

SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS

FALL 2011





Hello Everyone!

Welcome to the first Sustainable Food Systems Newsletter. There's a lot going on related to food systems at COA, and we thought it would be helpful to have a way to stay informed. Here you will find information and updates from Beech Hill Farm and The Peggy Rockefeller Farms, the Trans-Atlantic Partnership, the Downeast Food Heritage Collaborative, conferences, ways to get involved, and more.

Happy Reading!

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Beech Hill Farm

Sales to the Blair Dining Hall (Take-A-Break, or TAB)

The farm's sales to COA this fiscal year will be the largest the farm has ever experienced. Already, before the end of the fall term, the farm has exceeded last year's record total. Sales to TAB have increased by 61% since 2008 through a commitment to consistent communication and collaboration between the dining hall and farm management. With some fine tuning, this exchange between farm and kitchen can continue to increase as crop planning is brought further in line with the needs of the college. The storage facility (see Janoah's piece about the root cellar!) is key to a major increase in these sales. We are still finishing up our storage carrot harvest which will most likely exceed 1,200 lb. of produce. These stored carrots could be served in TAB until spring carrots arrive next May in our greenhouses.

Fiscal Year* Sales		Calendar Year Sales	
2008/2009	\$9,143.31	2008	\$10,130.16
2009/2010	\$12,909.16	2009	\$12,108.91
2010/2011	\$13,792.24	2010	\$13,244.99
2011/2012 (as of 11/14/11)	\$14,526.381	2011	\$16,316.88

*July 1-June 30



Changing our Food Culture, Storing the Harvest

This term we have been selling Beech Hill Farm produce to the college community in bulk amounts for wholesale prices. Carrots, onions, squash, and beets – all produce that can be easily stored for up to 3 months – are still available. Please consider your needs for the holidays and how locally grown food could be incorporated into your household's feasts and daily uses!

Storing vegetables is not a common practice anymore and most likely makes 5 lb. of carrots daunting when compared to the small packages at the grocery stores from California. One easy way to store them is to fill a 5-gallon bucket with sawdust in a colder, dark closet in your house. Another



possibility would be to make a large batch of soup (carrot ginger or curried roasted squash soup to name a few) and freeze it for lunch or lazy dinner.

We believe local food should not just be for the summer farmer's market but enjoyed throughout the seasons. Please join us in sharing this year's bounty!

The Greenhouse is Taking Shape!

An additional 2,880 square feet of greenhouse space will be added by the current construction of the new greenhouse at Beech Hill Farm, achieving our goal of producing more extended-season food for the COA and greater MDI communities. This valuable growing space allows for better crop rotation between greenhouses and space to grow the sought-after summer vegetables for our farm stand with greater control over conditions, lessening disease and improving yields. It also gives us more space to grow greens and other cold tolerant crops for use in TAB and local markets.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has been giving local farms grants to build greenhouses with funds from the last Farm Bill because of the great benefits that can be reaped from these enclosed growing spaces. We are lucky to have support from the Partridge Foundation which has generously helped Beech Hill's efforts to offer more healthy, local produce to the MDI and COA communities. We have had great help from work-study through the fall, and most recently Buildings & Grounds (B&G), and we are well on our way to finishing the greenhouse!



Share the Harvest

Beech Hill Farm's Share the Harvest program hosted a Family Fun day to celebrate the fall with the community while raising money for the program's low-income gift certificates for next season. Apple pressing, games and food were enjoyed on a beautiful fall day ending our farm stand season and celebrating the harvest. Thank you to Lisa McCusker '14 and Bronwyn Clement '13 for making it happen!



Thank You to our Work-Study Crew!

Thanks to everyone who worked out at Beech Hill Farm this fall, we had a great time, and you all made it happen!



The Peggy Rockefeller Farms

Just to fill you in: The Peggy Rockefeller Farms consist of two parcels of land along Norway Drive—the Cameron property and the DeLaittre property—that were generously donated to COA in the spring of 2010. Totalling 125 acres, the properties have great potential to become ‘learning-labs’ for agriculture and land stewardship. There has been plenty of brainstorming about how the farms can best be put to use and a Farm Task Force recently finalized a set of goals for the farm. Little by little, the Peggy Rockefeller Farms are becoming more integrated with the college and we’re hoping to get more students out there by spring!



A Summer of Gardens, Fences, and Trails

This summer two 2011 COA graduates, Neil Oculi and Adelina Mkami, worked to get the farm ready for production. They planted garden beds, constructed fence, and built trails across the property. They also did lots of mapping work to better understand the constraints and best uses of the land.

The plot they planted was a 40-foot square organic vegetable garden near the farm house. The two prepared the soil, constructed deer fencing, and grew an array of vegetables. The plot has been put to sleep for the season but there are plans to build a second plot in the spring and to start a small community garden. In late spring, Stu Weymouth '13 was also busy planting a small permaculture garden behind the farmhouse which he filled with a number of edible perennials and heritage apricot and peach trees.



The Cameron property is about 2/5 open pasture now, and was once used for raising livestock. The permanent fences that Neil and Adelina started building will protect the riparian zone (along the creek) from grazing animals. More temporary fences will be needed to divide the pasture into separate grazing paddocks. Neil and Adelina finished collecting soil samples from the fields; we sent these to the soil testing lab to find out what kinds of amendments are needed for grazing or vegetable and fruit production. Suggestions have been made to raise cattle (or perhaps a rotation of cattle, sheep, and chickens for meat, fiber, and eggs) on the Cameron property while growing hay on the DeLaittre property.



Another key component of Neil and Adelina’s summer work was to construct walking trails to welcome and educate visitors to the farm. The trail currently starts by

the main farm house and winds around the cemetery, down to the creek, and up through the woods to the barn. Eventually the trail will wind through our woodlands, perhaps cross our neighbours' properties to Northeast Creek, and go across the DeLaitre portion of the farm. We hope the trail can be used throughout the year for hiking, learning about working farm and wetland conservation, and cross-country skiing.

The Trans-Atlantic Partnership (TAP)

For the past three years, COA has had a partnership with Elm Farm Organic Research Centre (ORC) in England and the Faculty in Organic Sciences at the University of Kassel in Germany. This Trans-Atlantic Partnership is focused on learning about organic agriculture and global sustainable food systems. It offers students opportunities to study food and agriculture in Europe, while also enabling collaboration between our institutions.

The Trans-Atlantic Partnership is in its final year and we want to make the most of these last months! ORC can host COA interns next spring or summer, and we will be organizing a conference on Sustainable Food Systems Education in April (more to come about this soon). Meanwhile, please talk with Molly Anderson or Matthew Doyle Olson MPhil '12 if you are interested in an internship or residency learning about organic farming in the bucolic English countryside. The TAP can provide for your travel expenses, plus a living stipend.

Online Learning

This term the TAP helped support a distance learning class in Redefining Food System Efficiency. Through the course, six COA students—Sarah Duff '14, Alyssa McConkey '13, Boglarka Ivanegova '14, Patrick McGorrill '14, visitor Lisa Eberbach, Abbey Verrier '13, and one COA graduate—Hannah Semler '06—have been examining innovations in food system activities that promote sustainability and long-term efficiency (in contrast to short-term efficiency which encourages externalizing social and environmental costs).

One of the key components of the course was conducting and recording interviews with various people working in the food system. Students investigated Fedco Seeds, Mandala Farm, Four Seasons Farm, Hannaford's and Red Tomato. As an online course, students were able to discuss with their classmates from Germany, Finland, England, and India and to assemble portfolios that describe



and compare what they have learned in their regions about the status of food system innovation.

We Had Visitors Too!

Other TAP activities this fall included hosting two students from the University of Kassel, Marie Hertkorn and Lisa Eberbach. "Coming to COA has been a great opportunity to learn about the larger picture of food systems and to think differently about my studies in organic agricultural science," says Lisa. "I found it really easy to get involved here and meet students. I especially loved being able to visit the Beech Hill Farm and then eat farm-grown produce in TAB; it's something very hands-on and satisfying."

Researchers from Elm Farm Organic Research Centre and the University of Kassel also visited to discuss possibilities for organic systems research on our farms. Bruce Pearce, Roger Hitchings, Jo Smith, and Professor Peter von Fragstein from the University of Kassel gave a Human Ecology seminar about their work, with a great introduction and description from Polly McAdam about her internship last summer at ORC. Our visitors met with students from the System Dynamics class at The Peggy Rockefeller Farms, and had a fantastic tour at Eliot Coleman and Barbara Damrosch's farm on

Cape Rosier. On the way back we stopped by the farm of Jay McNally '84 in Bar Harbor and saw a litter of newborn baby rabbits, a very pregnant African Guinea sow, three healthy young shoats (pig youngsters), and a flock of mixed ducks, geese and chickens.

The Root Cellar

Hopefully, COA's new root cellar won't turn out quite like Roethke's. "Chinks in the dark" are accurate, perhaps: the cellar makes use of the pre-existing stone walls of the basement below B&G and darkness prevents potatoes from sprouting. Yes, "dank as a ditch" is correct, in definition if not connotation—beets, cabbage, carrots, parsnips, potatoes, turnips, apples—the vast majority of the cellar's potential inhabitants thrive at 90% relative humidity and temperatures just above freezing. But "mildewed crates" and "pulpy stems"? Hopefully not. Ventilation, the next step in the construction process, should provide adequate aeration, and the plan includes lopping off leafy stalks (to prevent rot) before packing roots in wet sawdust for the winter.

Descending the cellar stairs (walk around back behind B&G to a wooden door, currently propped open to welcome in cold air), Roethke's descriptions might seem valid; water often drips off the vaulted brick entrance, which sports miniature stalactites, and the gravel floor is sopping. But further along is a more presentable concrete slab, newly enclosed by concrete walls; the 270 square-foot room lacks only a door and insulation for it to become a controlled root cellar. The basement's conditions are variable; areas capped by B&G are warmer and drier, and the rest is cooler and wetter where the building's insulating properties are lacking. The varied conditions hint at a place tailored to the storage desires of all vegetables—onions and garlic want cool and dry, winter squash warm and dry. This winter will be a test; we will monitor with probes and see how the carrots and potatoes fair in the cellar before Beech Hill Farm commits to grow—and TAB commits to use—storage vegetables.

A root cellar has long been on the wish-list for both BHF and the TAB kitchen. Any work-study student who has ever attempted to fit a produce order in the perpetually cramped walk-in fridge understands the need for space. And one of the most entrenched barriers to local food in TAB is that COA's season operates out of sync from the farm's. The simple cellar technology uses a combination of the consistent underground temperature and ambient air to provide natural cold storage and ventilation without energy input. A pipe in the ceiling allows warm air respired by vegetables (rendered nearly dormant from the cold) to escape, creating a vacuum and pulling in fresh cool outside air through a pipe that runs to the floor. Multiple well-ventilated

Root Cellar by Theodore Roethke

Nothing would sleep in that cellar, dank as a ditch,
Bulbs broke out of boxes hunting for chinks in the dark,
Shoots dangled and drooped,
Lolling obscenely from mildewed crates,
Hung down long yellow evil necks, like tropical snakes.
And what a congress of stinks!—
Roots ripe as old bait,
Pulpy stems, rank, silo-rich,
Leaf-mold, manure, lime, piled against slippery planks.
Nothing would give up life:
Even the dirt kept breathing a small breath.

chambers hold the potential to keep produce through the winter and into March.

During spring term of last year, COA consumed roughly 100 bushels (\$3,300 worth) of vegetables that could have been stored in a root cellar and produced on BHF, including 1,400 lb. of apples (from Washington and as far away as Chile), 1,000 lb. of potatoes (organic from Jonesport Maine), 900 lb. of onions, and 700 lb. of carrots (organic from California). Given this trend, the current enclosed cellar space could nearly meet the storage demand for winter and spring terms; however, both our cellar space our taste for root crops have room to expand. Collaboration between the root cellar, BHF, and TAB could see local cabbage, celery, parsnips, beets, leeks, turnips, celeriac, rutabaga, and other vegetables served in the middle of February and beyond.

With industrial agriculture one of the most destructive economic, social, and environmental forces around, losing hope seems so simple. Yet Roethke's poem provides us with the image of a teaming community clinging to life. "Nothing would sleep in that cellar;" instead students have gathered to mud walls during late-night dance parties. And I'm confident that the social cohesion we've cemented through construction can carry through to all facets of the root cellar.

~Janoah Bailin '14

Apples



Downeast Food Heritage Collaborative and Heirloom Apple Week

The Downeast Food Heritage Collaborative is a partnership between Woodlawn Museum in Ellsworth, Healthy Acadia, and COA. The goal of the collaborative is to provide downeast communities with opportunities to think and learn about the history of farming and to envision healthy food from local farms as part of their future. The partnership's focus on apples emerged as a direct result of Todd Little-Siebold's work with the history of apples and apple orchards in the area and the History of Agriculture: Apples class.

"The collaborative fosters synergies between education, health, and preservation," Todd explained. It has also meant that the work the apples class is doing can be directly connected to the community. "It's been exciting teaching this class while working with the collaborative. It's meant that we've been able to make more community connections and share our research. As a class we've been able to go out and identify trees and significant orchards in the area—we even think we've found a Bourassa apple, which was thought to be lost."

Apples are a significant part of Maine's agricultural history. In 1850, there were 10,000 known varieties of apples in the state and apples were a staple part of the diet in every farm and homestead—used in cooking, drying, and of course, making cider. Downeast Heirloom Apple Week was hosted in early October, with a series of activities to educate people about the rich history of apples in the area. There was a daylong apple festival at Woodlawn which included orchard tours, a hard cider making workshop, cider pressing, and children's games.



Woodlawn Apple Internship

This summer and fall Fill Piekut '12 completed her internship with the Downeast Food Heritage Collaborative, conducting research in the museum archives, giving talks on the historical food economy of Ellsworth, designing a traveling exhibit on downeast heirloom apples, and making lots of lovely posters and promotional material for the Heirloom Apple Week. Here are a few of her thoughts about her time there:

This internship was an excellent way to combine my interest in history, design, communication, and food systems. My primary-source research focused on the business records of John Black, a land, lumber, and food merchant who lived in Ellsworth during the first half of the 19th century. I was able to use original invoices of goods shipped to Ellsworth from Boston between 1793 and 1850, daily sales records of Black's general store, agricultural census records,



and Mrs. Black's personal receipts, to better understand Ellsworth's historical food economy and the Woodlawn Museum's former use as a small-scale commercial farm. I was surprised to learn that even in the 1820s, many Ellsworth citizens, including farmers, would go to Black's store and other general stores to buy meat, fish, and vegetable produce.

The Downeast Heirloom Apple Week was another focal point of my time at Woodlawn. I helped plan the event and also created the promotional materials and a poster exhibit. Making the exhibit, "An Introduction to Heirloom Apples," was an excellent opportunity to explore the role of graphic communication in food

systems change. The Apple Week attracted a wide variety of visitors to the museum for cider pressing, talks by apple experts, and a hard cider workshop.

The most enjoyable part of my internship, though, was when I was hired to work in the museum gift shop—I loved talking to the people who came to take tours of the house, who were usually interested to hear about apples and general stores in Maine.

I will continue my work with apples, design, and food systems change with my senior project, an information and identification guide to Maine heirloom apples, which I hope to publish by 2013. The next step is a trip to England to study the graphic representation of apple varieties in British horticultural manuals and advertising.

Farms, Orchards, and Cider in England

As we write, a group of students are travelling around England, visiting orchards and learning about the history of English agriculture through the lens of the production, consumption, and marketing of apples (and in turn, cider). Led by Todd Little-Siebold, the class is accompanied by John Bunker, Maine's local apple expert, and Alisha Strater from BHF. The trip is being supported by the TAP and will begin at the Organic Research Centre. The group will hopefully bring back ideas and inspiration from Europe about ways to promote local agriculture and local distinctiveness.

Community Food Security Coalition Conference

The 15th annual Community Food Security Coalition (CFSC) conference was held in Oakland, California in November. The theme this year was Food Justice: Honoring Our Roots, Growing the Movement. River Black '12, along with Molly Anderson, Matthew Doyle Olson MPhil '12, Lisa McCusker '14, Elena Gilis '14, and Dionne Dettmer '14 were able to attend. Here are some of River's thoughts about her time there:

Oakland, within the larger Bay Area's legacy of political activism, was the perfect place to hold this year's food security conference, which specifically addressed issues of racism and poverty in regards to access to healthy food and representation within the leadership movement. I attended such workshops as "The Role of the Ally: An Open Space Discussion" and "Perspectives on Dismantling Racism in the Food Movement," and I participated on a march on Trader Joe's calling for fair wages for the Immokalee tomato pickers. The Food Sovereignty Prize Award Ceremony was really interesting because Black Panther founder David Hilliard spoke and we heard from award recipients from around the world about their work around issues of food sovereignty. These recipients included the Landless Workers Movement (MST) from Brazil, the South Central Farmers of Los Angeles, the Grow BioIntensive Agricultural Centre of Kenya, and the

Movimiento Campesino a Campesino of Mexico. I especially liked hearing from the South Central farmers because I had just read about their 14-acre community farm that was destroyed to make room for development. Since then, the South Central farmers have farmed on a piece of land in Bakersfield, CA and run a CSA. These and other stories of acts of resistance to the corporate food system, both locally and globally, were very inspiring.

The workshops I got the most out of were the ones about shared kitchens and healthy corner stores. These stimulated ideas that I can bring back to my community in Lake County, CA where I plan to start a community art and education center on my father's farm following graduation.

Besides learning about food deserts, food hubs, and urban foodsheds, the most important things I took away from the conference was the term "food sovereignty" and a better understanding of the Farm Bill. Food sovereignty is distinct from food security. Food security refers to providing food or access to food for the poor and hungry. Food sovereignty meanwhile has much more of a political connotation. It refers to food as a basic human right first and foremost, rather than as a commodity. Food sovereignty includes concepts like agrarian reform, protecting natural resources, reorganizing food trade, ending the globalization of hunger perpetuated by multilateral institutions, and advocating social peace and democratic control.

In contrast, the USDA says that there are officially no longer any hungry people in the US, just those that are "food insecure" (source: pamphlet by Family Farm Defenders).

The Farm Bill on the other hand is a huge package of legislation that is up for reauthorization in 2012. I was very surprised to learn about all the myriad issues included in the Farm Bill—and that 67% of the Farm Bill is budgeted to SNAP benefits (food stamps), while 15% goes toward commodity subsidies (I would have thought commodities would be the biggest expenditure). Also included (hopefully) in the bill are grants to help small farmers, farmers of color, and other socially disadvantaged farmers. Because the policies included in this bill affect every aspect of our food system—"what we eat, whether our food is nourishing and affordable, what assistance our society provides to feed hungry people, what crops farmers grow under what conditions, global grain and fibre markets, and how rural land is used" (source: CGSC)—it is vital that social justice organizations get involved to help draft this legislation, and that there is communication between the different organizations so that their policies don't compete for resources. I hope to continue learning about the Farm Bill at the EcoFarm conference in Asilomar, CA this February.

Thank you so much to Molly Anderson and the Partridge Foundation for providing the opportunity to attend this conference!