

Fernbrook Farms CSA

Volume 13 Issue 1

Winter 2020

2019 - Changing Of The Guard!



Hello & Greetings from Fernbrook Farms CSA! Today is a perfect writing day: 35 degrees and raining. The fields are draped in a grey mist as if to say—'stay away...let us rest'. We are happy to oblige. I like farming in the Northeast where we have 4 seasons. The growing season is a non stop grind with a lot of deadlines and controlled chaos. But the winter provides a time to rest, reflect, fine tune and plan for the next season of chaos.

There is plenty of work to do be it repairing equipment, making crop plans and seed orders, hiring staff, selling shares, and managing the winter share. But the slower pace is appreciated. Winter goes fast though. We start our onion seeds around Feb 20th so the clock is already ticking! But days like this when I am at home and our cat Oreo keeps trying to walk across the keyboard y5d9j4bs8hq9 are a nice change of pace. And writing the winter newsletter is a good opportunity to look back at the years' records, photos, emails and 'to-do' lists to take stock of the farm season. This winter newsletter is my 13th and final one at Fernbrook. In fact, I think I will co-write it with our current Assistant Manager and soon-to-be Farm Manager Jess Brandeisky!

As you may know, I am moving on to manage a new farm project for the Pine-lands Preservation Alliance in South-ampton where my wife Becky has

worked for 13 years. They recently acquired a 70 acre parcel adjoining their headquarters. It has been conventionally farmed in soybeans for many decades and our goal is to practice what we do here at

Fernbrook and what has come to be known as re-generative farming.

The basic goals are to build topsoil, enrich soil life, cultivate annual and perennial crops, sequester soil carbon, and build the farm in connection with a healthy overall ecosystem and watershed. We want to grow high value food with good yields while pro-

moting biodiversity and involving a lot of people to the cause. This new opportunity

is very exciting for me but the decision to leave Fernbrook was a tough one as it has been a part of my families' home since we moved here in 2007. But the plan is to stay very connected to Fernbrook and the community here so I look forward to seeing you in 2020 and beyond! Jess started at Fernbrook as a volunteer 'workshare' 5 years ago. She then moved up to Farm Apprentice and then Assistant Manager. One of my considerations in taking this new job was that Jess had expressed interest in the Manager job if it became available. Knowing that Fernbrook Farms CSA would be in good hands made my decision easier. If you know Jess you know she is determined, hard-working, community oriented, and becoming more of a leader in the local farming world. We have been working together (and with the Kuser Family) to make the transition a smooth one and I will be available as needed in 2020 to help out

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Richie, Sam, Meghan, Matt and Alex



however I can. But Jess is ready to take the reins and has a solid, creative vision for the farm. It is an exciting time in the farm's history!

But allow us to look back at the 2019 farm season. The CSA's 13th was a challenging one in many ways but one in which we also carved out some pretty good successes and welcomed many new families to the farm! And with our energetic, hard-working, goofy farmers, I have a lot of fond memories from the year. SO let us sit back, relax and gaze back upon what is (and what shall always be) the 2019 CSA farm season. Start the time machine...

'Winter Is Coming'...Man, a year ago I read the whole Game Of Thrones series (I am usually a non-fiction guy) but I got swept up in it and it made for good cold weather reading. Last winter had some nice cold stretches which of course we need to control insect and disease populations (think ticks, leaf hoppers and our new friend the Chinese Lanternfly). Matt stuck around for the winter and worked part-time with me and Jess on winter projects, my favorite of which was rebuilding the compost spreader. That thing works so good now (knocking wood). We also grew some amazing greens, kale, lettuce and spinach in our high tunnel for the winter share and some early markets and weddings. And Jess and I had the honor of speaking on a panel at the NJ Vegetable Growers Association Conference in Atlantic City, and Larry and Brian Kuser also spoke on a panel about education programs on farms. We

also got away a bit. My family went to Phillies spring training in Florida (some nice kayaking and hiking too). And Jess and Matt - boy I know they got away but I can't recall to where...But I am sure they both got some needed R and R. By Feb. 20th we fired up the greenhouse heater and put our first seeds (onions) into soil. That one moment officially starts the farm season (no going back...) And we begin our weekend chore schedule. This was the time when Sam Metz rejoined the crew for her second year at Fernbrook and we were thrilled to have her back!! March is all about staying on schedule with greenhouse seeding and getting tractors and equipment tuned up

and ready for that moment in early April when we start field work. We also take advantage of frozen mornings to spread rich compost on our fields without compacting our soils. And then, when the fields are dry enough and the greenhouse plants are big enough, we spade up (or plow) our early fields and get plants and seeds in the ground. This year was exciting because we replaced our 2001 spader with a brandy new one and we loved the results.

Many thanks to the original spader we used since 2000 and owed us nothing! As April rolls along the size of our crew grows. Richie, Meghan, Danielle, Tori, Sue and others started up to help us with the increased workload. In April, farming seems reasonable. With favorable conditions you can get seeds and plants in the

ground and April rains water them in. With cooler temps we don't see a lot of the

out of control weed growth that we do in Summer so everything is a little more manageable. In general, we had a good Spring; we stayed on task and had good crops popping in the fields. But we did have one major unfortunate incident. On Earth Day (4/22) some pretty giant winds blew the plastic off our high tunnel and wrecked part of the frame as well. Spring 2019 was unusually windy and this particular event was a setback. On the plus side, we kept the high tunnel uncovered for the season to let the rains flush out accumulated salts (and oh did it rain) but we didn't get it rebuilt and reskinned until December. But on the plus side we did have lovely early crops in the high tunnel and we got off to a slightly earlier start this year with some nice lettuces and greens for



New Spader Debuts!



Refurbished Spreader In Action!

weddings at the Inn and a new market we started at the Hamilton YMCA. We also were happy to add the Farm and Fisherman restaurant in Cherry Hill to our list of clients. We really enjoyed working with Chef Todd and their staff who truly seek out locally grown food for their kitchen. Well, before we knew it, Opening Day was on the horizon and our spinach, lettuce and greens were ready for the harvest tubs. And with our beloved Paula Hughes back, we were ready to open for season number 13! One crop we did not have was u-pick strawberries. The record rains of 2018

One Farm; Many Farmers



I've always told others that, in my opinion, farming is a weird way of making a living. There are days when you feel like you have the best job in the world and other days when you are pretty sure this is your last year farming. It is a profession with a lot of variables from weather and climate, insects, plant diseases, market changes, labor shortages, equipment failure, and weird things like slug infestations on your cabbage or a drunk driver getting stuck in your spinach field (happened one year). Then there is the whole business of actually getting on your own land and starting your own business. It can be tough sledding. But there is a draw to it that folks like me feel and farming can be rewarding in a variety of ways. But now more than ever beginner farmers have to know what they are getting into. The desire for learning sustainable agriculture and the energy young farmers can provide to farms is why we have been training Apprentices since 2008. This year we were lucky to have Sam Metz and Matt Casey back for their second year and they were joined by Alex Robb who became our first Summer Intern! We relied heavily on these three in every aspect of running the farm. We have many other part-time and volunteer farmers but the full-time farm crew is the engine that makes the farm go. These 3 farmers connected with our shareholders and with our larger community of farms in New Jersey. They worked their tails off and made it through 2 challenging farm seasons. Sam and Matt came to Fernbrook from different paths but both have the tools and the work ethic to accomplish whatever they aspire to within or outside sustainable agriculture. And Alex is just beginning his journey but he has already showed us a lot and made big contributions to the farm. We are excited to welcome him back in 2020! They join a list of terrific, funny, hard-working and very bright farmers who have come to Fernbrook to work and learn and we are grateful to them all!



Fernbrook Farm Apprentice Alum

2019 - Sam Metz, Matt Casey, Alex Robb

2018- Matt Casey, Erik Dalton, Sam Metz, Lindsey Wilson

2017 - Erik Dalton, Nick Delmar, Dan Mickey, Lindsey Wilson

2016 - Jess Brandeisky, Nick Delmar, Ray Leone, Dan Reyes, Sindhu Siva

2015 - Jess Brandeisky, Sam Bryant, Nick Delmar, Fiona Mulligan

2014 - Nicole Didero, Kristin Hock (Ward), Taylor James, Julie Pierre

2013 - Tori Francis (Wicker), Taylor James, Mark Tebben, Noah Zinter

2012 - Tori Francis (Wicker), Liz Keefe, Alice Sturm, Mark Tebben

2011 - Caroline DiGiovanni, Tori Francis (Wicker) Lo Pagan, Duncan Simonson

2010 - Rob Eckman, Duncan Simonson, Danielle Szepe

2009 - Rob Eckman, Jen LaMonaca, Brooke McMinn

2008 - Lauren Hill, Jen LaMonaca



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, birthday parties and much more. Please visit www.fernbrookfarms.com or call 609-298-4028 to learn more about all their terrific programs!!



You have probably heard the statistics on how much time kids spend on tablets and phones in today's world. In other words, today's generation of kids simply do not get outside enough. But, here at Fernbrook Farms, we get outside! We encourage kids to explore the natural habitat around them and we nurture their connections to food, agriculture, and the environment. The benefits of this time in nature is both priceless and timeless. Of course, there are the physical benefits but there are also the emotional benefits. This can easily be seen in a child's behavior after they have spent the day on the tablet compared to a day outside. And the best part about getting outside with us is, we have FUN! We like to enjoy our time with nature and create memories that will last a lifetime. We hope kids will want to continue to get outside and we envision people making meaningful connections with our natural world in order to become responsible stewards of local and global sustainability and agriculture.

We hope you can join us in our programs and in our quest. As always, feel free to walk the trails or visit the farm animals over at the education center when picking up your share and if you should have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask!

Thanks!

Brian Kuser, Education & Summer Camp Director

Fernbrook Farms Environmental Education Center

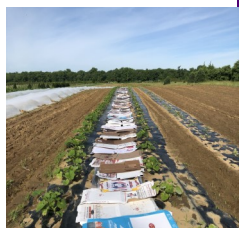


Project Pizza Box!



4,000 pizza boxes!?! Now that's farming. For the past few years we have collected your pizza boxes and used them in our mulching / weed suppression systems. This allows us to repurpose a non-recyclable item and recycle it's carbon back into the soil rather than shipping it to a landfill or incinerator. In conjunction with straw or leaves, the

cardboard provides a biodegradable walkway and weed barrier that adds organic matter to the soil and provides protection for earthworms and other soil critters. In 2019 we worked with the Bordentown City Environmental Commission to establish a pizza box collection bin in Bordentown and we recovered about 2,000 boxes from the bin in 2019 (about 500 a month). It was sometimes a burden to have to go retrieve



pizza boxes from a slightly overflowing bin in the chaos of summer but we aspire to have the farm be a place that not only grows food but helps our community tackle vexing problems like climate change, waste disposal and soil loss. I think this effort has demonstrated that people, for the most part, will do more to be a part of the solution. Places like San Francisco collect compostables at the curbside as you would trash or recyclables and in many ways, compostables, which make up a third of our waste stream, are less complicated to recycle than glass, plastic etc. As a society, we really need to rethink our waste stream—how to create less and how to better deal with the waste we do create. We hope we are demonstrating that folks like you and farms like ours can be a part of the solution!



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 share-holders got a good value for their food dollars in 2019. It breaks down like this:

In the farm shop we gave out 362 pounds per share (409 in 2018) of food over a 26 week season for an average of 11 pounds per week. In the U-Pick fields, we distributed 77.4 pounds (94.1 in 2018) over that period for an average of 3 pounds per week. In 2019 a share was \$660. So if you got your food from the shop every week and did all the U-Pick, ***you paid \$1.82 per pound. If you only got food from the shop and didn't do any U-Pick, you paid \$2.31 per pound.***

Our 10 year average is 12.7 pounds per week from the shop and 3.9 pounds per week from the u-pick fields. Our 10-year average is \$1.88 per pound doing no u-pick and \$1.44 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 __ 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, melons, squashes, etc. You could have an amazing year in high value crops like lettuce, spinach, and garlic 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. However, by farming alongside nature, that means that we are also at it's mercy. 2019 left us (and many other farmers across the country) literally under water in the spring, drowning out an unexpected amount of crops in our fields. We lost some tomatoes, eggplant, squash, peppers, and our newly renovated perennial bed. In June alone we got 5 inches over the average amount of rain for the month!! Looking at the harvest numbers though, we still did well and were able to provide you with lots of food over the season thanks to our sustainable growing practices. And I promise that this year we will do our best to beat the 2019 totals! Thank you for supporting your local farmers and chemical-free farming. A CSA cannot function without the 'C', Community! Here's to your health AND your wallet!



\$\$\$\$ - Reminder that a ***full share*** for the 2020 season is \$675. \$125 was due with your registration, \$275 is due Feb. 15th and the remaining \$275 is due by May 1st. Our ***TEN WEEK SHARE*** is \$360 with \$125 due at registration and the remaining \$235 due Feb. 15th. Checks can be made out to 'Fernbrook Farms CSA' and mailed to the PO Box listed on the front. AND you can now register and make payments ***on-line*** at fernbrookfarms.com! If you have questions about your balance or want to talk about a payment plan, contact Jess at jess@fernbrookfarms.com



Record June Rains

set us way back and the 2 fields they were in became untenable. It was a drag for us and for you. We did go down south to pick berries from our friend Jen at B and B farms so we did have fruit for you but it was not from our fields and it wasn't as much as we would usually have. (We do have fields we think will be good for Spring 2020 and beyond!) Besides the strawberries, we had some of our best June food ever as beets, carrots, cabbage, napa cabbage, lettuce, squash, cucumbers, peas and beans were all very strong. But it took a lot of hard work because (weather alert) June 2019 gave us around 9 inches of rain which is more than double the average June total. And much of it came between June 1st and June 20th giving us some serious ponding around the farm. This came on the heels of 2018 which gave us over 67 inches of rain in what was the wettest year on record for the county. We sustained real damage to peppers, eggplant, tomatoes, squash, potatoes, and flowers. And our renovated perennial bed got walloped - sage, catnip, rosemary, hyssop and lavender all got drowned out, the standing water was that serious. Extreme rainfall is a growing concern as warmer air has the capacity to hold more moisture. As farmers we are trying to plan accordingly but when fields get flooded there aren't any good options. Among the gloomy weather we got a bright spot in the form of a new crew member—Bentley! Jess adopted Bentley in April and he seems to love the farm, the squirrels, the tall grasses,



Jess & Bentley

the woods and the farmers (also cheez-its). It has been fun having a farm dog with us! We also had 13 pigs on the farm. We get 'feeder pigs' at the farm in Spring and raise them until early Fall. This year's heritage breed pigs which included some red waddlers from our friend Taylor James, did very well. With the help of spent beer grain from Tindall Road Brewery and rich pastures, the pigs sized up very well for us this year and our pre-ordered pork bundles were a big hit! The pigs give our farm fertility, some income, meat and they provide teachings for our farmers on how to raise livestock. Sam even kept an Instagram account just for the pigs. July: an exciting yet somewhat feared month. Too much work and too little time. We weed, we plant, we harvest, we pack and deliver boxed shares. That takes up a lot of time but there is so much more on the to-do list it becomes a little overwhelming. Every July I question my sanity. This year we also processed some

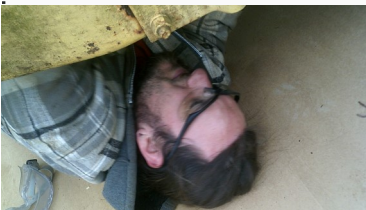


tomatoes! Jess led the effort to get our plum tomatoes and other ingredients to a processor in PA who jars salsa and pasta sauce. The end products were amazing and we sold all that we made. Looks like a project we'll expand on for 2020! One real bright spot this summer was the addition of our first ever summer intern Mr. Alex Robb. Alex is a local guy who attends TCNJ and participates in a service program which led him to Fernbrook. He was



looking for something more intensive so we carved out a position for him. Alex's no nonsense, let's get it done attitude helped him jump right in during the heat of the season. He also brought a knack for US history, 92.5 WXTU and backyard homesteading. August is the time when we all try to take a week off to recharge the batteries. We send the crew up to the NOFA Summer Conference at UMASS to gather with other young farmers and maybe even learn a thing or 2! But before you know it we start losing farmers to their fall semesters and August blessedly turns to September. The funny thing about September 2019 was the *lack* of rain. We got around an inch for the month and it was warm meaning that after some pretty wet weather, we had to start moving a lot of water. It was the latest in the season we ever had to irrigate! Nuts. Around the second week of October the rains returned in fact we had about 5 inches of rain that month. It looks like we will be about 6-8 inches over normal for the year. The Fall brought us lots of cover cropping, apples from Strawberry Hill Farm, garlic planting and some pretty nice harvests—carrots, Chinese cabbage, 'Gilfeather' turnips, and a lot of greens. We also had the best late beans we've ever had! On the bad side, the deer just ravaged our fall beets. We have plans for some deer fencing going forward as deer damage seems to be worsening. Well, we want to truly thank all of you for being a part of our 'Farmily' this season and every season. As the past 2 years have reminded us, farming is challenging and having the support of our terrific CSA members makes all the difference. We're so grateful to have your support and we look forward to seeing you in the Spring! Your Farmers,

Jeff Tober & Jess Brandeisky



Nick working on our JD1050

The Return of Nick Delmar !

We are very excited to welcome Nick and his fiancée Bitnari back to Bordentown and to the farm! Many of you know and remember Nick from his first three years working at Fernbrook from 2015 - 2018. Nick is originally from Moorestown, NJ and is dedicated to growing honest food. Be sure to find him around the fields or in the farm shop for all your classic rock questions.

Here are some words from Nick himself:

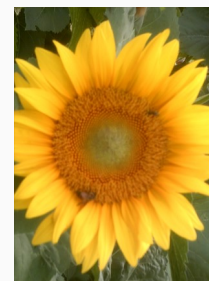
"Hey everyone, your friendly farmer Nick here! I am excited to be returning to Fernbrook as Field Manager. After working at the farm for 3 years, my fiancée and I moved to the D.C. area to start a new adventure. During my time there I worked for Love & Carrots installing gardens at schools, community organizations, and homes all over the DMV. After that I worked in cultivation for a medical cannabis company. I still found myself yearning for the long hours at Fernbrook with apprentices and shareholders, so I sought a part-time role at Owls Nest CSA in Prince George's County this past season. When I heard the exciting news that Fernbrook was in need of a whole new crew, I jumped at the chance to move back home and work in the fields that I know and love. I am looking forward to seeing old faces and new and working to bring you all quality and delicious veggies to fill your bellies. See you all when the weather gets warmer and the seedlings start to grow!"



- Regards, Nick.

Plastic-Free in 2020

Many of you know that in 2020 we are striving to be **plastic-free**! We farm the way that we do because we care greatly about the environment - without it, there wouldn't be food to grow or enjoy! There's no doubt that the mismanagement of plastic waste negatively impacts the environment. An estimated 8 million tons of plastic ends up in our oceans and that's only 3% of the world's total plastic waste (check out ourworldindata.org). So while it may take a little extra work to remember your reusable bags each week, be proud that you are making a difference and helping to create a healthier future for everyone. *This year every CSA member will receive 4 organic cotton reusable bags - put them right back in your car after emptying them and you'll be sure to remember them each week!*



LETTER FROM 'FARMER Q'

Dear Friends;

Welcome to our 14th year growing healthy, organic food. 2020 marks a new chapter for us; after 13 years of creative leadership, Jeff has moved on to new opportunities, but Jess Brandeisky, formerly our assistant manager, is taking over as the lead with enthusiasm, energy, new ideas and strong commitment. We are all very excited and proud to have her. Also as we look forward to 2020 there are many challenges. For whatever reason the number of shareholders in our CSA has been dwindling over the past few years. That's not just at Fernbrook but seems to be a trend throughout the United States. (The internet, Amazon, and delivery services abound). Many of you have been shareholders for 10 years or more and we truly appreciate your loyalty and support. And that's exactly what it is, your support. (CSA means Community Supported Agriculture). You are not just supporting a farm but most importantly you are supporting young people who want to make farming, sustainable farming, their careers...more like their life's work. Since our inception in 2007, we have trained over 30 apprentices and we want to continue to train many more as most of them are active, influential members of agriculture communities throughout the country. I like to think that Fernbrook is so much more than a place to get good, fresh, organic food. Coming to Fernbrook is an experience, an adventure if you will, especially for children. We have trails to walk, animals to visit, pick your own crops, not to mention a place of solitude, close to nature, God's created world, away from the constant hum of the electronic world. You will see some changes around the farm shop as well. Our sous chef, Matt, from the Inn will be giving cooking demonstrations and preparing many foods, both frozen and fresh for you to take home and enjoy. We will have additional sitting areas in front of the shop for you to sit and relax and converse with other shareholders. We plan to have more plants and trees for sale and there are always the flowers and herbs to pick. Jess has been working hard to prepare for this year. Nick is returning as her assistant and we will have two more apprentices. We especially are working to insure good fruit crops; blackberries, strawberries, and raspberries, and hopefully peaches. As I said in the beginning, all this is possible because of your support. We hope you not only renew your share but tell a friend about the experience of Fernbrook. Thank you, God bless you and your family. See you on the farm! -Farmer Q aka Larry Kuser. *Larry grew up on the farm and is President of Fernbrook Farms Inc.!*



Fernbrook Farms CSA 2019 ~ By The Numbers:

Total Shares: 332 Weeks Of Distribution: 26
Acres Used For Veggies: about 20

Acres in 'Fallow' (given a year off to build soil health) 2.6 acres
Average Weekly Farm Shop Distribution: 11 Lbs
Average Weekly U-Pick Distribution: 3 Lbs

Largest Share: 25.7 Pounds (Week 13 August 24th)
Smallest Share: 6.6 Lbs (Week 1 June 1st)

Lbs of Bok Choy Harvested: 1,369

Lbs of Sweet Peppers Harvested: 4,305

Lbs of Scallions Harvested: 1,456

Lbs of Cabbage Harvested: 6,183

Lbs of Cucumbers Harvested: 4,853

Lbs of Tomatoes Harvested (non u-pick): 9,620

Lbs of Lettuce Harvested: 2,262

Lbs of Summer Squash / Zucchini Harvested: 3,128

of Weeks Basil was available for U-Pick: 16 (thanks to an improved Rutgers variety!)
Figs Raised: 14

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

Number of Winter Shares Sold: 52

Number of Pizza Boxes Uses As Mulch: About 4,000!!! (Keep eatin' yer pizza!)

Infamous Statistic Of 2019 - 5" over the average rainfall amount for June!

Number of times the Crew won first place at Trivia Night: Once (Hey, it's harder than you think!)

Fernbrook Farms CSA
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