

THIS WEEK'S BOX:

Broccoli
Cauliflower
Cucumber
Fennel
Garlic Scapes
Green Savoy Cabbage
Green Top Carrots
Green Top Mixed Beets
Green Zucchini
Patty Pan Squash
Red Leaf Lettuce
Sugar Snap Peas



News from the Fields of Driftless Organics

Week #4! As we welcome in July (already?!), we are absolutely thrilled to see a week of sun and more importantly, no rain! The fields are finally drying out enough to get back into them and we keep plugging away. This week saw transplanting of your fall cauliflower, plus some green bean seeding and another round of arugula put in. We are getting things done and it feels good!

I've been thinking a lot about the price of food, where it comes from, and how the heck a head of broccoli from such far away places like California, Mexico, (or even farther) can be so darned inexpensive. I went to my wife, Dani, for the answers. She says this is one of the most common questions she gets asked at her job.

Co-op shoppers are frustrated because it's completely counter-intuitive to have to pay more bucks for broccoli that was grown ten miles away than from 1,500 miles away. This question becomes even more baffling when you consider most of that long distance shipping is on big refrigerated trucks & usually changes hands at least twice between farmer and store. The reasons for the price difference are many and it has lots to do with scale, labor and weather.

The economy of scale is never more apparent than in farming. Most of the produce being shipped from far away -

organic or not - is coming from giant corporate farms that are growing a few crops on hundreds & sometimes thousands of acres with giant and extremely specialized equipment. This specialization and mono-cropping streamlines the entire growing process cutting all sorts of costs along the way.

No different than any other multi-billion dollar industry, competition in the vegetable market is fierce and price wars are common. The more the farmers compete with each other, the more the prices go down. Like with commodity crops, often times farmers don't have

much say in the prices of their produce - it depends so much on the fickle nature of the market.

Another very real and important component in this equation is labor. Growing vegetables is an extremely labor intensive process and by paying immigrant labor poor wages at piecemeal rates, farms are able to pump out produce at low costs.

Weather plays a huge role in far away food prices as well. If you look, the hotspots for growing much of the nation's food are in areas that get very little rain. They make up for this with irrigation and this means the farmer has that much more control over the final product.

There are a lot of things that can go wrong (as we've learned over the years) when you are solely dependent on mother nature for your water. More control equals a more consistent and less disease prone crop. Yields go up, costs go down and the once again, you've got cheap produce.

Dani sums things up by stating "... it boils down to the fact that it costs a lot to be a small righteous farm. It costs a lot to take good care of your farm & your soil & your family & your workers. But all of that care comes through in the food you grow, & in my humble opinion, is worth every penny."

--Mike and Dani



Dan and Keeffe picking bunches of collard greens

THIS WEEK'S BOX by Dani Lind

Broccoli – is full of antioxidant vitamins & phytonutrients. To preserve them, eat it raw or lightly cooked. I like blanching it for a minute or two in salted boiling water to sweeten it up & make it a bit easier to chew. 1 cup of steamed broccoli contains over 200% of your RDA of vitamin C!! Try it in the broccoli-cauliflower salad recipe, right. It should be stored in plastic in the fridge & eaten within 4 days or so. If you can't get to it by then, freeze it: cut into florets, steam blanch for about 3 minutes, cool in ice water, & pack in freezer bags.

Cauliflower – is closely related to broccoli & also high in vitamin C & antioxidant phytonutrients. I love it roasted with oil, garlic, & lemon then tossed with Parmesan & lots of black pepper. Or simmered in curries. Or made into cauliflower beer cheese soup (we'll put that recipe in a fall newsletter!). Store in plastic in the fridge for up to 5 days, trimming off any brown spots that may appear.

Cucumber – just one in your box this week. A great addition to a salad or sandwich. Store in the crisper drawer of your fridge.

Curly Parsley – can be added to salads, soups, sauces, sandwiches... Freshens the breath & packed with minerals! Store in plastic in the fridge for up to a week.

Fennel – can be used in salads, soups (great in minestrone or potato soups), pasta sauces, stir-fries. I like to use the bulbs & stems as a general substitute for celery in just about anything, like tuna salad - recipe to the right.

Garlic Scapes – can be chopped up & used instead of garlic in a ratio of about 3:1 since they're a bit milder. Add nice color & crunch whether used raw or cooked. Will keep in plastic in the fridge for weeks or in a vase on the counter (just change the water every few days) for up to 2 weeks. Discard the fibrous pointy stem & use the rest.

Green Savoy Cabbage – is hands down the most lovely cabbage ever. In flavor & texture it's like a cross between green cabbage & Napa - use it accordingly. It makes beautiful & tender coleslaw or a lovely addition to salads or stir-fries. Store in a plastic bag or vegetable crisper in the fridge. If the outer leaves start to wilt, just strip them off.

Green Zucchini – is such a quintessential summer veggie! This weekend when you've got the grill going, try slicing them into thin strips the long way, brush with olive oil, sprinkle with salt & pepper, & lay them on the grate, turning once. Delicious! Leftovers are fantastic in sandwiches, pasta, or eggs.

Green Top Carrots – first carrots of the year! These early carrots are tender & mineral rich. Throw the green tops in the compost before storing the roots in plastic in the fridge.

Green Top Mixed Beets – oh boy do I love beets. Chioggias are the lighter red ones & are a bulls-eye striped Italian heirloom variety. Grated raw on salad, sliced into rounds or wedges on a veggie platter, or roasted or boiled whole & served hot with butter or cooled & marinated for salads (my favorite takes roasted or boiled, peeled, & sliced beets & drizzles olive oil & plain yogurt over them, topped with fresh mint & toasted walnuts - one of the most beautiful dishes ever to take to a potluck!).

Red Leaf Lettuce – should be stored in plastic in the fridge & used up within 4 days or so. Inner leaves make colorful "boats" to float the fennel tuna salad!

Sugar Snap Peas – are like candy! A wonderful snack all by themselves, or with dip. Tasty stir-fried or sauteed, too - just don't over cook them or you'll lose their juicy crunch.

Yellow Patty Pan Squash – can be grilled like the zucchini, or sliced & sauteed or stir-fried. Keeps a few days on the counter or about a week in the fridge.

Broccoli-Cauliflower Salad with Blue Cheese & Sunflower Seeds

5 cups broccoli & cauliflower florets
1/2 small red onion, diced
1 cup blue cheese, crumbled
1/2 cup sunflower seeds, roasted or raw toasted

Dressing:

2 Tbsp. mayo
1/3 cup creme fraiche, sour cream, or plain yogurt
2 Tbsp. sunflower or olive oil
2 Tbsp. honey
2 Tbsp. fresh lemon juice
1 tsp. fresh lemon zest
salt & pepper to taste

Bring salted water to a boil in a medium pan. Have a bowl of ice water ready. Blanch broccoli & cauliflower florets for 1 to 2 minutes, drain, & immediately cool in ice water. Drain. Meanwhile, mix dressing ingredients in a serving bowl. Toss in cooled & drained vegetables, onion, cheese, & seeds. Serves 4-6.

Fennel Tuna Salad

1 can tuna
1/4 cup fennel stems, chopped
1 garlic scape, minced
3 Tbsp. mayo
2 Tbsp. grainy mustard
fennel leaves, chopped, to taste
3 Tbsp. parsley, chopped
dash of hot sauce
salt & pepper to taste

Mix ingredients together in a bowl and refrigerate. Great in sandwiches, on crackers or just all by itself.