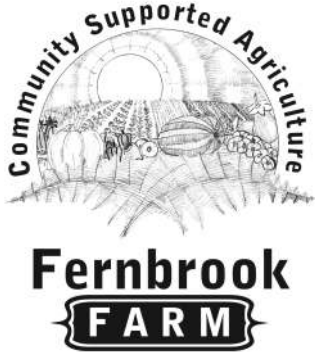


# Fernbrook Farm CSA

Volume 10 Issue 1

Winter 2017

## 2016: One Decade Down



Hello and greetings from Fernbrook Farm CSA. Generally during this time I like to see snow in the fields, icicles dangling from the branches and wood crackling in the stove (or at least the electric heater on medium). Ahhh - yes, when Old Man Winter himself forces us to go inside and produce our field plan and seed order and the winter newsletter. But suffice to say it is rather mild for January and Jess is out there cutting back bramble bushes and spreading compost. Warm Winters make me unsettled. I've seen enough growing seasons to know that cold winters generally help us (killing bugs and diseases) whereas warm winters

cause those problems to start earlier in Spring and often with more severity. So, let it snow! (And perhaps by the time you receive this, it will have...) BUT Winter it is. A time for Farmers to work less, sleep more, get family time, get the flu, watch bad movies and recover. But don't sleep too long farmer! The new season sure does come fast and you want to stay ahead of the game. Plus we have the winter share to coordinate so that puts a pep in our step. But before we get too far into the 2017 farm season, this is a great opportunity to put a bow on old 2016. Which we shall now do. AND not only that—but 2016 was our TENTH CSA season so we can put a bow on our first ten years. And we shall do that as well. OK. This sounds like a plan. Let's take off the shackles and write this here newsletter!

**WELCOME** (and welcome back) to Fernbrook Farm CSA. We are so appreciative to have you in this partnership wherein you trust us to grow lots of high quality food in a sustainable manner and we work our tails off to make it happen. That is it

in a nutshell and it has worked pretty well for the past 10 years. But in truth the partnership goes much deeper. You also provide us with a lot more like physical help, moral support, homemade beer and baked goods, kind words, honest feedback, and stuff like mowers, lumber, tools and seeds.

And we try to give you more than food such as potlucks, workshops, trails to hike, flowers to pick and all of that oh-so-good food and farming information. And the place where these 2 giving forces collide is something we like to call (wait for it....) community. It's the main reason we don't simply grow produce and sell it at markets. The



*Your 2016 Farm Crew Jess, Nick, Dan, Ray and Sindhu*

community piece - the relationships we have with you - that is what makes our work at Fernbrook so meaningful and it gets us out of bed day after day.

About a year ago, I had what doctors like to call the 'middle age special' which is knee and ankle surgery at the same time. Luckily Nick ('Nicky Noodles') and Jess were here at the farm not only holding down the fort but doing great work to boot. Jess got to scraping, priming and painting our old John Deere 1050. And Nick spent many frozen mornings spreading rich compost on our veggie fields. And they both renovated our greenhouse installing a great new stone floor. And Larry 'Farmer Q' Kuser coordinated the pouring of our new concrete floor in the shop which is a great upgrade. All the while I got used to crutches and tried to make life not too miserable for my wife and kids. Things got even better when my son Henry incurred a hairline fracture in his foot and joined me on crutches....Yes when it rains... Meanwhile, back at the ranch, we organized our second winter share for 100 families.

*continued on page 2*





We managed to put together 4 months of foods like beets, potatoes, squash, kale, cabbage, carrots, and fresh spinach. It can be COLD work but it is a nice change of pace packing up and distributing boxes once a month. (We are currently in the midst of year 3 of our winter share!) I also had the chance to speak at the Northeast Organic Farming Association Winter Conference on a panel on CSA management. That talk led to a really nice article about the CSA in ACRES USA which is a nationally published sustainable farming magazine! And then, suddenly, it was Feb. 20th which is about when we turn on the greenhouse, start seeding onions and officially kick-off the new season. (Winter goes fast....). And soon after the onions and cabbage pop, new farmers also sprout up! Sindhu Siva, Dan Reyes, and Ray Leone arrived to complete our 2016 farm crew. Ray is originally from Audubon, NJ and got a degree in Environmental Policy from Boston University. Ray gained valuable growing skills in Philadelphia, Maine, New York and rural Pennsylvania before joining Fernbrook. Ray came with a lot of real world experience including bike maintenance, writing, brewing coffee, environmental activism, and world class roller skating skills (seriously...Ray competed in competitions around the world which we found pretty impressive.) Sindhu and Dan were the first couple we ever hired. They farmed together in 2015 at Caretaker Farm in western Mass. which is one of the oldest CSAs in the country. Sindhu is from Delaware. She attended the University of Maryland where she

got a B.S. in Animal Sciences. Sindhu got farming experience in New York, North

Carolina and Delaware where she helped coordinate urban farming efforts in Wilmington. She also led the University of Delaware Blue Hen Dance Team which we thought was her most vital experience for a job here. Dan is from North Jersey and attended the University of Delaware. Dan brought with him a rich background of working on food, farm and ecological issues which included time in Guatemala, Delaware and Minnesota. Dan was also clear that he was applying to graduate programs and would likely have to leave in mid-August to attend school. But we really wanted Dan on the farm team so we hired him and sure enough he was accepted at the University of Pennsylvania! He is there now getting his Masters in City and Regional Planning (study hard Danny). We were excited to have found qualified, experienced and motivated candidates to join us for the growing season. And they got a good education off the bat - moving pipe! Once again, April proved surprisingly dry. So much so we spent a lot of time watering in our peas, carrots, beets, cabbage, lettuce etc. The dry April was a sign of things to come. Another sign of things to come was the series of breakdowns of our 274 Case International cultivating tractor. We had numerous troubles with it throughout the Spring which was a general headache - especially for Ray and Dan who got less tractor time. 2016 was the year of stuff breaking. Some years you get pretty lucky and others...well it seems we were always trying to fix something! The potato digger pump (twice), the cooling unit, the fieldhouse plastic (destroyed in a summer storm), the brush hog (thrice), the tiller, spader, compost spreader, the F350, the Silverado window....and it was THE YEAR of flat tires. Then there was my personal favorite. Sometimes we irrigate from a thousand gallon tank which we bring to

the field on a wagon. Well, yours truly got to witness 4 tons of water smash through said tank when it slid off a wagon early on a Sunday morning. The 8-year old in me thought it was really cool. But mostly I was just aghast at my own carelessness and the fact that I still had thirsty crops and no tank with which to water. But you just keep going as best you can (OYE!). We spent the majority of the Spring in full planting and seeding mode. Getting crops either started in the greenhouse or established directly in the field. We did great staying on track but the lack of rain definitely slowed crop growth. May was better but we had a very late, very light frost around May 21st; we were lucky to avoid any real damage. And just like that it was opening day! Our tenth. Pretty amazing. We had great lettuce and greens but the strawberries took another few days to open. And we had people! So many shareholders new and returning and the weather couldn't have been better. We gave tours, Paula greeted customers, The Inn at Fernbrook had homemade creations for sale and Larry sold some of his gorgeous plant material. It was a banner day and it marked the start of the real season. June, July and August are non-stop. There is always more work to do than we could possibly do. And throw in some hot temps and lack of rain and we have our hands full! Luckily, this is the time when we get reinforcements. Our full-time farmers were joined by our part-time and seasonal crew, many of whom have worked at the farm in years past. They include Sophia Buckalew, Danielle Bowman, Megan and Maryanne Murtha, Christine



# Fernbrook Farm—Growing Food and Farmers!

2016 was the 9th season Fernbrook Farm CSA hosted farm apprentices. Since 2008 we have ‘graduated’ about 25 aspiring farmers. Below you’ll see what some of them are up to today. Our Apprenticeship is basically a trade of their time, energy and hard-work for our knowledge. We try to find smart, hard-working, energetic candidates who want to come here to learn and work for a full farm season. In return for their efforts, we train them on everything from tractor use to greenhouse management, to farm budgeting. Apprentices also go off-farm throughout the growing season to broaden their agricultural knowledge. For the past 2 years we coordinated the NJCRAFT network (Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training). About 30 farms are involved to create a network to train beginner farmers. It is based on the Apprenticeship that got me started at Brookfield Farm in Amherst, MA. This year’s crew Jess Brandeisky, Nick Delmar, Ray Leone, Sindhu Siva and Dan Reyes worked VERY hard throughout the year. They achieved a lot personally and for the farm as a whole and we cannot thank them enough for their tremendous efforts! Below you can see what some of our previous Apprentices are up to. We see them as a key part of our country’s agricultural future - growing great food and being good stewards of our soils, waterways, ecosystems and human health. We’re very proud of our FARMILY!



Ray, Dan, Sindhu, Nick and Jess

**Fernbrook Farm Apprentice Alum Sam Bryant ('15)** Finished a successful season growing food (and living in a yoam) at Cure Organic Farm in Boulder, Colorado.

Looks like he'll be staying out west for another season. **Taylor James ('13-'15)** finished his first season at a new venture called Flipside Farm in Bedminster, NJ. He had a great first year growing produce for distribution on-farm and in NYC!

**Kristin Hock (Ward) ('14)** with the help of her husband Matt started a farm in conjunction with Collier Youth Services in Marlboro, NJ. It is an exciting new venture and they had a banner first year!

**Julie Pierre ('14)** just completed her second year running her start-up “Our Yards Farm” in Audubon, NJ. She was written up in the Philadelphia Inquirer this fall!

**Nicole Didero ('14)** is in Colorado teaching, promoting local food and recovering from shoulder surgery (heal up!!) **Lo Pagan ('11)** and her family moved back to the area and are members at Fernbrook!

**Mark Tebben ('12, '13)** is part of Fernbrook West, has been studying permaculture and is traveling this winter with an eye on farming in Colorado. **Noah Zinter ('13)** is out in Denver selling honey and playing in about 6 bands. **Victoria Wicker (Francis) ('11-'13)**, husband Joey and daughter Zoey are doing great and are active at Fernbrook. They are expecting numero dos later this year!

**Lauren Hill ('08)** is finishing her degree in Sustainable Ag at Cornell University in Ithaca. AND as chance would have it, she had a plants class with **Alice Sturm ('12)** who is finishing a Masters in Landscape Architecture at Cornell. **Liz “Lemon” Keefe ('12)** is enrolled at Brandeis University getting her MBA in Nonprofit Management and Masters in Sustainable International Development. And she frequents the Waltham, MA farmers market. **Jen LaMonaca ('08, '09)** and husband Ryan continue to grow B & B CSA in Galloway Township and Jen is involved in the NJ Agricultural Leadership Development Program. They have been expanding every year and run a great CSA! **Caroline DiGiovanni ('11)** completed a successful season in Southern Virginia as the Field Manager for Riverstone Farm. **Brooke McMinn ('09)** continues her work as the ‘Plant Adventure Program Specialist’ with the



*Fernbrook Farmers Reunite!*

Birmingham Botanical Gardens. **Rob Eckman ('09, '10)** and his partner farmer Maggie just got married! And they completed their first season in South Berwick, Maine to farm at ‘Baers Best Beans’. **Duncan Simonson ('10, '11)** had a great 5th year as the Farm Manager at the Green Earth Institute in Naperville, Illinois and he and wife Anna welcomed their son Diego! **Danielle Szepi ('11)** and her partner Dave Zelov also got married. And they completed their sixth season at Kittatiny Mountain Farm in Wantage, NJ. They are having a lot of success in North Jersey. Way to go Farmers! FarmOn!!



## Education Center News!

While you're at the farm, check out Fernbrook Farms Environmental Education Center, a nonprofit created to provide hands-on educational experiences for all young people by exploring the complex interconnectedness 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, homeschool classes, school field trips and much more. Please visit [www.FernbrookEducation.org](http://www.FernbrookEducation.org) or call 609-298-4028 to learn more about all their terrific programs.



This winter we are reviewing our strategic plan and assessing our progress. I am very happy to say that I think we are doing very well! Two years ago we completed our first formal strategic plan to really look at our mission and to make sure that our programs and activities truly align with it. Through the strategic plan, we solidified our mission to focus on engaging today's youth with nature. We also looked at *how* to accomplish our mission and we clearly decided that we want to use the 230 acres of Fernbrook Farms. It turns out that our ponds, meadows, forest, creeks, and agriculture production make for the perfect nature classroom! Another aspect of the *how* question includes *when*. The answer to the *when* question was daylight hours all year round. This means we want to create opportunities to plug kids into nature more and more. To help us do this we have expanded our vacation camp days from 8 days in 2014 to 16 days in 2016 and we have added 45 days of afterschool programs! In addition, our summer camp has added partial day camp for 3-5 year olds and full-day camp for 5 year olds. (We've always had full day for 6-14 year olds.) Our homeschool classes (ages 3-14) have added an additional time slot and increased capacity to where we had a record 210 kids engage in our fall classes! In 2017, we will look for even more opportunities to engage kids with nature. It has already started as our new classroom has helped increase capacity for our winter programs. In today's screen-centered world, we feel it is even more important for kids to have the opportunity to be unplugged from their screens and plugged into nature. I know many of you have engaged in our programs and I thank you for your support in accomplishing our mission!

Brian Kuser

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



## Shareholders Speak!

Every year we ask for your feedback and every year many of you respond. This helps us know how we are doing, and how we can make the CSA better for you and your family. Below are some of your comments. You may notice that we sometimes get polar opposite opinions on the same thing like amount of food or quality of a certain item. By offering choices and bulk, we try to address those differing opinions and tastes. **THANK YOU** for taking the time to give us your thoughts!! We hear you.

**HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE AMOUNT OF FOOD:** Our Full share was sufficient and sometimes hard to keep up. We preserved a large amount of our share / Nice...just right / Satisfactory / Good amount. Would never say no to more food! / It seemed somewhat less than other years but great variety / Abundant! Perfect! / Good but sometimes hard to keep up.

**CROPS LIKED BEST / WERE THE BEST:** Cucumbers / Blackberries and Ground Cherries / Very good Beans and Tomatoes / Arugula, Carrots and Kohlrabi / Glad to see Parsnips again / Garlic and Berries / Great Greens (but often more than I needed) / Eggplant and 'Blue Gold Potatoes' / 'Krimzon Lee' Peppers (Thanks Jess) / LOVED Okra! / Cabbage and Kohlrabi were great / Tomatoes were amazing / Great Peppers but got too many / Watermelons! / Swiss Chard great / Loved the Flowers / Tremendous



Garlic! / Loved the Beets / Good Kale (...always Kale)

**CROPS LIKED LEAST / WERE NOT AS GOOD:** Parsnips (we just aren't fans) / I would love to get more broccoli and cauliflower / Cilantro ran out too fast. Would like more herbs! / Watermelons were not that sweet / Wanted more Greens / Too many Eggplant and Turnips / Missed the giant fall Carrots / Didn't think butternut was as good this year / Don't care for okra / Peas were not as good as years past / Longer Strawberry Season / Not crazy about the celery

**OTHER FEEDBACK:** We used the multiple pick-up days which is excellent for distribution / U-Pick well done and well labeled / Jeff, you have a GREAT crew!! / Liked the Lacto-fermentation and rain barrel workshops / U-Pick areas are sometimes overgrown / U-Pick seems good early but gets picked out / Would love to see Vegetarian & Vegan products made on the farm / Emails are great / CSA is a good deal / Kielbasa was the best I've ever had / Please pick more u-pick crops for those physically unable to pick. / We got our money's worth but it seems like a little less than past years. Thanks to everyone that works so hard to bring us some of the best produce in NJ! / We Love You Guys!! 'Roses are red, Violets are blue, Eat Fernbrook Veggies, They're good for you!'



## 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 2016 - although production was down a tic from 2014 and '15. 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 341.5 pounds of food over a 26 week season for an average of 13.1 pounds per week. In the U-Pick fields, we distributed 72.5 pounds over that period for an average of 2.8 pounds per week. In 2016 a share was \$640. So if you got your food from the shop every week and did all the U-Pick, ***you paid \$1.55 per pound. If you only got food from the shop and didn't do any U-Pick, you paid \$1.87 per pound. And if you did half the U-Pick a share cost \$1.77 per pound.***

Our 8 year average is 12.7 pounds per week from the shop and 4.2 pounds per week from the u-pick fields. Our 8-year average is \$1.75 per pound doing no u-pick and \$1.30 per pound doing full U-Pick. And I should add ***that these prices DO NOT include U-Pick herbs and flowers*** (which were available for about 17 weeks in the fields. If you got a lot of fresh flowers, sunflowers and herbs one could argue it easily ***added over \$200 to your value!!!!***)

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. 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). And we do our best to protect biodiversity, use open-pollinated seeds, promote soil health and provide you with fresh, safe, delicious and nutritious food. I promise we'll do our best to beat the 2016 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](mailto:info@fernbrookfarmcsa.com). Thanks! Here's to your health AND your wallet.



**\$\$\$\$** - Reminder that a share for the 2017 season is \$650. \$100 was due with your registration, \$275 is due Feb. 15th and the remaining \$275 is due by May 1st. Checks can be made out to 'Fernbrook Farm CSA' and mailed to the PO Box listed on the front. If you have questions about your balance or want to talk about a payment plan, contact Jeff at [info@fernbrookfarmcsa.com](mailto: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!!**\*\*\***

A Penn State study found that there are about 130 million insects per acre in the top 5 inches of soil in healthy agricultural fields! Thanks bugs.







Aldrich, Mike Babbitt, Sonrisa Crespin, Leslie Nami and Falon Domrowski. These folks weed, move pipe, weed some more, load food onto wagons, and weed some more. We strive to “weed before it gets weedy”. Timing is SO important and the more hands on deck the better. And our part-time farmers bring us added energy, enthusiasm and general goofiness which helps us manage the long farm summer. Summer is the time for other things as well. We had a few potlucks, a great native plant walk by Joanne McKinney, a sold-out rain barrel workshop with Katie Ribsam of the NJDEP, and 2 terrific lacto-fermentation workshops with our friend Natalie Winch. Also our farmers led a number of CSA tours and gave talks at schools like the Stuart School, Moorestown Friends and Clara Barton. We also hosted adults with disabilities from ARC of Mercer once a week. These terrific folks came out and helped us with a variety of jobs and we look forward to continuing the relationship this year! Thanks to Ross and Joann from ARC for making it happen. We also coordinated the NJCRAFT program which stands for Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training. This is a network of 30 plus farms in NJ and PA who host workshops and farm tours for beginner farmers. Our Fernbrookers attended about a dozen of these this year. They learned a lot, saw how other farms operate and connected with other young farmers. In late Summer, the crew escaped up to the University of Massachusetts to attend NOFA’s annual summer organic farming conference. It’s an opportunity to get their heads out of the soil and reconnect with the larger sustainable farming world. And when the crew disappears, I have even more help that steps up. Among those are our workshare participants. These are members who trade regular work on the farm for a share at the farm. Every year they give the CSA a shot in the arm and added hands that help us with all jobs big and small. Thanks to this year’s great workshare crew: Sue McIntyre (10 years!), Tori Wicker, Julia Surdykowski, Ken Ryan, Cheryl Caldwell, Neke Wyble, Jill and Billy Welborn, and Laura Pekata. A highlight of the summer was a tremendous workday to pull our 2016 garlic crop. This was our best garlic crop ever which is a relief after we had a very serious onset of white rot in 2012 that set us back for a few years. MANY thanks to all of the volunteers who came out to help us pull and hang (to ‘cure’) our garlic. But there is a new potential threat to garlic and onions called the *Alium* Leaf Miner. It is a European pest that was discovered in PA and NJ last year and has the potential to be a serious and long-term problem for onions, scallions, garlic and leeks. We are learning all we can about this new threat. It is just one example of the ever-shifting landscape we face. As for our overall production,



2016 was down a bit from the previous 2 years. Our overall distribution was right at our 10 year average but pounds per share was down slightly from 2015. Like every year, 2016 had its share of winners and losers. On the plus side, our peppers, eggplant, tomatoes, winter squash, melons, okra, spring spinach and lettuce, fall cabbage, garlic, fennel, sweet potatoes and fall arugula led the way. On the other hand the spring cabbage, sweet onions, strawberries, fall spinach, brussels sprouts and shelling peas weren’t so great. And of course we had the middle ground crops—not bad; not terrific such as beans, cucumbers, potatoes, spring carrots and fall beets. There are always reasons why crops succeed or fail. Some reasons are more in our control than others. In 2016 deer damage, lack of rain, weed outbreaks and insect damage (flea beetles, thrips and leaf hoppers to name a few) were the main culprits. It is our job as farmers to observe crop production and make corrections for the following year.

We also raised 17 beautiful heritage breed pigs for our fall pork sale. They were on the smaller side but we sold a lot of terrific, pasture raised non GMO pork; bacon lasted about 12 minutes. (Those fellers did manage to have one huge jailbreak in August the likes of which we haven’t seen for a while...). So 2016 had its challenges but we managed to fill those tables week after week without fail. We are forever in debt to Ray, Dan, Sindhu, Jess and Nick for their amazing effort and overall dedication to the farm and its success! They were a bright, engaged, hard-working, java-fueled bunch. I am grateful for them and look forward to being connected to them and their bright futures going forward. AND SO we embark on year 11. I think we have a great crew lined up and we have some new crops in the mix. Let me say once again how thankful we are to you, the shareholders. We work really hard to make the farm and the food a real value for your family. If this is your first season, we welcome you and look forward to your feedback throughout the year. And check your email for great Fernbrook happenings throughout the Winter and Spring. Looking forward to seeing you at the farm!

Sincerely, Your Farmer

*Jeff Tober*



## Our New Assistant Manager Jess!

*I am very happy to announce that Farmer Jess Brandeisky has been hired as our new Assistant Manager! Jess has been here for 3 years and will be taking on more responsibility at Fernbrook to assist with the day-to-day management of the CSA. Here are some thoughts from Jess:*



Often I am asked "why farming?" Why pursue it as a career? Well, I can definitely say that there are plenty of reasons to consider different means of employment as successful farming requires a tremendous amount of effort. The summer sun is scorching and continual; pests that prey on livelihood are relentless; glimmers of rainclouds dissipate overhead as you harvest heat-sensitive crops as quickly and thoroughly as you can and the list of obstacles goes on. You are mostly at the mercy of the natural world, but in a modern era of chemical controls, cheap labor and air-conditioned supermarkets, who cares? When I was younger, I never questioned food. Never really gave it any thought other than 'commodity to be consumed to live'. As I got older I started asking questions about our food supply. —What was the origin of that delicious banana? How does it fit in to the global economy and what are the implications on the global ecology? Entering into my third year at Fernbrook Farm, I have reflected so much on all of these sentiments. What is this whole farming bit I've gotten myself into? After a dry, hot day in August after weeks of the same, feeling washed of my will, I find that there is nothing more soul-satisfying than walking into the farm shop with a sweaty farm crew and talking with so many wonderful shareholders surrounded by the literal fruits of our labor. The community at Fernbrook is invigorating. I believe that honest food is something that is not easy to find and for many is unfortunately not an option. To create a local and sustainable method of food production that engenders joyful community, to share food as a pleasure despite it's necessity, and to maintain a connection with the natural world that has been degraded amidst a fast-paced and technological one; these are merely a few of the reasons that I find farming to be so pertinent and worthy of our time and support. And so it is with great thanks that I look upon farming as a way to nourish the earth as we nourish ourselves.

**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: This past summer I had the opportunity to hear a talk by Dr. Doug Tallamy, a University of Delaware entomologist who has spent 20 years studying the correlation between insects and plants. Believe it or not, exciting and insightful stuff! He was the keynote speaker at a regional conference of Conservation Districts. Certainly conservation in practice and in teaching is one of the major objectives of Fernbrook, and Dr. Tallamy's research fits nicely into that paradigm. What struck me as interesting was not just the correlation between plants and insects but plants and birds. Over 90% of the diet of songbirds in the nest consists of caterpillars. Dr. Tallamy's observations showed that one small nest of three chickadee chicks consumed over 6,000 caterpillars before they fledged. Wow! Multiply that by thousands of nests and you need a whole lot of caterpillars. On his website ([www.bringingnaturehome.net](http://www.bringingnaturehome.net)) Dr. Tallamy lists many hundreds of trees and plants and their correlation to caterpillar species that they support. Turns out Oak trees are at the top of the list supporting over 500 species of caterpillars. (there are over 18,000 species of caterpillars in the U.S. alone) Birch, Maple, and Pine are also high on the list, as are most native trees and plants. On the flip side are the non-native trees and shrubs that have become popular landscape plants but support minimal caterpillar life. Zelkova trees, which became popular to replace our native Elm trees which died off in the 1960's, support no species of caterpillars. Couple this with what the Audubon Society tells us that songbird populations in the U.S. have declined 50% since the 1970's and there you have it...no caterpillars, no birds...no native plants, no caterpillars. So the challenge is how do we make our yards, our neighborhoods more bird friendly? Check out Dr. Tallamy's website, plant the right stuff wherever you can. That's what we're doing at Fernbrook. The kids in our education programs are planting Oak trees in our forests. Our nursery production is growing more and more native plants and trees. And they're all for sale at our Farm Shop throughout the year. As always we thank you for your continuing support of all that we do here at Fernbrook. We welcome the new families to our Fernbrook community. We not only want to provide you with good healthy food and improve your communities and our environment. May God bless you and your families with health and happiness in 2017! See you on the farm....Farmer Q

***Fernbrook Farm CSA 2016 ~ By The Numbers:***

Total Shares: 396      Weeks Of Distribution: 26

Acres Used For Veggies: 20

Total Lbs Harvested By The Crew: 169,016

Total Lbs From U-Pick Crops: (does not include herbs and flowers!) 27,589

Average Weekly Farm Shop Distribution: 13.1 Lbs

Average Weekly U-Pick Distribution: 2.8 Lbs

Largest Share: 9/5/16 33.4 Lbs; Smallest Share: 5/29/16 2.8 Lbs

Heaviest Crop: Winter Squash 29,573LBS

Lightest Crop: Mustard: 40.5 LBS

Lbs of Eggplant Harvested: 6,170

Lbs of Cantaloupe Harvested: 12,284

Lbs of Cabbage Harvested: 5,602

Lbs of Sweet Potatoes Harvested: 9,305

Lbs of Carrots Harvested: 5,484

Lbs of Kale Harvested: 3,621

Lbs of Watermelons Harvested 23,861

Lbs of Tomatoes Harvested (non-u-pick) 13,199

# of Weeks Cutting Flowers Were Open: 17

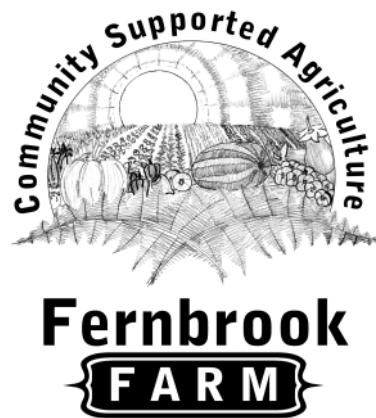
Lbs Of Food Donated To NJ Farmers Against Hunger: over 5,000!

Figs Raised: 17

Pounds of Compost Spread (roughly): 250,000!

Number of Winter Shares Sold: 83

Days The Crew Played Hooky Down The Shore: .81





# TEN YEAR ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL!



In 2006, my wife Becky and I were looking for a solid farming opportunity somewhere in New England or the Mid-Atlantic. We were approached by Larry Kuser, owner of Fernbrook Farm who found our information on the NJ FarmLink web page. We added Fernbrook to our list of farms to visit. After

our visit south, Larry and Susie came up to the farm where we were working - Brookfield Farm in Massachusetts (Under the tutelage of Farmer Dan Kaplan). We talked, settled on an arrangement and decided to start a CSA farm at Fernbrook. We



started the CSA because Larry saw the production of healthy, safe, quality produce as an important component of their farm. And I had been training to manage a farm like the one in his vision. So we took the leap. 2007

was our first season. We converted land used for nursery stock into veggie land and grew on 4 acres for about 70 families. Becky and I bought a house in Bordentown and had our firstborn Henry that fall. It was quite a year. I look at photos and see some of the beautiful produce we had year one and I don't quite remember how we did it! I know I had some



great help! In 2008 we added some acreage, sold more shares and we hired our first 2 Apprentices. Lauren Hill and Jen LaMonaca signed on even though I warned them that I wasn't sure if I would be a good teacher. Since Jen and Lauren



sowed their first seeds at Fernbrook, we have had over 25 farmers come here to work, learn and join the farming community. And as you can read elsewhere in this newsletter, our former Apprentices are doing amazing things. More on the Apprentices in a bit.

Throughout the years we have added land, expanded the size of the farmshop, added storage for food, equipment and crops (including a



second greenhouse), added to our portfolio of tractors, equipment and our workforce. We've gotten more diverse too adding a winter share and some wholesale and restaurant accounts. And we have honed our craft.

Since 2007, we've grown over 3,000 shares, raised 125 pigs, made and spread millions of pounds of compost, and raised something close to 1.4 million pounds of food! Wow. Perhaps more importantly are



the connections to people. Many thousands of people have come through Fernbrook to get fresh, chemical-free food over the last decade. And we have gotten to know many of you very well. I think of Families like the Beyers. Melinda and Hope Beyer who started here in 2007 as kids (see above) and are now in high school and college doing amazing things. They were raised to some degree on

our produce. And the McIntyres: Susan has been a workshare for 10 years. Her kids Sarah, Hannah and Nate have all worked on the farm and Nate visits us when he is on leave from the Air Force. And the Kovac family— also here since 2007. Lance Kovac helped me chainsaw some lumber to make a new farm road a few years back and his wife Jen once wrote to us

that we had "officially ruined supermarket produce" for their family. And we've gotten so much feedback over the years good and bad and it always helps us find our way forward. But it sure feels great when people send you notes like this:



*"This was our first year and we LOVED IT. Our Fernbrook experience is one of the best things we've done for ourselves in a long time. Being at the farm, eating through the seasons, and getting to know the farmers growing our food has shifted our consciousness about the food we put in our bodies."*

Larry and Susie have gone out of their way to mark the CSA's tenth year and I am grateful to them for those recognitions and for sticking



with the CSA through thick and thin for these ten years.

A highlight of this season was in November on our last Saturday shop. It was also the day of our smoked pork sale so I was already prepared for a little chaos. I WAS NOT prepared for the Fernbrook Farmer



Reunion that was about to take place. Throughout the morning former Apprentices arrived from New York, Maine, Illinois, Virginia, Pennsylvania, South Jersey, and of course Colorado. The crazy 'Fernbrook West' crew from the Rockies hopped in a van, drove straight through and arrived at the farm for the gathering.



Eventually we all went out to the fields to harvest beets together. And later to the pub for some karaoke. I couldn't stop laughing and feeling blessed. Many, many thanks to Jess, Nick and this year's crew for putting it together and keeping it a secret!



In 2007 when we started this, Larry and I agreed to give it 3 years to see if we could make it work. As we enter year 11 where does it go? We know people are going to need food. But will the CSA model remain relevant and viable? Will young people continue to want to learn how to farm? I think for now we feel comfortable with the CSA and its direction. But farming is inherently a risky venture. I can say with all honesty I am so glad that you, our shareholders, are with us in this journey! Thank you. Here's to another decade!!



## 'A Map Of Me' By Shareholder Joel Dowshen

We sat on the couch,  
My Grandson and I,  
Reading, chilling,  
Talking about the  
Spectacular sculptures of  
Human forms  
From painstakingly cut  
Maps we had just seen.

I looked down  
And saw him gazing  
Away from Harry Potter  
To the back of my Hand  
Resting gently  
On his leg.  
He started moving  
A slender, slightly grimy  
Forefinger,  
Very gently for a  
Six year old,  
Over the veins,  
The wrinkles,  
The scars  
Pronounced  
On my hand  
Now entering its  
Eighth decade.  
It was as though  
He discovered an  
Old map,

And was intent on  
Finding where  
The roads and rivers  
Flowed and intersected  
Even beyond the edge.  
It energized me,  
Remembering doing the same  
With my Grandmother's Hand.  
A hand sculpted with the  
Ache of dislocation,  
Of struggle, Of work,  
Of rebuilding,  
And ultimately of  
Nurturing, joy and love.  
That hand has been my guide.  
Now,  
With his smooth, soft hand,  
He's found  
A map of me.

*(Inspired by Nikki Rosato's "Human Maps" in her Grounds for Sculpture show: In-bound Hand-cut road maps. This was a response to my request on the survey for poems! Thanks for the submission Joel.*

We rely on many friends and partners as we try to make the farm work year after year. We are grateful for everyone who works with us throughout the year including:

\*New Jersey Farmers Against Hunger \*NJDEP \* St Mary's Food Pantry \*Jadwiga Bialostocka  
\*NOFANJ \*Rutgers University Agricultural Extension Service \*Hlubick's Farm \*Strawberry Hill Farm  
\*Moorestown Friends School \*Mercer County Community College Culinary Program \*NJ Department  
of Agriculture \*ARC of Mercer \*John Koncur \*The Monastery of St Clare \*Fresh From Zone 7 \*The  
Brachelli Family (window donation!) \*Oliver a bistro \*Philadelphia Green \*Nature's Own Farm \*PA  
Assc. For Sustainable Agriculture (PASA) \* Stephanie and Mike Neuhaus (our artists in residence!)

**Remembering John Lincoln.** John was an employee of Fernbrook Nursery. He died suddenly in November of a massive stroke. John was a valuable employee, hard working, dedicated, always cheerful and supportive of his colleagues. There are many people who are the 'invisible' force behind the diversity of Fernbrook; people who are critical to our success who do not often interact with our customers. John was one of those people who took pride in his work and always put his best effort forward. We will miss him.

