



# Harmony Valley Farm

An update for our Community Supported Agriculture Members - Since 1993  
Local & Madison Edition

August 13-14, 2010

## The Cervantes Clan by Terri

José Manuel Cervantes Sanchez started it all—he introduced us to the beauty of the H2A visa program and introduced us to so many of our valued seasonal workers. Nepotism is not always a bad thing!

When I first started here in August 2007, we only had 12 workers with the H2A visa – we were a little bit of a smaller operation then and we struggled to find enough hard working locals to fill the rest of the peak season positions. Summer only students do not fit into our April – November busy season schedule. They start too late and want to leave, just at the height of the busiest time of the year – September & October. Plus, don't forget that we work in rain or shine, hot or cold. Who will be here every day, on time, with a smile, willing and eager to work? Someone working for spending money or someone working to support a beautiful wife and children (and in José Manuel's case and Richard's opinion, the nicest house in the rancho/pueblo.) We went up to 16 visas in 2008, 22 in 2009 and 28 this year! Not only do the guys have to jump through hoops to qualify for a visa, so does the farm. We have to show a need for seasonal workers, show the effort to find local applicants, and have suitable housing inspected and available. The H2A program allows José Manuel (& the other heads of household) to spend the winter months with family and earn a good living for them year round.

We have an amazing group of workers again this year – how in the world did we get so lucky? It turns out it's all in the family. First, we have the Zuniga brothers, cousins and brother in law from Hidalgo: Benji, Nemi, Frezvindo, Lorenzo, Miguel & new this season, Juan Diego (a mighty fine dancer, as you know if you were here for the barn dance). Frezvindo & Benji get the wagons loaded and ready for the day each morning at 7:30am. Then there is the Rodriguez family from central Oaxaca state (Rey, his nephew Hector, Felix & his son Gerardo & his daughter in law Adelaida). Plus, we have the crew from Corral de Piedras, near San Miguel de Allende en Guanajuato. All come from rural areas so they had some agricultural experience from home. Some had worked in the U.S. before, mostly in the Florida orange groves, in Cali vegetables or milking cows here in the Midwest or Canada.

Let me try and illustrate the interconnections we have from the guys in San Miguel, in particular the Cervantes family: José Manuel referred his father, J. Ascension, brother to the ever handsome & dapper Anto-

## THIS WEEK'S BOX

**SWEET CORN:** Make a spice lime butter to spread onto grilled corn. Simply add cayenne, salt, and lime juice to room temperature butter.

**GRAPE OR SUNGOLD TOMATOES AND TOMATO VARIETY BAG:** Classic caprese salad is a very refreshing summer salad: Tomatoes, fresh mozzarella, basil, and red wine vinaigrette.

**EDAMAME:** Edamame are best eaten cooked and cooking them makes it easier to shell. Cook in the pod in boiling water for 5 to 7 minutes or roast in oven 12-14 minutes. Drain and toss with soy sauce or salt. Squeeze out of the pod for a quick & tasty snack. Store edamame in a paper bag in your refrigerator. Fluff every day to redistribute moisture.

**ORANGE UKRAINE OR ITALIA OR PIMENTO PEPPERS:** Roasted peppers make a great ingredient in omelets. Roast peppers in the broiler or over flame until all sides are darkened. Place in a bowl and cover with plastic. When cooled, peel and deseed, and dice or slice.

**SUMMER SQUASH:** Cut zucchini into spears and grill. Garnish with mint, capers, and minced onions.

**ITALIAN GARLIC:** Use thinly sliced garlic with olive oil, chopped fresh parsley and thyme as a marinade for chicken, pork, beef or tofu. Drain the oil off, season with salt and pepper, and grill.

**YELLOW ONIONS:** Beer battered onion rings go great on the side or on top of a burger. Make a roasted garlic herb aioli to accompany. Roast garlic and puree. Add to mayonnaise (bought or homemade) and chopped herbs.

**GREEN BEANS:** One of my favorite summertime dishes is sautéed fresh green beans with bacon, onion, and parsley. Add a splash of apple cider vinegar at the end.

**SWEET SARAH AND FRENCH ORANGE OR BUTTERSCOTCH MELONS OR YELLOW OR RED WATERMELONS:** Try sprinkling sea salt on melons or watermelons. If you want to get real crazy, make a mixture of salt and ground Thai chili and sprinkle over the melons. This week is the peak week for melons - we hope you enjoy!

**TOMATILLO SALSA PACK:** Use tomatillos in salsas or dips raw, roasted, or grilled. Remove the husk from the tomatillo and rinse. Don't forget to pick up a salsa recipe at your site!

**CHOICE -ITALIAN BASIL:** Plan ahead for basil in February! Blanch basil in boiling water for 30-45 seconds. Drain and rinse with cold water. Squeeze out any excess liquid. Puree with a splash of extra virgin olive oil until smooth. Freeze in ice cube trays or freezer bags.

## Produce Plus 25# Roma Tomato \$30, 3# Basil \$24, 10# Baby Beets \$18

Place your order by phone (608/483-2143 x2) or email ([csa@harmonyvalleyfarm.com](mailto:csa@harmonyvalleyfarm.com)) by 5 pm Wednesday, August 18. Local, Mazo & Cross Plains members: Please send a check for payment directly to the farm; your order will be delivered to your site on Aug 20/21, in a box with your name on it. **All other Madison orders will be available at our Farmer's Market stand on Mifflin, between 6am & noon on Saturday, August 21.** Madison customer, pay when you pick up at market. Thanks!

nio, Leon, & Miguel (the four eldest Cervantes brothers). Ismael, Miguel's son, is also new to the crew this year. It is sort of a running joke about how well dressed & coiffed the Cervantes family is. I get dirt under my fingernails working here in the office, but Antonio comes in from harvesting in the mud & rain still impeccable. On hot days it appears he does not sweat, never is a hair out of place, and his shoes are always clean and shiny. We don't know how he or the rest of the family does it, but it does appear to be a family trait.

J. Ascension's sons José Antonio (field crew) & Simon (packing shed, along with wife María – they met here at the farm, how romantic) work here, as does his son in law Manuel Vazquez. J. Ascension is godfather to Vicente (irrigation, cultivation, helps Richard clear trees), who is the best friend of José Manuel and brother of Lucio. Vicente referred José Antonio (Tigrito), who is married to his sister Lourdes.

Juan Vargas is godfather to one of José Manuel's daughters, and referred his nephew Daniel, who came to us from the wilds near Mexico City. José Manuel's wife's sister is married to Nestor, who's neighbor Angel is our resident butcher and animal caretaker. Another neighbor, José Ramón, is a new crew leader this year, harvesting many beans and greatly improving his

English! And of course our Madison customers should know the name Rogelio, one of our CSA delivery drivers alongside José Manuel, and occasional market truck driver.

Are you keeping this all straight? I had to draw a family tree of sorts to keep all these connections clear! And wait, there's more – we'll just call it little grafts on this family tree:

Leopoldo, a friend of Juan Vargas, referred his friend Leonardo. Both are married to sisters of young Tomás, who came here on our last available visa this year. Brothers Manuel (loads the Whole Foods truck late at night) & Rafael (cooks for the Hammel House every night, that's how good he is! Plus, he does all of our spraying & saved our tomato fields from blight!) recommended their future brother in law, Juan Pablo.

There are agencies out there that we could pay to recruit workers for us, but thankfully, we don't need them. We are happy to rely on the recommendations of our hard-working & trusted crew. They do the first screening for us to ascertain strength of character, work ethic and skill level. I think they might also help not only keep each other in line or on track, but also serve as a good support system and a taste of home for the six months or so that they are away from family and friends. They make a big sacrifice to come here and work in order to better the lives of not only their immediate, but many times their extended, family. Just think of being away from your spouse & children for half the year! They start the work day on time, are happy to work 6 days a week, take care of the housing we provide for them, and end the day singing, whistling or at least smiling. They take turns shopping, cooking & cleaning for their households & live together peacefully. Whenever I get together with them for a Saturday night bonfire & a few beers, the good feeling & camaraderie that I witness amazes me. I can't understand everything that is said in their rapid Spanish, but it seems to be good natured ribbing & storytelling.

Especially in this recent anti-immigrant culture, we're happy that the government created the H2A visa program so we can legally bring workers to our farm and so they can safely return home at the end of the season.

## Vegetable Feature: Tomatoes

Many factors play a part in how we decide what varieties of tomatoes will be grown here on the farm. Taste, color, disease resistance and fruit production are just a few of those factors, others include the way they are grown and how they are packed in your boxes.

Before we even put a seed in the ground, the soil is carefully prepared with a special fertilizer mix of fish, seaweed and sea minerals as well as the usual compost that all our vegetables receive. We believe that nutrient rich soil is the best way to help our plants resist disease naturally, along with the plant's genetics and the way in which the plants are cultivated. We use a stake and weave method for growing our tomatoes. Each plant is individually staked and tied on a raised bed with mulched rows and drip line for fertilizer mix and water; this allows the plants to dry out faster and keep contact moisture to a minimum. The plants are pruned to two main stems with three plants between stakes. Usually there are six or more horizontal levels to the twine we tie the plants up with between the stakes. Wet conditions increase the chance for disease and cracking, so keeping the plants off the ground is a must. Tomato crack happens when there is uneven water distribution; water is absorbed through the skin, leaves and ground. If too much is absorbed too quickly the skin can't handle the rapid expansion and splits, causing tomato crack. Early blight, a common tomato disease, kills the leaves from the bottom up – we always see some of this in our tomatoes. Late blight wipes out the entire crop, usually within a couple weeks. We hope to avoid this devastating disease, which hit WI & MI last season and again this year.

There are two growth types of tomatoes; determinate and indeterminate. Determinate grows to a short height around three or four feet and then produces fruit all at once. This is great for large scale tomato production, but here we grow a variety of tomatoes in all shapes and sizes specifically for you. We also grow indeterminate types of tomatoes. This kind continues to grow as high as we can stake them, creating a wall of tomatoes that we can pick from once they are ready. So what are the factors we consider when choosing what varieties to grow? It's a delicate balance of flavor, color, resistance to disease and fruit production. We like to deliver an array of taste and color for you to experience that you just can't get in a conventional grocery store or anywhere else besides maybe your own backyard. You will encounter many different shapes and colors of tomatoes throughout the season. You have already met some of the small (or chico as we like to call them) types of tomatoes. The thin skinned, orange, globe shaped Sungold, the red and yellow Grape tomatoes and the Black Cherry tomatoes. There are also other tomatoes like Pink Beauty and a nice pink colored Rose De Berne; its color is due to its thin transparent skin allowing you to "see inside" the tomato and sweet Orange Russian with its red streaked yellow skin and heart shaped body. Many heirloom varieties have excellent taste and are somewhat disease resistance but may only produce a few pounds of fruit per plant. Hybrids are more resistant to disease and produce more fruit, but might not have the taste that we think a tomato should have. So we test a lot of varieties to see which ones hold up against disease, have a preferred flavor and produce a good amount of fruit. Currently we have over 30 varieties growing that have passed the test or are being tested and will end up on your table at some point and time this season. Torpedo, Japanese Black, Black Velvet, Paragon, Polbig, Amish Paste, Romas and Red Slicers are some larger varieties you will encounter. FYI: The yellow and orange colored tomatoes tend to be a "drier" tomato while reds and pinks tend to be juicier allowing for different textures and culinary uses. The blacks add a nice brown/red/green color to a mixed platter.

So when do we pick our tomatoes? Well it's not the way the big guys do it. Most tomatoes in the stores are picked green and ripened with ethylene gas and the "vine ripened tomatoes" that you hear so much about are picked green and left to ripen on the vine while it sits in storage and then travels to your local grocery store a week later, finally ready for the display. The only true vine ripened tomato is the one that is picked right from the vine, fully ripe and ready to eat. We pick our tomatoes when they are beginning to "turn" from green to their true color. This allows for less chance of cracking, better packing in the box and showing up in your kitchen ready to eat. If they are still a little "green", just let them sit in your windowsill until they are ripe.

Store your tomatoes at room temperature until ripe. Tomatoes will become soft and lose their flavor if left in the fridge too long, so keep them out as long as possible until ripe and in the warmest part of the fridge (usually the compartments or shelves of the refrigerator door) once they have ripened.

This is a great opportunity to experiment with a variety of tomatoes that aren't easily available in stores. Please take the time to get to know your tomatoes and experience the different textures and flavors that go way beyond the common grocery store red tomato. Enjoy!

## Stuffed Tomatoes

Serves: 2 - 4

2 large tomatoes  
¼ cup eggplant, diced  
¼ cup onion, diced  
¼ cup zucchini, diced  
¼ cup peppers, diced  
2 cloves garlic, minced  
½ tsp salt  
¼ tsp pepper  
½ cup bread crumbs  
1 egg, beaten

-Preheat oven to 400° F.

-Cut the tops of tomatoes off and carefully hollow the inside of the tomatoes out with a spoon.

-Dice tomato insides and mix with remaining veggies. Add bread crumbs and egg to veggies and mix together.

-Stuff tomatoes with veggie mixture. If not all of the mixture will fit in the tomatoes, use leftover mixture to stuff other veggies with remaining mixture (i.e.: remaining zucchini or eggplant).

-Place tomatoes on a baking sheet and bake for 20 - 25 minutes

*Recipe by Summer Chef Jim Wells*