



Where the Land, Food, and People Come Together!

March 2009
Vol 3, Issue 1

Season Three: Big Changes Ahead!

Welcome to the third season of Three Rivers Community Farm. As I write this newsletter, the sun is shining, and the air is warm. Spring is here!! The winter has seen only one snow and very little rain, but it has felt colder than winters past. It has also felt hotter too. We've had several bizarre 70 degree days in January, February, and March and even a few 80's. As we are reminded every year, the weather is becoming less predictable and we must learn to roll with it. Whether too dry or too wet, too warm or too cold, we've seen it all at this point and feel more experienced to handle whatever Mother Nature throws our way.

We are excited to update our farm members of the many changes we've made to the farm for this third year. First, and most importantly, let us introduce you to our three interns for the season. We have hired a full-time intern, Beth Bergstrom, who will be starting April 1st and working through the end of the season. Beth is a 2008 graduate from Principia College currently living and snowboarding in Colorado, but is originally from Iowa. Beth has spent a portion of this last year travelling through India and pursuing her interest in sustainable agriculture. She hopes to start her own farm in the future and we feel fortunate to have her energy, inquisitiveness, and good sense of humor around the farm.

Bethany Boyer-Rechlin will be interning with us in April and May as part of an independent study at Principia College. She will be graduating this upcoming June and her interests cover the map (literally--her major is global studies)! At the farm she will be focused on general exposure to small-

continued on page 3

What's New in 2009

So what does 2009 hold? Less farm members to start. This year we are decreasing our membership to 150. We have only **fifteen memberships** left so please send friends to (www.threeriverscommunityfarm.com) to find out how to join. We decided to take a small step back from last season and put more of our energies into improving our soils, increasing yields, decreasing weeds, and continuing our work on infrastructure projects.

First, we have spent the winter months working with a soil consultant from Midwestern Bio-Ag. Soil samples were sent and from there we established a long-term plan for restoring the health of our over-worked, depleted soils. We discovered that our soils are out of balance and low in key nutrients: calcium, potassium, and many micro-nutrients. They also lack many of the fundamental elements to good organic crop production: living organisms, organic matter, and good soil structure. The restoration involves continuing a lot of what we've already started: cover crops, incorporating animal manures and compost, and crop rotation. This takes time, as much as five years to see significant improvements. But Segue and I are so proud to be on this journey. We are rebuilding soils for a future generation and learning to farm in a way that will require less inputs; instead build the health of the soil so that it can feed itself and in return feed us.

Weeds are another challenge we have faced the last two seasons. Over the winter we purchased a plastic mulch layer. Farmers have used mulches for centuries to suppress weeds and conserve moisture.

continued on page 2



Look for the 2009 3 Rivers Farm Calendar in your mailbox by late April....



What's New in 2009 continued...

Mulches can include straw, leaves, newspapers, and synthetic mulches like landscape fabric. We will be using a combination of landscape fabric and a new biodegradable mulch made out of corn starch. This will all but eliminate weeding in such crops as melons, tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, squash, and cucumbers, which will free up more time to weed carrots, flowers, and onions. We can also put more of our energy into cover cropping areas where there are no crops which will suppress weeds and help restore fertility. Our hope is that in the future we use the mulch layer less as we get the weed pressure more under control. The fewer weeds that go to seed each year, equal less weeds for the future. The farm is going to look very different this season with the combination of more mulch and more hands!

Finally, we've been busy with more infrastructure projects. In November we constructed a 30 x 96 foot greenhouse behind the barn. We now have our own space to start seedlings (we are still using the Principia greenhouse for early February sowing) and space to experiment with early greens, tomatoes, and cucumbers. A greenhouse investment is a lot to swallow upfront (ours cost over \$7,000 and that is without an expensive heating and cooling system), but should pay for itself in a few years with these high value crops. Segue and I had no idea how expensive even the seeds are for greenhouse tomatoes and cucumbers; almost fifty cents a seed. However greenhouse-grown tomato

and cucumber plants stay healthier longer because rain cannot spread disease. Maybe we will finally achieve a tomato season that stretches from June through October.

Our other infrastructure project this spring has been the installation of an exclusion deer fence. Our deer fence is of the 8 foot woven-wire fence style; however, instead of woven-wire it is woven black netting. This type of fencing is cheaper and easier to install than woven-wire and we are going to be able to enclose about three of our acres this year. The most deer enticing crops will go inside while other areas are protected using the electric fencing from the first two years.

Segue and I couldn't be more excited about these improvements. We are optimistic that our third season will be our best yet!!



Season Three: Big Changes Continued...

scale organic agriculture, raising laying hens, and collecting oral histories from local area farmers.

Finally, starting in June and going through the summer months, we are lucky to have Caleb Stevens interning at Three Rivers. Caleb is an artist with a commitment to having his own small garden someday. Caleb is graduating from Principia in June as well, but not quite ready to leave Elsay yet. Look for Caleb, easel and paints in hand, out in the fields this summer!

We've been fortunate to have interns from Principia College the last two spring semesters. We teach them everything we know in those two short months: from greenhouse seeding, to tractor operation, to harvesting, and the hundred steps in between. In return they help us plant thousands of onions, weed strawberries, and build chicken coops. They also provide plenty of questions that continually challenge our knowledge of farming, and they offer valuable input about how the farm can improve. Our full-season intern, Beth, will experience small-scale vegetable farming in even more depth. She will experience a season just as we do: from the first seeds in the greenhouse through the last pick-up and closing down of the farm. She will learn not only about the day-to-day operations of a vegetable farm, but also the hidden underbelly of successful farming: our business operations, marketing, selling at the farmer's markets, budgets, taxes, and whether it's a good idea to work with your spouse (ask us in December, not in August)! We are also looking forward to visiting other local farms in Illinois and Missouri once a month to view different operations (from apiaries, to ranches, to wineries) and learn all the different ways small farmers are successful.

We have one more person who has expressed interest in interning this summer; we are waiting to see if funds will allow. It is encouraging to know that there is so much interest with young people in organic farming as a profession. We are excited to share our knowledge with these new green thumbs, just as our farming mentors did in the past. Thanks for supporting this training!!!

About the FOOD!

Unique Varieties=Unique Taste!

Deciding on varieties is a little like writing out a Christmas wish list. We try to grow a mix of productive hybrids and traditional heirloom varieties. Here is just a sampling of the new, quirky, downright bizarre vegetables that we will be trying out this season:

dragon tongue green bean
amethyst radish
baby bear pumpkin
big mama sauce tomato
sugar nut melon
flashy trout lettuce
socrates cucumber
lemon drop cherry tomato
slick pick summer squash
peach habanero pepper
queensland blue winter squash
red zebra tomato
honey orange melon
tamosa savoy cabbage



Farm Events

see you there....

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!!

May 2nd, Saturday, 9-Noon: Volunteer Work Morning: Want to get your hands dirty and see how your food is grown? Come see the farm at the height of spring!! Pizza lunch provided for volunteers.

May 12th and 15th: The first week of pick-up, Tuesday and Friday from 2-7 PM; with Mother Nature's cooperation of course!

June 6th, Saturday 5PM: The Best Salad Bar in the World !! Potluck at the farm. Please bring your favorite salad (or any other favorite dish) to share, chairs, and utensils. Bonfire after dark. Come enjoy the farm!



ThreeRivers Community Farm
PO Box 185
Alton, IL 62002

(physical address:
22867 Chautauqua Rd.
Elsah, IL 62028)

