

Week # 17 Timken Farm Community Supported Agriculture

The Striving -Heather

Another farmer on the island asked, “what is the value of Timken farm running its business every year at a loss?” What kind of contribution are they making? And yet another queried is it responsible, the bounty we are providing in our CSA boxes? What happens when you go to another island farm and sign up for their CSA and are disappointed with their quantities and quality? One of our customers said “ you should not have spoiled us in the beginning”. They may be right, is it fair and responsible to the community to operate a business in the red, to personally subsidize what we are doing because we believe in it and because we love it? We know it is not sustainable for our family in the long term.

There are a lot of nights under the stars these days pondering just these things-I know one wizened farmer told Mark it will take 5 years to develop a farm that will work for you and the community. We are getting close to that five year marker. Let me give you some history. Mark interned here on the island on two farms-for a season four years ago now. We bought our land and he worked here alone for a year growing for our family and setting up systems-then that second season he was joined by another farmer, Jennifer Smith. The two of them worked to grow food and sell at the farmers’ market. There were many days when we came home with half of what we grew unsold. The food bank did well that year, but it was not a financially sustainable first year for our farm. The next year Dana joined us with new vision and inspiration-we spent Saturdays at the market again and started a collective with other island farmers to create a vehicle to sell to restaurants, health food stores, and caterers. Mark sat on the VIGA board, got more involved, the bottom line was the same. This year we are trying the CSA model-starting small, just twenty shares, and continuing to sell to restaurants, caterers, and the farmers’ market. Mark and Dana spent the winter planning and visiting other CSA’s . Our sales have increased , but not nearly enough to cover the expenses. Mark has been talking to farmers around the state and on the island this season, asking them frankly about what we are doing and seeking advice, input, connection. The answers have ranged from take it back to the beginning and grow for your family to -you have to get big more acreage, machinery and cheaper labor. Most admit it’s fairly impossible to make money with vegetables on a small family farm.

We talk late into the night about our vision, commitments, responsibilities, capacities, and passions. We realize we want and need to break even financially. We would like the farm to pay a fair wage to those who work here. We want to support and create community with people who want to learn how to farm and earn a living farming. We want to grow the best possible food for our community. And primarily we want to do meaningful work together that sustains our family. We will take a 5 year outlook-we have two more to go. We are striving, next year I know we will make some different choices.

We fumble, we make a lot of mistakes, we have a lot to learn. We want to farm responsibly; so that we support the overall system of farms here on island and in the region and so that we are supported by it. We love growing things, the least of all should be ourselves. So I tell you all this because we are committed and I want this to work for all of us. I don’t know what we will do next year, I am not certain what we should do-I know we are lucky-we do what we are passionate about as a family-but I don’t know yet if we are contributing to this community in a sustainable way-but this striving... it’s exhilarating.

Kate’s First Duck Egg-

Butter
Chive, parsley, thyme
Leek, shallot or onion
Bread
Sheep milk cheese
Tomato and salt
Egg-of any variety

Mince chive parsley and leek or onion-mix into softened butter. Butter bread liberally and place in an oven proof dish. Thinly slice or grate a Spanish sheep milk cheese or gruyere on top of bread-warm in the oven until cheese melts and bread softens-salt a tomato slice and fry an egg in the herb butter. Stack the warmed buttered bread with tomato and fried egg- begin.

Last Saturday Timken Farm entered a tomato tasting contest at the farmers’ market. The Judges were random customers shopping at the market. Here are the awards we took home:

First Place: Best Heirloom Tomato

Second Place: Heirloom Tomato

Third Place: Heirloom Tomato

First Place: Best Slicing Tomato

First Place: Weirdest Tomato

Second Place: Best Cherry Tomato

What’s in your box:

Lettuce- Baby Mix (Not Washed!)

Basil- Sweet, mammoth

Carrots- Bolero

Tomatoes- Sun Gold, Stupice, Mortgage Lifter, Oregon Spring, Sweet Million, Yellow Brandywine, Early Girl, Black, Green Zebra, Black Plum, Fantastic.

Squash- Sunburst, Crookneck

Cucumbers- Marketmoore, Lemon

Chard- Argentata, Bright Lights

Apples- Not known

Leeks- Lincoln

Potatoes- Yukon Gold

Parsley-