

Fernbrook Farm CSA

Volume 9 Issue 1

Winter 2016

2015: Farm Wars: The Spuds Awaken



Fernbrook
FARM

Ah—another winter on the farm. And holy cow it is our 10th at Fernbrook! WELCOME to all of our new members and welcome back to all of our returning families. I recall our first winter down here in 2007. My wife Becky (newly pregnant at the time) and I were living in an apartment in a barn in Juliustown. We had just rescued a kitten trapped inside the wall of the barn and he (aptly named “Wall-ter”) was playing around on the living room floor with all the seed packets and crop plans for what would be our first year having a CSA at Fernbrook Farm. I

recall walking the frozen farm fields envisioning actual crops growing...or hoping that maybe they would. Fixing up the greenhouse, selling shares and waking up in the middle of the night stressing about onions. (That for some reason is my usual go-to stress dream...onions rotting in the fields or being over-run by weeds...and disappointing shareholders. I don't really know why.) Winter is great in many ways. Certainly a time to rest and recoup and see the family a bit more! But it is challenging because if you do get stressed or have “onion dreams” there isn't a lot you can do about it besides more planning and waiting. Fast forward to winter 2016. We now live in beautiful Bordentown City. Walter is still with us and still very cute and I still get “onion stress”. True, we have 9 pretty good growing seasons under our belts now but I believe the minute you think you have it figured out you are setting yourself up for bad things to happen! I also finally went ahead and had some long delayed ankle

and knee surgery done. So for a few weeks I am ultra-focused on doing things like writing this newsletter and driving my family crazy. Ok—and some bad TV but not too much. Look I could write all day about middle-aged health ailments and bad TV BUT we just had a pretty successful and pretty colorful year on the farm and this is the time we get to sit back, relax and gaze back upon what was (and what shall always be) the 2015 CSA Farm Season:



Your 2015 Farm Crew Fiona, Sam, Taylor, Jess and Nick.

We had a few firsts in 2015. One was our first winter share! We sold about 90 winter shares and did a monthly distri-

bution from December—March. Some COLD box packing days but Taylor, Kristin, Julie, Tori and others helped us complete what I think was a very successful first winter share (We have just over 100 winter shares this season and hope to expand it a bit more next winter). If we can grow more Jersey Fresh produce for families and slowly move that needle from the supermarket to the farm well that's part of our mission. Most of the foods are traditional storage crops - many of the same ones that kept our ancestors alive through the winter—potatoes, carrots, turnips, beets, cabbage, squash, and greens. The winter share also helps address one of our goals in keeping more farmers employed year-round. In 2015 we hired 2-year Apprentice Taylor James as our first ever Assistant Manager (or Assistant to the Manager...) He took on a lot of extra work in 2015 including Harvest Manager, Keeper of Farm Records, Secretary of Tractor Work and General Lackey. He also coordinated the regional NJ CRAFT program

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which stands for (Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training). This is a network of about 2 dozen mostly organic farms who are committed to training young farmers as a part of their mission. Taylor coordinated the farm visit schedule for the 2015 CRAFT program which isn't easy considering it involves working with 2 dozen overly busy farmers...But, Jeff and Taylor do not a complete farm crew make. We brought Fiona Muligan back to Fernbrook. Fiona worked some at the CSA and even more at the Fernbrook Education Center over the years so we were really happy to get her back after some farming up in New England. We also were lucky to have one of our workshares Jess Brandeisky sign on for a full-time Apprenticeship. She left her indoor job for the green fields of the farm. She brought with her a proven work ethic and knowledge of the CSA operations. Plus like Fiona she is another Jersey Girl and you can never have too many of them on your crew. But how about a couple of Jersey guys? We hired 2 of them. Sam Bryant hails from the great village of Burlington, New Jersey. He played soccer and got a degree from Rider College and went on to work as a police officer. But his work in a community garden spoke to him and he really wanted to make the leap to full-time farming. In fact (hope this doesn't embarrass you Sammy), but when he was trained on a tractor and was at the field edge about to use the tractor for the first time he said something to the effect of "I have been dreaming about this moment"...And to

round out the crew was Mr. Nick Delmar. A Moorestown, NJ and Rutgers product,



Ahhh—Onions

Nick had been working with the Lakewood Blueclaws grounds crew and at a farm near his hometown. Nick liked the outdoor work but felt called to grow more than turf. So he came down to Fernbrook last winter, helped us plant garlic in chilly soil and decided to sign on.

This was the largest full-time crew we have had and we needed it! 2015 was an ambitious year for us. We added an acre plus to our production and we added a delivered box share program to customers in Hoboken. We also made small to moderate expansions for our on-farm CSA, winter share and wholesale accounts. So we needed the extra hands. Nick started at the beginning of March to help get the onions growing. Remember last winter's cold snap? It's nice to have some work to do in the greenhouse when it is that cold outside. We got it going with onions, cabbage, leeks, parsley and lettuce. This is also the time of year when our 'workshares' start returning. These are folks who trade regular hours at the farm for a share at the farm. Sue McIntyre has been a workshare since 2007 and she is normally there in March to help with the greenhouse clean-up and early seeding. Meanwhile we are receiving pallets of organic fertilizer and amendments, potting soil, seed potatoes and other supplies we'll need for the growing season. By the first of April the whole crew was ready to go and we were in the fields! After tractor maintenance and training, Apprentices hop on tractors and start discing, spading, and transplanting (when the soils are dry enough.) Of course much of the work we do is by hand and we spend many hours planting our early crops and crawling behind the seeder to get

carrots, beets, greens and turnips in the soil. April was a pretty good month as we had rain but not too much and we stayed on our planting schedule.



May Irrigation

Our problems came in May which can be described with one word—DRY. Might be hard to remember back but trust me. Normally reliable for rain, May was painfully dry. It was the most irrigation we ever had to do in May in my 9 years here. Moving pipe, rolling out drip tape, fixing header lines and running the diesel generator and gas pump.... I can say the crew got quite skilled in the art of throwing water! A few times we had to pre-irrigate fields just to seed or plant. There were days where we wondered if we would have food for opening day! It is only due to the crew's really hard work that we did. Opening Day 2015 was a hit! We had some early 'S-Berries', great greens, radishes, lettuce and green onions. Pretty soon the 'S-berry' crop was in full fruit, the peas were popping with sweet pods, and the mountains of cukes and

squash were piling up in the shop. We also had some great events like a lacto-fermentation workshop



June at the farmshop

with Natalie Winch, a medicinal plant walk with Joann McKinley, a Solstice potluck and a grass-fed beef sale with our friends from Meeting Place Pastures in Vermont. And of course Paula and Christine were back in the shop offering many goods made and grown either locally, organically, or at the Inn. And we watched with delight as our 3 potato fields popped with healthy looking foliage. 2014's spud

Fernbrook Farm—Growing Food and Farmers!



Jess, Sam, Nick and Taylor

The Apprentices...”The engine that makes the farm go.” That’s generally how I describe our Apprentice crew. 2015 was our 9th farm season and our 8th with Apprentices. We have now graduated 20 Farm Apprentices (about half have stayed here for multiple years). Our Apprenticeship program is basically a trade - their hard work and effort for a full farm season in exchange for the farm’s knowledge. That is, we do our best to teach the Apprentices how to farm in every aspect. From managing a greenhouse, running a harvest crew, making a crop plan, operating a tractor, procuring equipment—the whole 9 yards. I started my farm career with an Apprenticeship at Brookfield Farm in Amherst, MA and we try to replicate their very good farmer training program. The 2015 crew: Jess, Fiona, Sam, Nick and Taylor (Assistant Manager) was tip top. I require a lot from them and they farmed their tails off this year. Each of them gave extra hours after 5pm and on weekends

to help the farm. They took advantage of tours and workshops off-farm and they were good to each other by having Friday ‘Farm-ily’ Dinners and stepping up when someone was away. As you will read elsewhere in this newsletter, Taylor has moved on after 3 great years at Fernbrook to start his own farm business. Fiona had to leave a bit early at the end of Summer to pursue an opportunity in Massachusetts. She is up there still and doing well. Sam is literally on the road driving with Jess to Colorado where he will join like 8 other Fernbrookers who have moved to the Rocky Mountain State! Sam got hired at Cure Organic Farm in Boulder, CO and he will be enhancing his existing farming skills and living in a yoom! Good luck Sam! Thankfully for us, Jess is flying back to NJ because she has signed on for another season here! Jess spent 2014 as a Workshare and 2015 as an Apprentice. This year she is working through the winter and will be taking on more responsibility this season. Nick is also returning to Fernbrook. Like Jess he has caught a case of the farming bug and he is looking to become a more skilled and experienced grower of food. They are both working now getting the farm ready for Spring. Joining them will be newcomers Rachel Leone, Sindhu Siva and Daniel Reyes. ***Thanks again 2015 crew!*** *(These eyes have seen a lot of love but they’ll never see another one like they had with YOU...Meanwhile, back at the ranch...Bing Bang Bong)*

Fernbrook Farm Apprentice Alum (Our ‘FARMY’) are all over the map doing some amazing things!



(Fernbrook is taking over the world!!) Here is an update on some of their whereabouts and whatabouts: **Kristin Hock (Ward) (‘14)** worked part-time at Fernbrook in 2015 and just got hired to start a farm at the Collier School in Marlboro, NJ! **Julie Pierre (‘14)** just completed her first year running her start-up “Our Yards Farm” in Audubon, NJ. It is a very innovative farm business making use of yard space to grow organic produce. She is primed for a great 2nd season in 2016. **Nicole Didero (‘14)** had a great year working at Native Hill Farm in Fort Collins, CO and keeps bees with former Fernbrooker **Lo Pagan (‘11)**. Lo

and her husband Kevin recently had their first child Elian. Congrats and welcome future farmer!! **Mark Tebben (‘12, ‘13)** is part of Fernbrook West and studying permaculture in Colorado. **Noah Zinter (‘13)** is spending time farming in Puerto Rico and playing music in Denver. He also worked a bunch here at the farm this fall which was great! **Victoria Wicker (Francis) (‘11-‘13)** and husband Joey and daughter Zoey are doing great and are active at Fernbrook. Tori will be in the fields with us part-time in 2016. **Lauren Hill (‘08)** is finishing her degree in Sustainable Ag at Cornell University in Ithaca. That is also the home of **Alice Sturm (‘12)** who is getting a Masters in Landscape Architecture at Cornell and just got hitched to her fiancé Ahmed! **Liz “Lemon” Keefe (‘12)** set up a gardening program at a school in CT and was hired to teach Spanish full-time. **Jen LaMonaca (‘08, ‘09)** and husband Ryan continue to grow B & B CSA in Galloway Township and Jen was accepted to participate in the NJ Agricultural Leadership Development Program.



They have been expanding every year and run a great CSA! **Caroline DiGiovanni (‘11)** is moving to Southern Virginia to be the Field Manager for Riverstone Farm after 3 years farming in PA. **Brooke McMinn (‘09)** continues her work as the ‘Plant Adventure Program Specialist’ with the Birmingham Botanical Gardens. **Rob Eckman (‘09, ‘10)** and his fiancée Farmer Maggie Tounds, have moved to South Berwick, Maine to farm at ‘Baers Best Beans’ an organic dry bean business. They’ll be helping to manage the bean operation and growing veggies as well. **Duncan Simonson (‘10, ‘11)** had a great 3rd year as the Farm Manager at the Green Earth Institute in Naperville, Illinois and he and wife Anna are expecting their first in March! **Danielle Szepi (‘11)** and her partner Dave Zelov completed their fifth season at Kittatiny Mountain Farm in Wantage, NJ. They recently came back to visit Fernbrook and they are having a lot of success in North Jersey. ***Way to go Farmers!***



FarmOn!!

Programs at Fernbrook Farm!!

While you're at the farm check out the Environmental Education Center, a nonprofit created to provide hands-on educational experiences for all young people by exploring the complex inter-connectedness of our natural world in order to learn about food, agriculture and the environment. The Environmental Education Center provides year-round programs through summer camp, home-school classes, school field trips and much more. Please visit www.FernbrookEducation.org or call 609-298-4028 to learn more about all their terrific programs.



I am happy to say that 2015 was a great year at the environmental education center as we had a record number of kids engage with nature through our camps (summer & vacation), field trips, and homeschool classes! As Richard Louv says in *Last Child in the Woods*: "Unlike television, nature does not steal time; it amplifies it. Nature inspires creativity in a child by demanding visualization and the full use of the senses." I love seeing all the creativity and inspiration happening around Fernbrook Farms and I love the enjoyment the kids genuinely express as they are able to explore their own natural curiosities! During this winter, we have been busy with our homeschool classes, vacation camp days, and our new after school clubs. I know the cold days often mean going inside but around here, it gives us excitement for new places to explore outside on the farm. In particular, Kuser 'Pond' along White Pine Road (since the dam has broken, it's not really a pond anymore) has been frozen over enough where we can explore all around it without getting stuck in the mud. We found amazing tracks, including a fox clearly hunting for mice. We are working on adding another classroom for indoor space use when the weather is particularly uncooperative which will allow more kids to engage with nature and remain safe when needed. Also, we are discussing ways to make our fundraising events bigger and better than ever this year! Please save the dates: Plant Sale (4/30-5/8), Mother's Day Brunch (5/8), Farm Run (9/25), Not-So-Scary Halloween (10/28-10/30), and Wreath Making (12/3-12/4). We hope you can join us in 2016!

Brian Kuser

Education & Summer Camp Director / Fernbrook Farms Environmental Education Center (609) 298-4028

Remembering Eve

2015 started on a rough note for me and my family as we lost my Mother Eve K. Tober on March 1st. My Mom had battled a number of health issues for a long time. She was stubborn enough that they took her OFF of hospice care in the fall of 2014 because she just kept going. But in the end it was too much for her and she passed peacefully at home on a snowy Sunday morning. Among many other things, my Mom was a gardener and a composter. My introduction to food growing was finding new potatoes growing in our compost pile. "Hmm - now how did this happen?" That was the seed that eventually brought me here. Eve was a throwback in many ways. She valued simplicity, thrift, privacy, listening, rainy days... She was a master quilter and did every stitch by hand on a small circular loom. As was her way quilts were usually constructed with scrap material, or a piece of denim from old jeans or even my Dad's old ties! She made many foods from scratch including her amazing raisin bread. And her meatloaf might contain the last bit of oatmeal or some leftovers...but it was always good and she would just smile when you asked her what was in it. And she NEVER wasted food. If a dish didn't get finished one night it would be back the next to be sure. In a time where we seem to always be buying new things and trashing used things, my Mom was more interested in reusing what we had and seeing the value and potential therein. She was an amazing wordsmith. Eve co-founded and was a tutor for the Willow Grove Literacy Council which offers free English language instruction to adults, many of whom are immigrants. She was very bright and graduated with a degree in Chemistry from Ursinus College in 1965 and a Masters in Radiological Health from Temple University. I have talked with many shareholders this past year who have recently lost loved ones. Inevitable but never easy. The farm is a place that somehow helps me make some sense of the non-stop cycle of life and death. Strange ideas to try to grasp but every one of us has to do just that at various points in our lives. Eve's lessons of thrift, doing more with less, valuing and preserving nature, and embracing diversity help to guide me and I am very thankful for her and those teachings. I also want to thank Larry and Fernbrook Nursery for donating a red oak tree which we planted at preserve for Eve in Pennsylvania. We enjoy visiting it and remembering Mom every chance we get!



Eve's Tree

How Much Does The Food Cost?

We frequently get the question—"How much does the CSA food cost" and "How much



food do I get from my CSA share?" Good questions! Obviously, the better the growing season the more food you get for your dollar. As you will see below, I think shareholders got a very good value for their food dollars in 2015. It breaks down like this (and I should say we try to keep very good records of what we harvest and distribute so we know how we did in a given year):

In the farm shop we gave out 352.4 pounds of food per share over a 26 week period for an average of 13.6 pounds a week. In the U-Pick fields, we distributed 125.1 pounds over that period for an average of 4.8 pounds per week. In 2015 a share was \$630. So if you got your food from the shop every week and did all the U-Pick, ***you paid \$1.32 per pound. If you only got food from the shop and didn't do any U-Pick, you paid \$1.79 per pound. And if you did half the U-Pick a share cost \$1.52 per pound.***

Our 6 year average is 12.7 pounds per week from the shop and 4.8 pounds per week from the u-pick fields. Our six year average cost per pound is \$1.23 per pound with full U-Pick. And I should add ***that these prices DO NOT include U-Pick herbs and flowers*** (which were available for about 19 weeks in the fields) so if you added the cost of those you'd be doing even better dollar-wise! (Cut flowers let alone ORGANIC flowers at the store are pricey!!)

That's a lot of numbers. But like with any statistics, the numbers only tell part of the story. For instance, measuring in pounds makes the analysis skewed toward the heavier crops – tomatoes, potatoes, winter squashes, etc. You could have an amazing year in high value crops like lettuce, spinach, garlic and arugula but that won't change your pounds per dollar as much as a bumper crop of eggplant or pumpkins. And raw numbers don't rate the variety and quality of the food. But the figures do help us evaluate our success. The total pounds and dollars per pound were not as good as 2014 but better than 2013. We're trying to demonstrate that in fact organic (we are not USDA certified) ***is not prohibitively expensive.*** We don't get crop subsidies, we don't use any synthetic fertilizers, insecticides or herbicides, and we don't use any GMOs (Genetically Modified Organisms). I promise we'll do our best to beat the 2015 totals this year! And of course, we always value your feedback. How can we do better going forward? Please send any ideas to info@fernbrookfarmcsa.com. Thanks!



\$\$ - Reminder that a share for the 2016 season is \$640. \$100 was due with your registration, \$270 was due Feb. 15th and the remaining \$270 is due by May 1st. If you have questions about your balance or want to talk about a payment plan, contact Jeff at info@fernbrookfarmcsa.com

*****And as of this printing we still have some CSA shares available so if you know of any families interested, they should contact us ASAP!!*****

**"They Will Take Nothing From The Ground They Will Not Return" -
Wendell Berry**





Book Written by our own
Natalie Winch!!

crop was 75% damaged due to heavy April and May rains and we never got much of a harvest which was very disappointing. So that strong germination in 2015 was a joy to see. We worked diligently throughout the year on weed management, control of the Colorado Potato Beetle, Leafhopper and other pests, and fertility and water needs for the crop and it paid off! We harvested almost 10 tons of potatoes including varieties like "Purple Viking", "Blue Gold" and "Strawberry Paw". In June we made our first delivery of our boxed CSA share. Taylor had a connection with a gym in Hoboken whose members were very interested in getting



Good Bug Doing
Good Work!

fresh, chemical-free produce. So we arranged a 20 week program and sold 30 shares. We did some extra harvest on Wednesdays, packed the boxes first thing Thursday mornings and got the truck on the road shortly thereafter. All-in-all, it was a nice addition for our farm and for the recipients of the produce. We are doing a similar program to Belford, NJ this year. Taylor will continue to supply the Hoboken folks with produce from his new venture "Flip Side Farm" (see article for all the sad and exciting news on Taylor and his farming future!!) And so the local food movement grows. And with the summer comes changes at the farm. Crew members often shear off their hair. This year Jess went through the biggest transformation getting a "Lex Luther" cut while Taylor lost his beard for a throw-back mustache. Of course, they continued to look marvelous and more importantly they were even lighter on their feet! And as the hair disappears the crew size swells. Summer means more labor to help us weed, plant, weed, harvest, weed and irrigate and...weed! We apply ZERO herbicides so much of our weed management relies heavily on good old-fashioned elbow grease. Folks like Marianne and Meghan Murtha, Danielle Bowman, Sonrisa Crespin, Mike Babbit, Kristin Hock, Nate McIntyre, Katherine Bryant, Gavin Lento and others helped us stay on target as the workload PILED UP in the summer.

It is a fun and frenetic time - non-stop action. We do a weekly and daily to-do list and every morning I have to take a deep breath as we head into battle. But the dedicated work of so many gets us through each day. And that goes double for our tremendous 2015 workshares who are there for the farm week in and week out. They are: Kristin Keane, Tori Wicker, Billy and Jill Welborn, Sue McIntyre, Jen Hilinski, Laura Pekata, Steve Blau (and Holly!), Anna Melendez (and her brood), Terrence Jackson and Geoff Richter. Extra hands were handy as we hit



drought number two. From late August to nearly the end of September we got less than a half inch of rain. Getting our fall crops like broccoli, cabbage, brussels sprouts and carrots through the hot and dry weather was a large undertaking. For the most part we did great but the fall carrots did not germinate particularly well and we ended up with a disappointing yield which of course was a bummer. We try hard for every crop and while we celebrate the wins, the loses are never easy to swallow. All-in-all, 2016 was a pretty strong growing year. Our overall harvest (non-upick) was our largest ever at 198,800 pounds. Our best crops included potatoes, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, eggplant, kale, okra, winter squash and turnips. We also had a comeback year for brussels sprouts and although our fall beets and carrots were not terrific, the spring beets and carrots were tremendous. Down crops included beans (heavy deer damage this year), parsnips, summer lettuce, and fall leeks. We changed the way we grow most of our onions this year and the results were what we had hoped for as our onion yield (sweets, cippolinis and storage) was very good this year. And (knock wood) our garlic crop was very good and it seems to say we have recovered from the very damaging garlic white rot outbreak we had in 2012 (again knocking wood). Ah, well I could sit here as the snow falls outside and type all day but I should probably get this thing to print! You may have heard the sounds of the Guess Who emanating from the wash area this year. We played that cassette tape (that's right) to death but the sound of "These Eyes" with the image of Jess, Fiona, Nick, Sam and Taylor is forever seared into my memory.



Those five gave it their all and pushed through a lot of adversity. I can only thank them and sing their praises for making the 2015 farm season such a bountiful one. As you read this our 2016 crops are bursting from their seed casings on their way to becoming healthy food for you and your family. ***Thank You*** for being a part of our farm and the local, organic movement. We can only do this because of your participation and it means the world to us! We're glad that Fernbrook is here as a resource for you and your family. See you this Spring!



Sincerely, Your Farmer *Jeff Tober*

Taylor James—Moving To The ‘Flip Side’

Taylor James came to Fernbrook in March 2013. He quickly became a great asset



to the CSA as his hard work, good attitude and love for farming shined through. In 2015 I hired him to become our first Assistant Manager and he took on a lot of extra work. Our goal is to hire and train would-be farmers AND to help them to go forth and succeed in the challenging realm of sustainable agriculture. And so it is with sadness and great pride that we bid Taylor adieu as he heads to Bedminster, NJ where he and a partner have started an exciting venture: **‘Flip Side Farm’**. Here are some thoughts from Taylor:

Where to begin?? Nearly three years ago I took a giant leap of faith and joined the good food revolution down here at Fernbrook Farm CSA. Its always with a laugh when I tell people “Yeah, I used to work in fashion, but now I’m *farming*.” Two careers not usually mentioned in the same statement. Nonetheless, Jeff Tober took a chance on an enthusiastic (albeit “green”) young farmer and gave me the keys to a whole new kind of kingdom. A few of the lessons learned:

- Organic farming builds a long-term healthy relationship with our earth, and focuses on restoring the ecology of the land.
- The most delicious produce comes from soils which we nurture with love, care, and respect.
- Without friends and neighbors in the community to share the joyful bounty from our land, this farming thing wouldn’t be so fun (or sustainable!)

A common theme here? You guessed it: healthy soil. Healthy soil = Healthy people. Over the past three years, I’ve witnessed first-hand how a lifestyle oriented around chemical-free, local food from healthy soil can radically alter one’s health for the better. And as the paradigm of local food continues to take hold beyond the fields of Fernbrook, we empower not only the future of ecological agriculture, but also our own health and happiness. I’m forever in gratitude to Jeff, Q, and the whole of Fernbrook Farm CSA: for the wonderful community of shareholders, for the inspiring apprentices and workers, for its natural beauty, and for the beautiful food that we grow every year. And now, as I leave for greener (or should I say shale-ier?) pastures up north, I’ll forever strive to emulate the vibrancy of Fernbrook Farm. The acorn from the tree never falls *toooo* far, and I hope that the collaboration of mind, food and spirit continues. Flipside Farm CSA is located in the heart of Bedminster, NJ (north off SR206) and will break ground on 4 acres in 2016. You can always check out our progress at www.FlipsideFarm.com All the best! - Taylor



LETTER FROM ‘FARMER Q’ Larry ‘Q’ Kuser and his wife Susie own and operate Fernbrook Farms which is a preserved farm. Larry grew up on the farm and you will often see him at the farmshop (he’s tall—just look up!)



Dear friends - As most of you know I run the nursery part of the farm. So my world is significantly about trees. When we drive down the road or into the driveway at Fernbrook there are trees all around us. We often take them for granted. But trees are perhaps the greatest engineers on the planet; cleaning the air, absorbing toxins in the soil, providing habitat and food for thousands of species of insects, a renewable resource for lumber, and building our most precious asset, topsoil, which is where we grow our food. It’s a long and fascinating story and I would like to share a little piece of that story with you. The *Metasequoia glyptostroboides* or Dawn Redwood was thought to be extinct. The fossil record was millions of years old. Then in 1944 trees were discovered in the Sichuan province in central China near the Yangtze river. The tree is in the same botanical family as the giant Redwoods of California but smaller; the tallest trees are just over 100 feet. It is said that the name ‘Dawn Redwood’ was given the tree because it has been around since the dawn of plant life.

In the 1980’s my late cousin, John Kuser, then professor of forestry at Rutgers University, traveled to China and collected seed from these remote trees. The progeny proved to be diverse and interesting, a mix of genetic data over 25 million years old. The fun part is that John gave me three seedlings from his research. Two are growing on the farm. One is at the driveway entrance to my son Brian’s house next to the barn. It has the muscular tan trunk of the Giant Redwood, fern-like deciduous foliage with graceful branches from the ground up. You walk right by it if you visit the animals or u-pick. I planted it in the 1990’s and it’s over 50 ft tall today. The other tree is in the hedgerow on your left as you come up the entrance driveway to the farm, on the end closest to the highway. Check them out. You’ll be looking at 25 million years of history direct from China. The Jurassic Park of the tree world! Today the Dawn Redwood is grown by nurseries throughout the country, and as a result is thriving around the world. No genetic modification needed. So next time you’re on the farm don’t take the trees for granted; take a walk in the woods. Look up. Listen. In spring especially look down, decaying leaves and fungi in a symbiotic relationship with the trees roots are at work making topsoil. It’s all an amazing mystery that we’re just beginning to understand. And it’s all happening without the forceful hand of humans. Enjoy. Be awed! Peace...Q

P.S. There is a small grove of metasequoia that Fernbrook planted in honor of John Kuser at the Rutgers Gardens, Ryder Lane, New Brunswick. It is on the right as you enter the Gardens next to the pond.

Fernbrook Farm CSA 2015 ~ By The Numbers: (2014 numbers in parenthesis)

Total Shares: 414, (395) Weeks Of Distribution: 26, (26)
 Acres Used For Veggies: 20.5, (19.5)

Total Lbs Harvested By The Crew: 198,800, (192,585)

Total Lbs From U-Pick Crops: (does not include herbs and flowers!) 51,791 (45,825)

Average Weekly Farm Shop Distribution: 13.6lbs (15.2 Lbs)

Average Weekly U-Pick Distribution: 4.8 Lbs (4.7Lbs)

Smallest Share: May 31st 5.3 Lbs May 31st (4.0 Lbs)

Largest Share: August 22nd (32.3 Lbs) (49.6) Lbs

Heaviest Crop: Winter Squash 28,362 Lbs (29,388 Lbs)

Lightest Crop: Parsnips - ZERO Pounds (total crop failure) (820 lbs 2014)

Lbs of Brussels Sprouts Harvested: 796 Lbs (zero 2014)

Lbs of Cucumbers Harvested: 9,553 Lbs (8,329 Lbs)

Lbs of Cabbage Harvested: 9,129 Lbs (4,769 Lbs)

Lbs of Potatoes Harvested: 19,601 Lbs (4,040Lbs)

Lbs of Carrots Harvested: 5,279 Lbs (8,964 Lbs)

Lbs of Kale Harvested: 4,147 Lbs (3,883 Lbs)

Lbs of Watermelons Harvested 11,361 Lbs (29,798 Lbs)

Lbs of Tomatoes Harvested (non-upick) 16,035 Lbs (15,426 Lbs)

of Weeks Cutting Flowers Were Open: 19 (15)

Lbs Of Food Donated To NJ Farmers Against Hunger: 11,395 (5,725)

Pigs Raised: 16, (16)

Number of Apprentices: 4 Full-time (4)

Number of Winter Shares Sold: 103, (85)

Days The Crew Played Hooky Down The Shore: .81 (.75)



Fernbrook
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