

Vegetable Notes

December, 2002

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This issue of Vegetable Notes gives information on marketing, management, organic certification cost sharing, pest management and sprayer cleaning and maintenance. The calendar also lists upcoming meetings. There are also announcements for the upcoming all-day Vegetable and Berry Growers' meeting in December, the North American Direct Marketing Conference and the Annual Northeast Food and Farm Gathering.

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"GOING LOCAL"

By Cathy Roth, UMass Extension

Each year growers in Massachusetts produce a remarkable bounty of food. At the same time, the survival and sustainability of our farms and our local food supply is threatened. During the last several years, community members have come to recognize that small, working farms are essential for fresh and healthy food, as well as vital to the economy, environment, and cultural identity of the places where we live. As a result farmers and community-based groups are working together to build a local food system that better serves shared values and needs.

There are currently more than 50 such "local food and farm groups" in the Northeast region. Three of these active and successful local endeavors are working with growers in Massachusetts - Berkshire Grown, (Berkshire County), Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture (CISA - Pioneer Valley), and Southern Massachusetts Agricultural Partnership (SEMAP).

This collaboration allows growers to do what they do best - grow fresh and healthy food and develop direct, one-to-one relationships with buyers. It also allows food and farm groups to focus their efforts where they excel - getting growers and buyers together and educating a larger public about the value of local food and farming. Some of the ways these three MA groups are working with MA growers include: diversifying; selling to stores and supermarkets; selling direct from the farm; expanding market choices; finding markets for a new farm; understanding buyers' needs and vice versa; selling at a farmers' market; developing a new product; networking farmer to farmer.

Amy Cotler, Director of Berkshire Grown, describes one aspect of this collaboration:

"Our purpose is to support and promote locally based agriculture as a vital part of a healthy Berkshire economy and landscape. We know that different personalities work

best in different markets. Wholesale, farmstand, selling to chefs, farmers' markets: there is no one way that is right for everyone. The right product, personality, approach, and business savvy - all need to go together. Farming is a business and those who succeed learn to reinvent themselves in terms of the market. We help facilitate that process. One of the main ways farmers benefit from Berkshire Grown is through our Business to Business ("B2B") program. We get growers and buyers together and help them make the connection. There are now over 60 buyers and 90 farmers in the B2B program. Because it's the Berkshires, we've been particularly successful in matching small and large farms with small and large restaurants and institutions."

Don and Judy Leab, growers from Hancock, MA, have reaped several benefits from working with Berkshire Grown. Judy says, *"Berkshire Grown (BG) helps retail, because it keeps people aware. BG did some nice ads for PYO this year, and I do see people take the county-wide farm maps we keep at our farmstand [Berkshire Grown Buyers' Guide to Locally Grown Food, Flowers and Plants]. I like the fact that they keep in front of the public that we still have farms here and these farms have fresh foods available. We've been in BG from the start, and in the UMass Extension food and farm discussions that BG came out of. Don and I are interested in keeping agriculture 'alive and well' in the state, not just in the county; we lose infrastructure otherwise. When farms disappear, the fertilizer dealer, the hardware store where you buy your tools, the machinery dealer get farther and farther away. Central Tractor, a farm store that carried everything you need, went bankrupt; we now travel 50 miles or depend on UPS. As we changed from dairy to vegetables and smaller commodities, BG made sense for us to be part of. The concept was good, and it's good for farmers. Financially, we'd be better off selling the land for development, which we call 'the last crop'; it's not something we want."*

Working together, growers and food and farm groups are solving some of the problems of being a viable enterprise in a challenging period for Massachusetts's agriculture. At the same time they represent one example of "going local" - recognizing the value of local food, appreciating the skills and knowledge of those who grow and provide it, and understanding the relationship between a strong local food system and a strong local economy.

To read about nine growers who are successfully working with food and farm groups, you may order the new UMass Extension Publication, "Straight From the Farm - Farmers and Local Food and Farm Groups Tell How They Are Changing Farming in the Northeast," by Rena Gill, 26 pages, \$5.
Available from: lauriec@umext.umass.edu.

For more information contact the following food and farm groups in your region:

Berkshire Grown: Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture (CISA):

Amy Cotler, Director Annie Cheatham, Director
P.O. Box 983 893 West Street
Gt. Barrington, MA 01230 Amherst, MA 01002
Phone: 413-528-0041 Phone: 413-559-5338

bgrown@bcn.net;
<http://www.berkshiregrown.org/>
<http://www.buylocalfood.com/>

Southeastern Massachusetts Agricultural Partnership (SEMAP):

Irene Winkler, Coordinator NRCS - Pilgrim RC&D
15 Cranberry Highway
West Wareham, MA 02576
Phone: 508-295-1317, Ext. 130
irene.winkler@mawestware.fsc.usda;
<http://www.temp.umassd.edu/semap/welcome.cfm>

CISA'S FARM PRODUCTS GUIDE: AN EFFECTIVE MARKETING TOOL FOR PIONEER VALLEY GROWERS

By Mark Lattanzi, CISA

Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture (CISA), the Amherst-based creator of the 'Be a Local Hero, Buy Locally Grown' campaign, cites its Farm Products Guide as integral to its buy-local efforts. The Guide, published annually in May, is a comprehensive listing of farm stands, farmers markets and CSA's selling direct to the public in the Connecticut Valley region of Massachusetts. It is distributed as an insert in area newspapers and through local Chambers of Commerce and visitor information centers and is published on CISA's web site, www.buylocalfood.com. "We've been producing the Guide for at least 5 years," says editor Mark Lattanzi, "and the number of farms listed keeps growing, from 32 in 1999 to 140 in 2002." The Guide includes information from each farm on products grown, seasonal hours, location and contact information. An index of products grown helps consumers find farms near them selling the items they need.

The Guide's value as a marketing tool for farmers with farm stands is well established. *"Each year I hear from farmers who say that customers showed up on opening day with the Guide in hand," says Lattanzi. "But large scale growers can benefit from the Guide as well. I've heard of several instances of wholesale buyers using the Guide to help them find sources for the produce they need."*

The 2003 Guide promises to deliver even more of an impact. Listings will be available on www.buylocalfood.com in a comprehensive, searchable database that will allow consumers and wholesale buyers the opportunity to search for products by type, location, delivery option and even growing practices. *"This version of the Guide will give users quick and accurate answers to questions like, 'where can I pick my own strawberries?' or 'are there any farms in Franklin County that will deliver local potatoes to my restaurant?'"*

Combined with a print circulation of 200,000 copies through all major Pioneer Valley newspapers, the 2003 Guide will be an important marketing resource for local farms. For more information, or to include your farm in the Guide,

contact Mark Lattanzi at 413-559-5338 or email markl@buylocalfood.com.



Heirloom tomato display from Lampson Brook Farm Partners, Amherst Farmers Market, September 2002.
photo by Ruth Hazzard

MASSACHUSETTS GROWERS SELL HARVEST TO LOCAL SCHOOLS!

By Kelly Erwin, Mass. DFA

Schools such as Williams College in Williamstown, the University of MA in Amherst, and the Fessenden School, located in West Newton are a few recent examples of schools in Massachusetts that are buying local foods from MA area farms. This "farm to school" market is growing in both interest among school food services and in new income for local growers.

Based on rising interest, the Massachusetts Farm to School Cafeteria initiative is also moving into high gear. The MA Dept. of Food and Agriculture has been awarded a grant from USDA to evaluate opportunities and methods for achieving profitable sales of locally grown products to private schools in Massachusetts.

The Department has successfully collaborated with the Pioneer Valley Growers Association (PVGA) in this venture, but encourages inquiries from any growers in Massachusetts who would like to explore their options for selling vegetables, fruits, and other farm products to schools.

Additionally the trade association of the public school food service directors in Massachusetts (MSFSA) has just received a grant to do feasibility studies for local schools that want to buy local products - eight school districts indicated interest when the grant application was written. Regional "5 A Day" coalitions that promote eating 5 fruits and vegetables daily are also beginning to endorse buying local food for healthier school meals.

As a result of a few months of excellent sales work by PVGA, more than 15 schools, public and private, have begun to "buy local", with many more expressing initial interest. Colleges throughout the Northeast region are beginning discussions about purchasing more local and organic produce from local farms.

In the coming months, the Mass. Dept. of Food and Agriculture will focus on finding profitable sales opportunities and overcoming obstacles to making farm to school relationships a business success! For more information, contact Kelly Erwin, Western Mass. Marketing Specialist for MA DFA, at (413) 545-2353 or kerwin@umext.umass.edu.

LOCAL FOOD AND FARMLAND PROTECTION ACT

By Carol Lee Rawn, Conservation Law Foundation

Massachusetts's farms are a vitally important environmental resource. Our family farmers are the unsung stewards of over 570,000 acres of orchards, fields, and forests. They protect the landscape from sprawl, preserve the state's historic character, and provide fresh locally grown food. By serving as a bulwark against sprawl, Massachusetts's farms protect air and water quality as well as open space. In a state that loses an estimated 44 acres of open space per day to development, helping our farmers make a living in agriculture is a critical open space strategy. Massachusetts's farms also provide a viable resource for the state and local economy; they have good revenue-cost ratios for municipalities, they help state government avoid infrastructure expansion costs, and they serve as a land protection strategy that relies on the private sector.

The Food and Farmland Protection Act was recently filed by a group of rural, urban and suburban legislators. The bill is supported by a unique coalition of farm groups, environmental groups, and state agencies. Supporters include American Farmland Trust, Berkshire Grown, Cape Cod Cranberry Grower's Association, Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture (Pioneer Valley), Massachusetts Audubon, Massachusetts Department of Food and Agriculture, Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, the Massachusetts Farm Bureau, Southeastern Massachusetts Agriculture Partnership, and the Trustees of Reservations. The Massachusetts Food and Farmland Protection Act would help keep land and people in farming by: improving market connections between farmers and consumers; helping farmers succeed in the marketplace (rather than through reliance on subsidies such as those the federal government provides in other regions); and providing incentives to preserve farmland for future generations.

The bill's provisions promote Massachusetts-grown agricultural products and the farms and farmers that produce them. One provision establishes a preference for Massachusetts-grown food in state procurement, and at local option, in local procurement, and would streamline the procurement process. A "truth in labeling" provision would require that when food is labeled or advertised as "local" or "native", the state of origin be identified. Other provisions include a loan program, targeted regulatory relief, and improvements to the existing Massachusetts Agricultural Preservation Restriction Program (APR).

For more information about the bill, or if you would like to support the bill, contact:
Carol Lee Rawn; Staff Attorney;
Conservation Law Foundation; 62 Summer Street; Boston, MA 02110;
clrawn@clf.org;
Tel. 617-350-0990 X715.

"TILLING THE SOIL OF OPPORTUNITY": A BUSINESS PLANNING COURSE FOR FARMERS

By Rick Chandler, ABTP Director Mass. DFA

The Department of Food and Agriculture, Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, will present "Tilling the Soil of Opportunity: A Business Planning Course for Massachusetts Agricultural Enterprises - A National NxLevel© Curriculum for Today's Agricultural Entrepreneurs", during the second week of January 2003, and end in late March.

Course Structure: Classes meet once per week during a 10-12 week window. The design is cumulative, with each session building on the last. Guest speakers will be drawn from local agricultural businesses and business service providers to personalize the key principles of many sessions.

The Massachusetts Department of Food and Agriculture (MDFA) sponsors regional delivery of this innovative self-directed course written for existing agricultural businesses (those that have been operating for two or more years) that want to re-examine their operation and/or make sustainable changes.

The course uses 35 hours of classroom time, individualized technical assistance and confidential financial planning to walk you through creation of a business plan that can help guide decision making on your farm. If you consider yourself to be a start-up or even idea-stage business, we can refer you to a more appropriate course using a similar approach.

Prior to the first session, we host an orientation session, including one-on-one help to gather and assemble your historical financial information. You will use this confidential information as a base for the changes you pursue in the course.

A Program Manager familiar with your region and the available local resources will support the nationally certified Course Instructor. Agricultural case studies illustrate business plan principles and formats.

During the course (and/or afterward), you will receive additional individual technical assistance in topic areas needed to complete your plan. The business plan you will create in this course can simplify your eligibility for many federal, state and local assistance programs and can enhance your efforts to secure funds from any lender.

Topics covered include: Take Stock of Your Resources; Basic Planning and Research; The Legal Terrain; Manage from the Ground Up; Bring Your Product to Market; Reap the Benefits of Market Strategies; Get Your Budgets in Line; Analyze Cash Flow and Financial Statements; Cultivate Your Money Resources; and Harvest Your Future - Using Your Plan.

When: Classes are held during the "off season " winter window. This year's classes begin the second week of January 2003, and end in late March. Class sessions are three to four hours long, often 6:00-9:30 PM. Each course group has input on scheduling specifics.

Where: 2003 Classes will be in Lowell and West Wareham, both in Massachusetts.

Class Size: Enrollment is limited to 15 businesses. More than one person can attend from each farm.

Cost: When your application is accepted, you will be asked to pay a course fee of \$250, which includes the course text and workbook, individual technical assistance and any additional handouts. You may bring another person from your farm under the same registration if space permits. We are happy to provide referrals to alumni of our programs to help you decide if this course is for you.

Interested? For additional information and an application form, contact: Rick Chandler, ABTP Director; Massachusetts Dept. of Food & Agriculture; 25 West Experiment Station; University of Massachusetts; Amherst, MA 01003. Phone: 413-577-0459; e-mail: rchandler@umext.umass.edu.

NATIONAL ORGANIC PROGRAM

By Don Franczyk, Certification Administrator; NOFA/Mass Organic Certification Program

On October 21, 2002 the National Organic Program went into effect regulating the marketing and labeling of organic produce and products. A key component of this program is that an accredited certifying agent must certify all operations marketing produce and products as organic, with a few key exceptions. Up until the implementation of the National Organic Program, certification for Massachusetts's growers and processors had been voluntary, now all operations must be certified unless they qualify for an exemption.

The National Organic Program standards that spell out the production and handling requirements of the National Organic Program can be viewed online at www.ams.usda.gov/nop/ or viewed as part of the NOFA/Mass Organic Certification Program Manual at <http://www.nofamass.org/>.

The \$5000 Exemption: A grower or processor that sells product as 'organic' but whose gross agricultural income from organic sales totals \$5000 or less annually is exempt from the certification requirement of the National Organic Program. These operations can continue to sell and label their product as organic, but they must comply with all production and labeling requirements of the National Organic Program. Products from these operations cannot be used as an ingredient identified as organic in processed products produced by another handling operation.

Transitioning to Organic: Any field or farm parcel used to produce an organic crop must have been managed in accordance with the National Organic Program standards for at least 3 years prior to harvest of an organic crop. During the 3 year transition period crops cannot be marketed as 'organic', though some certifying agents will certify the crop as transitional and it can be marketed that way. A grower wishing to certify a field or fields as organic must follow the practices of the National Organic Program standards as they relate to all aspects of his or her operation including soil fertility, nutrient management, tillage, soil erosion and conservation practices, etc. Growers must also maintain distinct, defined boundaries between their own production and conventional

production to prevent contact with the organic land or crop by prohibited substances applied to the adjacent cropland. Careful records of all crop inputs including fertilizers and pest control products used on the transitional fields must be kept by transitioning growers.

Violations of the National Organic Program: Any operation that is not certified that knowingly sells a product as organic may be subject to a civil penalty of not more than \$10000 per violation.

Fee Reimbursement: Growers seeking organic certification for the 2003 growing season can get 75% of their certification fee reimbursed up to \$500 through the Massachusetts Department of Food and Agriculture. This is a federal reimbursement program that is meant to make certification fees affordable to all growers.

Certifying Agents: The USDA/AMS/NOP website lists all certifying agents accredited by the USDA and what states they operate in. A principal Massachusetts based certifying agent is the NOFA/Mass Organic Certification Program. This program is accredited by the USDA to certify organic growers and processors in New England but confines its operations principally to Massachusetts and Connecticut. The NOFA/Mass Organic Certification Program is operated by Massachusetts Independent Certification and is no longer affiliated with the NOFA/Mass farming organization. The NOFA/Mass Organic Certification Program is a nonprofit program that seeks to make organic certification affordable to all farmers or processors in states in which it operates. The program is run with minimal staff, and is dependent on volunteers representing the organic community at large to make certification decisions.

For more information on the National Organic Program or organic certification contact Don Franczyk, Certification Administrator for the NOFA/Mass Organic Certification Program at: (978) 297-4171 or dfranczyk@starpower.net.

ANNUAL NOFA WINTER CONFERENCE JANUARY 25, 2003: CO-SPONSORED BY UMASS EXT. VEGETABLE PROGRAM

By Ed McGlew, NOF/Mass Winter Conference Coordinator

The Northeast Organic Farming Association of Massachusetts (NOFA/MASS) announces its 16th annual Winter Conference and Annual Meeting. The conference, cosponsored by the UMass Extension Vegetable Program and CISA (Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture), will be held on Saturday, January 25, 2003 at the Quabbin Regional High School in Barre, MA. The conference features over 40 workshops, covering a multitude of topics including hands-on activities, growing techniques for growers of all abilities, workshops on livestock production, homesteading, genetic engineering, and much more. For more information, contact one of the following: the NOFA/MASS website at www.massorganic.org registration coordinator Elaine Peterson at (978) 928-4707 or hhollow@worldnet.att.net, NOFA/MASS main office at (978) 355-2853 or nofamass@massorganic.org.

In addition to the workshops, the conference features a delectable potluck lunch, exhibits, a farmer's market, a raffle, a children's program, and the NOFA/MASS annual meeting. The Northeast Organic Farming Association of Massachusetts is a community including farmers, gardeners, landscapers, and consumers working to educate members and the general public about the benefits of local organic systems based on complete cycles, natural materials, and minimal waste for the health of individual beings, communities and the living planet.

NOFA/MASS also offers many other programs and services: an annual three-day summer conference in Amherst, MA at Hampshire College; a quarterly newspaper, *The Natural Farmer*; a bimonthly newsletter, *NOFA/MASS News*; low-price bulk ordering of organic seed, compost, soil amendments, and other hard-to-find items - for members only; a free copy of *The Organic Food Guide* - listing organic producers in Massachusetts; an organic extension service to help gardeners and farmers with growing questions; a Small Holders Alliance to connect producers of farmstead animal products with consumers; information on where to purchase organic grain in Massachusetts; outreach to the public at fairs and conferences throughout Massachusetts; information and activism on the issue of genetic engineering of food crops; an organic landcare program that accredits organic landcare professionals and educates the public on organic landcare; a practical skills workshop series with on-farm all-day and half-day workshops; a youth gardening project in Springfield; CSA, apprenticeship listings and much more on our continuously updated interactive website www.massorganic.org; and hundreds of how-to videos which are available for purchase or rent.

EXPLORING THE SMALL FARM DREAM: IS STARTING AN AGRICULTURAL BUSINESS RIGHT FOR YOU?

Course Description: The New England Small Farm Institute has developed this four-session course and workbook for people who are actively considering starting a farm. Participants will set goals, assess available resources, determine if farming as a business is right for them, and develop action plans to guide next steps. They will take a close look at what it takes to own and manage a successful farming venture-the realities of working for yourself, including the particulars of operating a farm. For those who cannot schedule participation in an "Explorer" course, the workbook is available for self-guided study.

Dates: The class meets over the course of four evenings, from 6-9pm each night. The evenings are: Tuesday, February 11; Thursday, February 13; Tuesday, February 18; and Thursday, February 20. **Location:** UMass, Amherst.

Class Size: Limited to 12 enterprises. Up to four enterprises may register two participants. **Fee:** \$60 for one individual; \$90 for two people working on the same business idea. Fee includes one Workbook per enterprise and additional handout materials. **Who should attend?** If you are thinking about starting a farm, this course is designed for you. This includes people thinking about full-time farming, farming part-time while continuing other employment, changing careers to start a farm, taking over an existing family farm business, and/or developing an existing but informal farming pastime into a more serious business activity. **To apply:** Contact the New England Small Farm Institute at (413) 323-4531 or programs@smallfarm.org to receive further information and application materials.

THE PASSING OF A NEW MASSACHUSETTS FARMER

By Frank Mangan, UMass Extension

Cha Yang passed away on Sunday December 15 of cancer at the age of 42. Cha leaves his wife Sia and ten children, ranging in age from 6 to 22 years old. Cha, who was Hmong, was born and raised in Laos. Many of the Hmong in Laos were forced to fight the Vietnamese during the conflict between the United States and Vietnam. After loosing the war, the Hmong were forced to leave Laos, their homeland. Cha's family relocated to Thailand in 1980 where they lived in a refugee camp for 12 years. In 1992 they immigrated to the United States and eventually moved to Fitchburg, Mass.

Cha worked as a machinist at a company in Gardner, but anyone who knew him recognized that he was a farmer first and foremost. Cha grew up in a farming community in Laos and growing crops was still his passion. He started renting land in Lancaster almost as soon as he arrived in Fitchburg. He would come to the fields by 4:30 a.m. to work before starting his job at 7:30. After work, he would return to the fields to join members of his family where he would work until dusk.

This past season he and his family farmed six acres on two sites. They grew and sold mostly Asian produce at farmers' markets, flea markets, and Asian stores and restaurants. He longed for the day when he could be a full-time farmer.

A fund has been set up in support of his children. Contributions can be sent to: Cha Yang Fund, Sovereign Bank, PO Box 45; Sterling, Mass. 01564.



Cha Young and his daughter Xue Young at the UMass Vegetable Twilight Meeting on July 16, 2002. They served traditional Hmong cuisine from crops they grew on their farm

Vegetable Notes is a publication of the University of Massachusetts Extension Vegetable Program, which provides research based information on integrated management of soils, crops, pests and marketing on Massachusetts farms. Subscriptions to Vegetable Notes include the IPM Newsletter, published weekly during the growing season. For subscription information call (413)577-0712 or visit our website at <http://www.umass.edu/umext/programs/agro/>. For more information about the Vegetable Team's research and UMass Extension programs call Ruth Hazzard at (413)545-3696.

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