



# Harmony Valley Farm

An update for our Community Supported Agriculture Members - Since 1993

June 10-11, 2011

## Food Safety By Andrea Yoder

There are some things in life that you just do because "it's the right thing to do." We value you, our customers, and take your health and well-being to heart. We work very hard every day and get up the next day to do it again because our job is to grow food for you, and that is no small job to take lightly. Managing the farming aspect of growing vegetables is important, but it's not the only part of farming. In the farming community, there is currently quite a bit of chatter about food safety in light of the recent Food Safety Legislation that was passed and the European E-coli outbreak. Changes in politics aren't too much of a worry for us since we've been developing and implementing a food safety plan for about 10 years now. Yes, it takes extra time and energy to develop a plan and implement it, but our goal is to minimize the risk of contamination and prevent a food borne illness. Ignorance is not bliss in this situation and it behooves us to be aware of potential food safety concerns. If you don't look, you may not know a problem exists.

The FDA Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) was signed into law by President Obama on January 4th, 2011. It aims to ensure the U.S. food supply is safe by shifting the focus from responding to contamination to preventing it. The Centers for Disease Control estimate the annual incidence of food borne illness in this country is 1 in 6. The new food safety legislation is supposed to move food producers towards a greater level of food safety awareness by requiring written food safety plans, federal authority to institute a food recall and increased standards for imported food. These are all very good moves! We already have systems in place to facilitate a recall if there is an issue with a product. This is a requirement for obtaining and maintaining our organic certification. Unfortunately, the conventional agriculture industry does not have a consistent requirement for food recalls. This is why it takes so long to trace back and identify the location of product when a food safety concern arises. Small scale certified organic farms have not been a source of food safety problems. Historically, it has been large, industrial farms that have had problems with products. A local, certified organic producer with a food safety program in place will continue to be one of your safest food

## THIS WEEK'S BOX

**MINI ROMAINE LETTUCE:** Use the mini romaine lettuce to give a succulent crunch to your fresh salads. The dark green outer leaves are crisp and surround the crunchy midrib. Prior to use, wash well then slice in ¼-inch pieces and use in Caesar Salad or your favorite green salad.

**SAUTÉ MIX OR ARUGULA:** Sauté mix is a blend of flavorful greens that work well together when quickly sautéed in a small amount of oil. They have a spicy flavor due in part to the red mustard green that is part of the mix this week. Use in stir-fries or saute as a side to your favorite entrée.

**SALAD MIX:** Here you have the base for beautiful salads. The young, tender greens that are in the salad mix are good on their own or in combination with your mini romaine lettuce and baby white turnips. Garnish your salad with the exquisite pea vine.

**ASPARAGUS:** It's hard not to appreciate the tender green spears of asparagus. In a matter of minutes (3-5 usually), you can have delicious steamed or sautéed asparagus. Also, great on the grill when you baste the asparagus spears with a little olive oil. Store upright in an inch or so of water, covered in a plastic bag in the fridge, for 3-4 days.

**BABY WHITE TURNIPS:** Pearly white bulbs make these turnips stand out as a vegetable. Delicious eaten raw (greens included) or cooked quickly (no longer than 5-8 minutes). Remove the root tip just before washing and using.

**PEA VINE OR SWEET BABY BROCCOLI:** The tasty pea vines require a very short cooking time, so add last to any stir fry or cooked dish you are preparing. Pea vine is wonderful fresh in a salad with a flavor that's a cross between peas and spinach. Our first taste of spring broccoli & you will find nearly the entire plant to be edible. To prepare, remove the outer leaves, cut into bite sized pieces and add at the end of cooking, since they cook faster. Then cut off the small broccoli head and cut it into bite size pieces. You may want to trim the outer layer of flesh from the stem to expose the tender center. The florets will require slightly more time to cook than the other parts, but all parts are edible and can be used in salads or stir fries.

**POTATO ONIONS OR WHITE SCALLIONS:** Potato onions are very similar to scallions, except the greens are longer and the bulbs a bit bigger. The taste is fresh and wholesome and works well in raw or cooked dishes. Store wrapped tightly in refrigerator.

**GREEN GARLIC:** Green garlic is young garlic, before the bulbs start to form. It has a fresh garlic taste that is both mild and appealing. The flat greens will help you identify the garlic from the potato onion. Use the bulbs the same as you would mature garlic to flavor your favorite dishes. Try some green garlic with your spinach in a sauté. The green garlic, this week, is just a little more mature; you might have a piece that is slightly forming a bulb. If you do, you may find the flavor to be a bit more pungent and the garlic a bit more firm-chop or mince for use.

**BOK CHOI:** See veggie feature on the back of the newsletter

choices.

Over the past several years, we've been working diligently to continue to develop and improve our food safety program at Harmony Valley Farm. We follow the food safety practices developed by Cornell University and the USDA, referred to as "Good Agricultural Practices (GAP)" and "Good Handling Practices (GHP)." We participate in an annual third party food safety inspection that is based on these GAP/GHP criteria as well as more extensive food safety standards. This past April, the inspector paid us a visit and spent the day here checking out all areas of our operation including thorough inspection of all our facilities and fields. This is a voluntary inspection that we choose to do annually. It has always been very informative and, over the years, has trained us to see our farm through a different set of eyes...food safety eyes. We passed our inspection this year with a perfect score and we were issued our food safety certificate. Along the way we,

once again, walked away from the inspection with a lot of valuable information and resources we can utilize to continue to improve our food safety practices over the course of the next year.

Presentation is everything. One of the first observations the inspector makes is checking out the appearance of our farm as he drives down the road and pulls into our driveway. He has always emphasized that the appearance of the grounds, buildings and fields is a strong indicator as to how much care, attention and value the producer has for food safety. We take great pride in maintaining beautiful fields and clean perimeters in growing areas. We emphasize picking up and removing trash and debris, washing tractors, equipment, and wagons after use. When facilities, equipment, and storage areas are kept clean, neat and organized on a daily basis, it's easy to notice if there are any breakdowns in the systems.

There is potential for food to become

contaminated all along the food chain from producer to end user. One of the most important acts of prevention we can all do is wash our hands. Every spring we conduct basic food safety training for all our employees, which includes reviewing the proper procedure and frequency for effectively washing one's hands. We provide hand-washing stations in the field as well as in the packing area and have signs up all over the farm to remind everyone to wash their hands.

Pest control is another important aspect of our food safety program as pests can be vectors for disease. In our packing shed areas, we do a thorough weekly inspection of all our packing and storage areas as well as other areas including our greenhouses, shop and employee locker areas. We look for any signs of pests including nesting, tunneling, scat droppings, dead bugs and insects, and any other sign that tells us an animal, bird, bat, bug or insect has been there. Birds, bats, mice and other pests can cause contamination of vegetables by getting into storage and processing areas, packaging and machinery. We have done extensive alterations to many of our facilities in order to prevent entry into critical areas. If you visit our farm, you'll probably notice curtains and screening in our salad washing and outside washing areas. We have mouse and fly traps placed all over the farm and monitor them regularly. In the field, we try to eliminate harborages for critters by removing brush, trimming trees, removing brush piles, and keeping the fields and surrounding areas clean and free of debris. When we do have a crop that we know the critters like, we fence it to prevent entry. This can help keep raccoons out of corn and melons and deer out of a field of lettuce or spinach.

Manure and feces are always a concern, as this can be a potential source of contamination. We follow the National Organic Program (NOP) guidelines for compost and raw manure applications, which allow raw manure to be applied in a growing area greater than 120 days before harvest at a minimum. We only apply manure to our fields in the fall when we are putting them to bed for the winter. Anyone working with compost or with our animals is trained to wash their shoes, hands and equipment after working in one of these areas and before entering a packing area or area of harvest.

As the result of one of our past inspections, we implemented a microbial testing protocol. Every month we take random samples of surfaces throughout our packing shed and test for the presence of E. coli. We also do weekly cleanings of our floor drains in our packing shed and test both drains and ice machines for the presence of Listeria. We also test our water supply annually to ensure the water we use to wash vegetables is safe for drinking and consumption.

## Vegetable Feature: Bok Choi

The bok choy's relatively slim stalks are satiny, its curly leaves are spruce green and although they may resemble Swiss Chard, they taste nothing like it, having a mild, juicy sweetness that suggests cabbage romaine.

Pak choy is another name for bok choy and is mainly cultivated in China, Korea, Japan and the United States. The plants, 16-20 inches tall, are ready for harvest after just two months. Bok choy does not form a closed head like cabbage. Instead, bright green leaves top its white stalks and when the base is trimmed the stalks separate, much like celery.

Bok choy's growing season is limited to the cooler weather of spring and fall. Spring crops, well loved by the tiny garden pest the flea beetle, must be covered to survive. Bok choy, like many brassicas, does especially well in the fall. Fall crops withstand light frost very well, actually increasing in sweetness.

Often touted as the garden vegetable highest in calcium, Bok choy is a great nutritional gift. Like other leafy greens, bok choy can be simply steamed. To create an Asian flavor, toss the steamed bok choy with a light coating of toasted sesame oil, soy sauce, and rice vinegar.

When preparing bok choy, trim the base and discard any blemished leaves. Separate the stalks and rinse thoroughly. Cut the leaves from the stems and tear them into bite size pieces or cut into chiffonade. Cut the stems into crosswise strips or dice.

To cook the bok choy, for most dishes, cook the stems and leaves separately, as the latter take only seconds to soften. Stir fry, adding the stems first then add the leaves last along with some liquid to finish cooking the stems. Make simple soups by combining stock, shreds of meat, ribbons of bok choy leaves, and a snippet of ginger. Simmer five minutes.

To store, wrap the bok choy in a damp towel or put in a plastic bag in the crisper drawer of the refrigerator. Store up to one week. Leaves will lose integrity and wilt if allowed to dry out.

One of the projects we are working on now is developing a HACCP program for our facility. This formal process allows us to look at the procedures and flow for moving vegetables through our facility. It starts with receiving produce from the field, cooling and storing, washing and packing and then distributing them to you. We will take a critical look at all the potential sources for contamination along the way and then put systems in place (if we don't already have them) for preventing contamination.

These are just a few practices we implement on our farm. If you visit our farm, you'll see signs of many other efforts such as color coded brushes for cleaning, color coded totes for compost waste, boot wash buckets, employees wearing gloves and hair nets and much more. We do take this seriously and consider it an important service to offer our consumers.

Remember to do your part to keep your food safe, too. While we wash most things here at the farm to remove field dirt, we recommend that you wash them at home prior to using them. Take care to avoid cross-contamination in your home by using a separate cutting board and knife for preparing meat and make sure you wash that meat preparation area, tools and your hands after working with meat. Store fruits, vegetables and other food at an appropriate temperature. Raw meat and eggs should be stored on a lower shelf so as not to contaminate other food and produce by potentially dripping on it from above. We hope you consider our food safety program and efforts to be a valuable part of your interest in our farm and your purchases.

### Creamed Bok Choi And Turnips

Serves four

Recipe by Chef Bonita

1 head bok choy  
2 potato onions  
4 baby white turnips with greens  
2 tablespoons butter  
1 tablespoon olive oil  
salt and pepper to taste  
4 tablespoons white wine  
7 tablespoons vegetable or chicken stock  
2 tablespoons sour cream

-Cut off the base of the bok choy and separate the stems, wash well. Cut the leaves into strips and slice the stalks into ½ inch strips.  
-Wash the baby white turnips and cut off the root tip. Quarter the turnip bulbs and cut the greens into bite size pieces.  
-Dice the potato onion bulbs along with some of the green stems.  
-In saute pan, heat the butter and olive oil, add the diced onions and cook for 1-2 minutes to soften. Add the sliced bok choy stalks and the quartered baby turnip bulbs. Add salt and pepper to taste and cook 3-4 minutes.  
-Pour in the wine and let cook to reduce the liquid to almost dry.  
-Add the stock and stir in the bok choy leaves and the turnip greens, continue cooking 2-3 minutes.  
-Stir in the sour cream and serve.