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Rare Earth News



Farm fields in February still blanketed with snow silently await the approaching warmer days when once again the landscape will come alive with new life.

This month Debra Jo and I had the pleasure of traveling to Washington DC to visit with close friends, and to just simply take some time to get away for some R & R. While there we spent an afternoon at the Smithsonian Institutes National Museum of American History. One exhibit we looked at was named "Food: Transforming the American Table 1950-2000." While strolling through the exhibit I came across the section on the counter-culture food movement of the 60's and 70's. Talk about having a "blast from the past" experience. Reading along I stood entranced in front of the exhibit as the last fifty years of my own life flashed before my eyes. At that instant it struck me in a profound way realizing that I had been part of one of the most important eras in the history of our country. How incredible to see all this documented at the Smithsonian! When you see this exhibit you can't help but to appreciate the mass effort put forth by so many people over several decades, that paved the way to the better and healthier food choices we have today. The following segment is on a plaque displayed at this exhibit and I felt compelled to share this with you. From the perspective of a curators view-point this writing says it all about this time period. Its great to realize that this modern food revolution was an American experience worthy of having it's place among so many other major events that shaped our nation. Even more grand is knowing this exhibit will be on display for generations to come. If you ever have the opportunity to visit Washington D.C. be sure to put the American History Museum on your itinerary. Reading this may invoke some of your own memories of our past. We've all played a part!

“During the 1960’s and 1970s as waves of cultural and political change swept through American society, food became a tool of resistance, consciousness-raising, and self expression. Embracing the motto “You are what you eat” hippies, feminists, religious seekers, ethnic nationalist and antiwar and civil rights activists rejected the mass-marketed, mass produced food as symbols of the establishment they rallied against. These nonconformists made pilgrimages to Hindu ashrams, Sikh temples, and Buddhist retreats, while others volunteered for Peace Corps tours in developing countries. They sampled the communal life at music festivals and peace marches in the States. They came home (or left home) to create food co-ops, vegetarian and “natural food” restaurants, coffee bars, organic farms, and communes.

By engaging in a public debate about the politics of food, these grassroots movements brought to the table concerns about diet, hunger, health, and the environment. They raised questions about food safety and justice and how the food Americans ate was produced, prepared, and consumed, advocating new models of food production and new diets.”

* Transcribed from an exhibit at the Smithsonian National museum of American History.



We Love What We Do!.....Are We Making a Living?

Once again we’re right at the starting gates for the upcoming growing season and as always we’re very excited to get rolling with seeding and transplant production. We take a deep breath and then we’re off on a mission that will consume us for the next nine months. Year after year we enthusiastically look forward to the upcoming season. The love of our farm and what we do keeps our excito-meter pegged high and it should be no surprise to anyone who knows us that our job satisfaction and fulfillment comes from growing food for our CSA family members.

Over the past 15 years there has been zero off-farm income for both of us. For the majority of that time CSA membership fees paid all farm expenses and personal living expenses. This in itself was quite an achievement as many farms (of any kind) have at least one adult working off-farm even if just for health insurance benefits. In the past 2 years there has been a decline in general CSA membership, both for us and other CSA farmers in the area. Where we once had a waiting list we now have lower total membership count and have even accepted memberships after deliveries begin. Our assessment of this is a change in the times (increasingly busy lifestyles, more modern “health food” conveniences) and greater access/choices for local and sustainably produced food. We continue to see many core long-term members returning and have also noticed a trend of customers who leave for a year or two (maybe to try another CSA farm or means of acquiring food?) and then return to Rare Earth. This leads us to believe that our program continues to satisfy and please folks that strongly believe in the worth and investment of Community Supported Agriculture.

It is not our goal to upturn our 25 year old business model on its head and cater to those families that need or want their food source to be highly convenient. Raising fresh, nutritionally dense food especially on a small

scale has never been convenient and probably won't ever be. Choosing to partake in bringing whole foods to one's kitchen and table is about nurturing the physical, mental and spiritual body and community. Taking time to pause and admire the beauty of that deep orange carrot followed by the burst of sweetness the soil provided to it is just the start. Displaying self control to not eat the entire pound of carrots while standing at the counter so that the rest of the family can enjoy them with dinner (and because you already devoured the entire weeks offerings of long, tender pole beans on the drive home from your CSA pick-up site) is an experience you don't get if choosing to shop at the nearest grocery store all summer long.

Educating your children to enjoy and even crave a wide variety of produce along with lending a hand in the preparation of food, challenging yourself as an adult to try new vegetables, visiting the farm to make a personal connection with the land, the farmers and perhaps even other members all add to the list of benefits in choosing to purposely "inconvenience" yourself and prioritize personal growth and healthy living.

Without the support of folks who value these things CSA will not be able to continue providing a living for us or other farmers. And so as not to stash all our eggs in one basket we have branched out to more restaurant sales in the past 2 years. This balances out our income and allows us to continue providing food through the CSA program without one of us leaving the farm for off-farm income.

We hope that the interest in buying locally grown food will continue to hold interest (and grow stronger) with our local community members. It will be a very sad day if small farms fade entirely out of the landscape as big agriculture and business continue to grow. There are a lot of folks like Steve and myself out there who love growing food and wearing all the various hats it takes to manage a small farm business. But without the consumers demand and support for these enterprises they could end up being nothing more than a future exhibit at one of our nation's Smithsonian Museums.

Debra Jo

P.S. We firmly believe that part of the educational component of the consumer falls on to our shoulders as farmers. This is why we dedicate a great deal of thought and energy into year round newsletters. Our in-season newsletters contain as much information on the produce, how to use it and store it and specific recipes as we think the average person has time to digest. As with any good teacher we are also life-long students so feel free to offer suggestions for improvements, modifications or additions to our current educational offerings.

Be the change that you wish to see in the world.- Mahatma Ghandi

Further reading in a similar vein:

<http://genfaux.blogspot.com/2015/12/doing-something-real-but-are-we-making.html?m=1>

<http://www.polyfacefarms.com/2016/02/03/ecological-eating/>

<http://www.takepart.com/article/2016/02/22/china-syngenta-smithfield>