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News from the Fields of Driftless Organics

Week #15! What a beautiful week it has been so far! We are ripping through the week and loving every minute of it. Thanks goes out to Driftless crew member, Feliciano Puig for writing this week's newsletter article about Driftless Organics farmer and co-founder, Noah Engel.

Farmer Profile: Noah Engel

Noah Engel was born and raised on a small organic dairy farm near Soldiers Grove WI, just three miles up the road from the current headquarters of Driftless Organics. While raising their kids, Noah's parents, Marta and Dave Engel, kept a herd of 50 Jerseys, raised their own young stock (about 120 head), and grew all of their own feed. When Noah was eight, he was called upon to start helping in the barn before and after school each day. He began with general chores such as feeding the calves, helping with the milking and laying fresh bedding, but soon had his eye on learning to operate the farm machinery. He learned to drive tractor on an old IH Farmall 140, purchased for him by his mother, and was soon requesting to help with making hay, field preparation, seeding, and fall harvests, completing his first solo tractor work by age ten.

Summers were devoted to farm work as well, and it was during this time that Noah and his older brother Josh decided to start their own side business, which they called Rainbow Potatoes. They began by renting ¼ acre from their parents and growing a variety of potatoes, including several that they still sell today: All Blues, German Butter Balls, and Fingerlings (Russian Banana and French).

Upon expanding to a one-acre plot they also grew squash and calendula. The summer of 1994 marked their first season at the Dane County Farmers Market in Madison, WI, where Marta had arranged for them to sell their produce a card table booth. Their profits that summer reached a grand total of \$70, which they contentedly split fifty-fifty.

Although Noah's desire to farm undoubtedly began during the years that he worked alongside his family, it wasn't until early high school that he was able to realize his dream of becoming a vegetable farmer. Rainbow Potatoes would soon become Engel Bros, an increasingly serious and productive endeavor, and by graduation time, Noah was looking for an apprenticeship on a medium-scale vegetable farm. During the growing seasons of 2003 and 2004 he worked for Gardens of Eagan in Farmington, MN, where he was fortunate to work closely with Martin and Atina Diffley. As part of their small, well organized crew he had the opportunity to be part of virtually every aspect of the operation from installing irrigation systems to cultivation to pack shed organization. Then, after having worked hard all week, Noah returned home nearly every weekend to participate in the work that was needed to keep Engel Bros afloat.

In 2005 Noah returned to the Driftless Region permanently and worked for a season at Harmony Valley Farm near Viroqua, WI. While his work there was primarily tractor related, he continued to observe and learn from the general organization of the farm and CSA in preparation for the leap to farming independently full-time. A year later, Josh and Noah took that leap and established Driftless Organics.

Noah's role on the farm is multifaceted: he is directly involved in and/or oversees all tractor work on the farm including bed prep, seeding, cultivation, and mechanical harvests (root crops: potatoes, carrots, parsnips, etc., and others such as garlic and onions). He also oversees the maintenance department, ensuring that all twelve tractors, farm implements, trucks, and pack-shed equipment are serviced and functioning properly. Thirdly, Noah plays an integral role in the general organization and management of the harvest team, determining the method and timing of each harvest. And finally, Noah is a problem solver. He is the person we look for when

THIS WEEK'S BOX:

- Broccoli
- Butternut Squash
- Cilantro
- Eggplant
- Garlic
- Green or Purple Beans
- Green or Red Kale
- Parsnips
- Poblano Peppers
- Radishes
- Red Leaf Lettuce
- Red Onions
- Saute Mix
- Shallots
- Sweet Peppers
- Tomatillos
- Tomatoes

the potato bagger needs a new plug, if there is an electrical issue with the ice machine, or problems with the water pressure. He is also in charge of general building maintenance and the installer of new appliances in the pack shed. If he isn't out in the field he is usually around and, albeit busy as can be, generally available to answer questions or give necessary instruction.

When I asked Noah why he loves farming so much, and what it was that made him want to build his life around it, he answered that he loves the freedom that comes from working for yourself, the variety of work it entails, watching the fields turn green in the spring, and constantly being surrounded by so much beauty. He says he can still remember the excitement he felt as a kid when he and Josh would take a few days off from school each fall to help bring in the corn silage; the cool, crisp air, the sense of urgency and importance of such a big harvest, working long and hard until the job was done. Farming still feels that way to him, and it's so satisfying.

--Chana



THIS WEEK'S BOX by Dani Lind

Broccoli – perfect for a stir-fry, a side dish, or to saute with garlic in lots of olive oil & toss with pasta & Parmesan. Best stored in plastic, in the coldest part of your fridge.

Butternut Squash – the easiest squash to peel - making it a great soup squash when you don't have time to roast. If you do have time to roast - then cut in half and put on a cookie sheet with water, with the cut end facing down. Roast at 350 until soft (check with a fork).

Cilantro – Store in a plastic bag with a paper towel in the fridge. Use up within a few days.

Eggplant – Just a small mini eggplant either Oriental or Italian. A perfect amount for a stir fry. YES, eggplant is good in a stir fry! Store on the counter.

Green or Purple Beans – possibly the last of the season - the cold nights we've been having halt flowering.

Green or Red Kale – Steam & drizzle with oil & lemon juice, saute in oil or butter & garlic & toss in pasta, or simmer in soups.

Parsnips – first of the season! They'll get even sweeter as the temperature goes down. Mix with potatoes to mash or add to stews or roasts. Store in plastic in the fridge for several weeks.

Poblano Peppers – There are 3 of these and they are dark green. They have some heat - use caution when handling or your fingers may burn. Delicious in fajitas, enchiladas, or eggs.

Radishes – cool weather means salad fixings are back! Store in plastic in the fridge. Wash greens carefully & eat within a day or two in salads. Roots will keep up to 2 weeks in plastic in the fridge.

Red Leaf Lettuce – wash & dry it to use in sandwiches & salads. Keep in plastic with a paper towel in the fridge up to a week. Sadly, the last of the year.

Red Onions – slightly sweeter than yellow onions, great shaved on salads & sandwiches, sauteed & simmered in pasta sauces, or caramelized. Store on the counter.

Saute Mix – add to salads for some

spice or saute or stir-fry until just wilted. Doesn't keep well for more than a few days, in the fridge.

Shallots – very fancy onions. Delicious anywhere you'd put an onion, but really shines when it can be highlighted in simple dishes, raw or cooked.

Sweet Peppers – mini sweets, red roasters & pimientos. The similar size & shape of the red roasters as the poblanos make them ideal companions when stuffing (for the people who can't handle the slight to moderate heat of the poblanos). Remember the red roasters are red, the poblanos are dark green. The mini sweets are nice single serve peppers for salads, sandwiches, eggs, etc.

Tomatillos – These are the round green tomato-looking things with the brownish-green husks. They are primarily used for salsa verde (see recipe from August 12-14 newsletter). Or try the recipe below. Store in the fridge.

Tomatoes – Again, just a random sampling of tomatoes here - and not enough for much other than on a sandwich or mixed in with a dish. As far as tomatoes go, this is the year to forget!

Tomato Poblano Frittatas

8 eggs
2 Tbsp. milk
salt & pepper to taste
1/2 tsp. dried oregano or marjoram
2 Tbsp. butter or olive oil
1 poblano pepper, seeded & cut into thin strips (use gloves if you don't want burning fingers)
1 red sweet pepper, cut like the poblanos
3 cloves garlic, minced
1 c. tomatillos, husked & halved
1 c. cheddar or jack cheese, shredded

Turn oven on to broil. Whisk together eggs, milk, salt, pepper, & herbs in a bowl. Stir in half of the cheese. In a large well-seasoned cast iron pan or oven-proof skillet, melt butter or oil over medium heat & swirl to coat. Add pepper strips & saute for a minute or two. Add garlic & tomatillos & saute for another minute. Pour in egg mixture & let cook for a couple minutes, until starting to set around the edges. Place pan under broiler for about a minute, add remaining cheese, & return to broiler for another minute (be careful not to burn it!). Serve immediately. Serves 4 - 6.

Parsnips in a Dark Beer Glaze

(recipe from MACSAC's 'From Asparagus to Zucchini')

1 pound parsnips (about the amount in your box), cut into small chunks
1 cup stout or brown ale
1/4 tsp. cinnamon
1/8 tsp. cloves
2 tsp. butter
salt & pepper
1-2 Tbsp. maple syrup (optional)

Combine parsnips, beer, & spices in heavy saucepan. Cover & simmer until barely tender, 8-10 minutes. Remove cover & simmer hard until liquid reduces to a glaze. Stir in butter. Season to taste with salt & pepper. Stir in optional maple syrup. Makes 3-4 servings.

Not sure of what to do with items in your box? Stir-fry them!

Really, just about any veggie is good stir-fried. Start with the onions, add the meatier things like carrots or parsnips - things that take longer to cook. Then add veggies like peppers and broccoli. Then comes the softer things like green beans and garlic (I like the garlic a little under-cooked as it is more potent this way). Lastly comes the greens. I usually throw in the tamari or Bragg's at this time as well. Use to top rice or Asian noodles.