



# News from Provident Organic Farm

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Season 4, Week 24

“dedicated to a safe, just, and sustainable food system”

November 7th–13<sup>th</sup>, 2005

## Notes From the Field, vol. 4 # 24

I feel the need to clarify a few points made in last week's newsletter. At the meeting I told the group that we had two problems: land and labor. As you know the land is leased from Jane Dayton, a very dear friend of my family. Since I started managing the land the organic matter in the soil has improved and its ability to give respectable yields is considerably better than four years ago. The first year was a drought year and we had no problems with drainage. The second year was a very wet year and the poor drainage in parts of the field became evident. For the third year, I rearranged the blocks so I would not lose all of any crop, but could lose a portion of a crop grown in the poorly drained areas. Last year was a moderate year and we had our best yields from most of the field. This year the rainfall was either too much at once or none for an extended period of time. What all of this means is that at least half of the field cannot be considered reliable to produce vegetables without extensive drainage work. Jane and her two sons are unwilling to invest the money in the necessary drainage work, nor are they willing to allow it to be done if I were to make the investment. I have not been able to establish the rotations with cover crops that are necessary to manage the land sustainably. I have had to intensely crop the usable portion of the field to produce the amount of food needed for 140 shares. To maintain the present level of membership, we will have to involve other farms. I am working on that now and so far there is strong interest from the farmers I have discussed this with. Having other farmers grow some of the crops for us has the potential to solve both the land and labor problems.

As I said in a previous newsletter I am burnt out on trying to find and keep good help here. You have no idea how many times I hear “Oh, I would just love to work on an organic farm” or some variation on that thought. Sometimes it lasts two minutes, sometimes it last two months, but it seldom lasts long enough to get the return on the investment of my time and energy. The prospect of starting a farming season in 2006 with a crew of rookies is out of the question for me. My daughter, Heather is my most experienced and for obvious reasons, my most dedicated helper. This year she told me she only wanted to work on harvest days and with markets if I needed her. I had to respect that. This year I felt like a hostage to my help, fully aware that many tasks were not being done in a timely fashion or correctly in many cases, but that I would not find replacement help. I am not totally

opposed to hiring help for this farm. If I could find one person (or that person found me) that demonstrated a strong, realistic level of interest in learning the craft, I would be willing to make the investment. Some of you have told me that hiring Hispanics is the best solution to my labor problems. While that may be true, I consider this a fallback position and not workable in my particular situation for many reasons. I am unable to provide housing on the farm and it is very unlikely I could find any local housing. Understandably, Hispanic workers want to live and work within a community of other Hispanic people. Jorge, Rosa, Juan and Trini were a tremendous help this fall after Heather went back to school and Kelly and Rodney quit, but it was difficult coordinating the schedule. It worked only because their other farm work and my workload were diminishing. It is unlikely that this arrangement would work well during the height of the season.

As the saying goes: life is like a river, it flows where it needs to go, not necessarily where we want it to go. With this in mind, perhaps the problems we are facing will be best solved by the solutions that are surfacing. In a discussion with one of our members a few weeks ago, he told me that the typical reaction by a businessperson to these types of problems is to contract (get smaller) and that 75% of the time it is the wrong decision. In my frustration and disappointment with this season, I was ready to throw in the towel.

Recently a young man contacted me who is interested in learning about organic farming. He has 20 acres that he would like to convert to organic practices. In our discussions thus far, he seems to be serious. ?????????? He may be willing to invest a year as a learning experience while he transitions the land. A young couple from Cambridge who I met at the Easton farmers market has been coming down to spend a day each week working with me. They have helped build a compost pile and rebuilt some of the raised beds in the garden for the over-winter crops. All for a lousy meal prepared by me! CSA member, Lori Lilly has been able to help me on Mondays. The Peer Connection Team, who distribute the shares at Asbury Church on Tuesdays, has been coming down on Thursday afternoons to help with the harvest. Some of the working share members have pulled extra duty to help get the work done. Some members who did not get working shares have helped out, too. For all of this, I have a grateful heart and back.

Onward,

Jay

Jay promised, "...the most beautiful crop of cauliflower I have ever grown" so here are two delightful ways to enjoy it. Both can be served as a side or main dish....perhaps at the **Final Harvest** potluck in a few weeks?!

### Indian Spiced Cauliflower and Potatoes – Serves 4 as a side

1 3/4 lb cauliflower, cut into 3/4-inch-wide florets  
1 1/4 lb Yukon Gold potatoes, peeled and cut into 1/2-inch cubes  
1/4 c vegetable oil, divided  
1/2 tsp cumin seeds  
3/4 tsp salt, divided  
3/4 c finely chopped onion  
2-3 tsp finely chopped garlic  
2 tsp minced fresh jalapeño, including seeds  
2 tsp minced peeled fresh ginger  
1/2 tsp ground coriander  
1/4 tsp turmeric  
1/4 tsp cayenne  
1/2 c water or vegetable stock  
- lemon wedges

Preheat oven to 475°F.

Toss cauliflower and potatoes together with 2 tablespoons oil, cumin seeds, and 1/4 teaspoon salt. Spread in shallow baking pan and roast in upper third of oven, stirring occasionally, until cauliflower and potatoes are both is tender, about 20 minutes. Cauliflower may be slightly browned.

Sauté onion, garlic, jalapeño, and ginger in remaining 2 tablespoons oil in a large heavy sauté pan or skillet over moderate heat, stirring frequently, until soft and beginning to turn golden, 8 – 10 minutes. Add ground cumin, coriander, turmeric, cayenne, and remaining 1/2 teaspoon salt and cook two minutes, stirring constantly. Stir in water or stock, scraping up any brown bits from bottom of pan, then gently stir in roasted vegetables. Cook, covered, stirring occasionally, another few minutes. Serve with lemon wedges on the side.

**Notes** - Butternut squash may be substituted for potatoes or they may be eliminated altogether.

### Roasted Curried Cauliflower Serves 4-6

12 c cauliflower florets, about 4 lbs cauliflower  
1 lg onion, peeled, quartered  
1 tsp coriander seeds  
1 tsp cumin seeds  
1/2 c olive oil  
1/2 c red wine vinegar  
3 1/2 tsp curry powder  
1 tbsp Hungarian hot paprika  
1 3/4 tsp salt  
1/4 c chopped fresh cilantro

Preheat oven to 450°F.

Separate onion quarters and combine in large roasting pan with cauliflower. In a small skillet over medium heat, stir coriander and cumin seeds until slightly darkened, about 5 minutes. Coarsely crush with mortar and pestle; transfer to medium bowl. Whisk in oil, vinegar, curry powder, paprika, and salt. Pour dressing over vegetables and toss to coat. Spread vegetables evenly in single layer and sprinkle with pepper.

Roast vegetables until tender, stirring occasionally, about 35 minutes. Sprinkle with fresh cilantro. Serve warm or at room temperature.

Adapted from **Bon Appétit**, R.S.V.P., September 2004.

#### *Comments & Contributions*

We welcome your comments and contributions, including recipes!

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