Center's educational community farm and garden located on the outskirts of town. I run a very small CSA, Community Supported Agriculture, and grow for a Saturday Harvest market. Those six acres keeps me busy into the wee hours of the day and when I am not hanging out with the chickens or preserving the summer harvest, I love to cook, eat, and veg out with good friends. 

## AVAILABLE IN NOVEMBER

**SALAD GREENS** Arugula, Frisse, Lettuces, Radicchio and Salad Mix

**HERBS** Rosemary, Sage and Thyme

**VEGETABLES** Chioggia, red and gold Beets, Broccoli, Burdock, Cabbages, Carrots, Cauliflower, Celery, Chard, Collard, Garlic, Kale, Kohlrabi, Leeks, Onions, Parsnips, Radishes, Shallots, Turnips and Winter Squash

**FRUIT** Apples, pears and quince

**FLOWERS** Calliopsis, Cosmos, Dahlias, Gomphrena, Marigolds, Millets, Safflower, Sunflowers, Zinnias

### The Oak Hill Farmer

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Look for the 2010  
**Oak Hill Farm Calendar,**  
available in the Red Barn soon!

## BARN BUZZ

### You tell me...

**T**he Spaniards must know what they're doing when it comes to "tapas". And I'm being told there is more to padron peppers than their delicious flavor and ease of preparation. Specifically, pleasure to the point of aphrodisiac. Good food can have that quality.

The Red Barn belly-laugh of the year, ties in with the famous padrons. A local cooking class came to Oak Hill Farm for a field trip. While selecting produce in the Red Barn, one of our frequent customers was at the head of the line, buying a huge melon. The customer behind her asked what it was. "A Moon and Stars Watermelon," she replied, in her very innocent-sounding voice. Then, as she left, she stopped and announced to the crowd, "It's better than Viagra!" Everyone cracked up. (You know who you are Linda.)

So, back to the padrons, once someone tries the first basket, they come back the next day for 3 or 4 more, eyes twinkling. You tell me. Is there more to good food than nutrition and flavor, or what?

See you through December 20 in the Red Barn.

*Gael and the crew*

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 Tipsy Pig ♦ Umami