



WEEK OF MAY 18TH, 2020 #21/52

This Modern Food System

Every day I read or listen to another story of farmers being forced to euthanize animals, dump milk down the drain, and let crops rot in the fields. Why is this happening? We still have over 330 million mouths to feed. Just because offices, restaurants and schools are closed doesn't mean those people have stopped eating. The lines at the food banks wrap around the blocks. The need for sustenance is still there, so what is the problem? Our very powerful and enormous global corporate food system is slowly collapsing.

Consolidation, globalization and corporatization has not been our friend. The American Grocers Association, along with the large grocery chains and giant food corporations, systematically eliminated medium and small processors. They, not the farmer, determine what is paid for a pound of meat, a dozen eggs, or a gallon of milk. And quite often they control the feed, housing, and processing. Even Marin Sun Farms, who was supposed to be a savior for local ranchers, turned their backs on many when they announced they would no longer process anyone else's meat. This left ranchers with almost no option for processing and some said they had no choice but to go out of business. Tam and Cory recently told me the processor where they bring their quail has so little business now he is only operating one day a week. That is due to the fact that so many of his customers sold to restaurants, just like Cory and Tam. But in their case they have us as an option and I am really happy to say that with the mention in last week's newsletter and the Thursday email, y'all bought just about everything they have in stock at the moment. Your choice to support Cory and Tam's quail operation also supports that small meat processor, and without local processors there is no way to make swift changes when market needs shift.

Over the past many decades we have been convinced that food should be cheap, especially meat. It shouldn't, ever. We recently stretched a pound of ground beef for tacos by adding a load of sautéed greens, it was fabulous. We chopped the greens so small you hardly even noticed them in there. Adding the veg stretched that \$10 a pound of ground to give us plenty of tacos for at least two meals, making it a lot more affordable. But the problems we are seeing right now does not lie solely with the meat industry. Potato growers in Washington are in big trouble because freezers all over our country are filled with french fries and no cafeterias to send them to. From the LA Times on May 3rd: *The coronavirus pandemic has left Washington's farmers with at least a billion pounds of potatoes they can't sell, a new crop growing without any buyers and millions of dollars in debt they have no way to pay.*

A little closer to home, for about the last 10 years, CSA's have really struggled. Many have given up, either they quit farming altogether or chose a different path. How does a farm in California, with all of our costs, compete with inexpensive fruit and veg in the supermarkets from growers in Mexico, Chile, Argentina or China? We can't, and that is the truth. Looking at a report on the Wilson Center's website, conducted by some UC Davis professors (partly funded by Walmart), the average farm worker in Mexico earns \$190 a month. How can farmers in California match prices against that? I am not suggesting

we boycott foods from countries like Mexico, but perhaps we could rely on them a little less. The truth is, we need a local food system that is strong, diversified and robust. It doesn't mean we have to eliminate corporate food, but they don't need to control the lion's share. Think about these few facts from the National Family Farm Coalition's website: *Agriculture is one of the most concentrated sectors of the US economy. As tens of thousands of independent family farmers have gone out of business in the last few decades, their land and operations have been bought up by ever-larger farms. Today there are 70 percent fewer hog farmers than in the mid-1990s, while just four companies control two-thirds of hog slaughter. Nearly 17,000 cattle ranchers have gone out of business each year since 1980; 85 percent of the beef market is now controlled by the top four meatpackers. Trends are similar across agriculture: the top four companies in each industry control 85 percent of the corn seed market, 90 percent of grain trading, and 63 percent of food retail. **Twenty percent of farms control nearly 70 percent of US farmland.***

These figures should alarm us all. And they do explain why we are seeing our food system fall off the proverbial cliff. How are we ever going to get ourselves out of this mess? Local farmers are heroes, but in my eyes the true heroes are all of you who have chosen a different path. Those of you who accept produce out of a CSA box that doesn't always look perfect, sometimes coming to you with flaws. But still, you have made that commitment to a family farm, YOUR family farm. We need to stand up and say enough is enough, and make the decision to try a pack of Cory and Tam's quail, or buy the \$10/lb ground beef from Avdis Ranch in Sacramento (which should be back in stock soon). We need to reject strawberries and stone fruit in the middle of winter that have traveled halfway around the world to our supermarket shelves. We should save our money to pay what they are worth when they are ripe and local in the middle of summer. There is plenty of delicious local fruit to enjoy and get us through the rest off the year. And if you are new to our CSA, I truly hope you commit to staying. Honestly, that is the biggest fear I hear repeated from every single CSA farmer I have spoken with, everyone jumped in during this panic, but how many will stay when life goes back to normal? I have faith, I believe many of you will stay. And I believe we are learning just how much our food shopping choices matter. So thank you for being my heroes.

Gifts For Our Crew

Many of you have asked if there is anything you could do for our crew. Cory has taken on the dividing up of tips for the drivers that you generously give to his Venmo account. But our farm crew is a little tricky. Working with them on a Saturday, a couple of weeks ago, I saw how they love making a burrito run. They get burritos from Chuy's Taqueria in Winters. Chuy is from Jesus Maria, just like all of our farm crew. He started here in California working on farms, including working a stint for Nigel years ago. So there is a connection there beyond just burritos. I came up with the idea to create a donation for Burrito Runs. If you feel so inclined, I know they would really appreciate the gesture!

RECIPES AND IDEAS FROM LORRAINE

I am so excited to have potatoes in the box this week! They are just starting to come in so it won't be loads. But I highly recommend you gently wash, then steam them, and enjoy with a bit of butter. No salt is needed. I am happy we are getting some of the broccoli and romanesco we planted back in February. With such a warm spring I was afraid we would lose it all to bolting. And hooray for Apricots, peaches and cherries! We are starting to run into the problem of having too many choices for the boxes, but that's a good problem. So glad to be transitioning out of the hungry months. So what to cook this week?

In the past couple of days I have heard from two different folks about how they have fallen in love with fennel. One CSA member Shivz had this to say, "No one ever told me the onion looking thing, with the hairy-celery ponytail could taste SO GOOD...roasted fennel, welcome to my life!" Love that description. Shivz made a salad composed of roasted fennel and turnips, hard boiled eggs, some white beans on a bed of lettuce. Looks delicious and is perfect for this week's box!

Tangy Braised Collard Greens with White Beans and Lime

Recipe by Daniel Boulud from Food And Wine April 2010

The original recipe calls for 5 lbs of Collards, which obviously is not what you have in your box. I have cut this recipe in half, still 2 1/2 lb is probably pushing it, so perhaps add some extras greens like your turnip tops.

- 1/2 lb small dried White Beans, such as French navy beans, picked over
- 2 small Onions, 1 thinly sliced
- 1 small Carrot
- 1 small sprig Thyme
- 1 small sprig Rosemary
- 1 Bay Leaf
- 16 oz Chicken Stock or Vegetable Broth
- Salt and freshly ground Pepper
- 1 1/2 TB unsalted Butter
- 1 TB Extra-Virgin Olive oil
- 2-3 Garlic cloves, thinly sliced
- 2 lb tender collard greens—stems and inner ribs removed, leaves cut into 1-inch ribbons
- 1/2 teaspoon finely grated lime zest
- 2 TB fresh Lime juice

In a large pot, cover the beans with 2 inches of water and bring to a boil. Remove from the heat, cover and let stand for 1 hour. Drain the beans and return them to the pot. Add the whole onion, carrot, thyme, rosemary and bay leaf. Add the stock and 2 cups of water and bring to a boil. Simmer over low heat until the beans are nearly tender, about 30 minutes. Season with salt and pepper. Drain the beans and reserve the cooking liquid. Discard all of the other solids. In a very large pot, melt the butter in the olive oil. Add the sliced onions and garlic and season with salt and pepper. Cook over moderately high heat, stirring occasionally, until softened, about 6 minutes. Add the collards and cook, tossing, until wilted slightly. Add half of the reserved bean cooking liquid, cover and cook over low heat, stirring occasionally, until the collards are tender, about 1 hour. Add the beans and the remaining bean cooking liquid to the pot and cook until the beans are tender, about 30 minutes. Stir in the lime zest and juice, season with salt and pepper and serve. Make Ahead: The cooked collards can be refrigerated for up to 3 days. Reheat gently and stir in the lime juice and zest just before serving.

Coconut-Poached Fish with Bok Choy

Recipe by Colu Henry from NYT Cooking

Makes 4 servings and takes 25 minutes

- 4 (6-ounce) Cod Fillets or other flaky white fish
- Kosher salt
- 2 TB good Vegetable Oil
- 1 large Shallot, thinly sliced
- 2 Garlic cloves, thinly sliced
- 1 (2-inch) piece Ginger, peeled and cut into thin matchsticks

1 fresh Thai or Serrano chile, Coconut-Poached Fish with Bok Choy

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- 1 fresh Thai or Serrano chile, thinly sliced
- 2 (13 1/2-ounce) cans Coconut Milk
- 1 1/2 tsp Fish Sauce
- 1 tsp Light Brown Sugar
- About 7 ounces Bok Choy, ends trimmed and stalks separated
- 1/4 cup roughly chopped Cilantro, both leaves and tender stems
- 2 TB thinly sliced Scallion Greens
- Lime wedges (from 1 lime), for serving
- Flaky salt (optional)

Season fish well with salt. In a large sauté pan, heat oil over medium heat. Add shallot, garlic, ginger and chile, and cook, stirring often until they become translucent, about 2 minutes. Season with salt. Add coconut milk, fish sauce and brown sugar, and whisk together until combined and sugar dissolves. Bring mixture to a gentle simmer. Add cod fillets and turn the heat down to low. Cover and cook until cod is just cooked through and opaque, about 6 to 8 minutes. Carefully remove the fish and plate in bowls. Add bok choy to the coconut milk broth and turn heat to medium-low. Cook bok choy until leaves are wilted and stems are tender, about 1 to 2 minutes. Divide bok choy evenly alongside the fish and ladle the coconut milk broth over each portion. Top with cilantro, scallions and a good squeeze of lime, and serve with remaining wedges on the side. Garnish with flaky salt, if desired. thinly sliced.

This Week's Box List

- *Lettuce
- *Collards
- Dino Kale
- *Turnips
- Peaches or Cherries
- *Potatoes
- *Bok Choy
- Radicchio
- *Fennel
- Napa Cabbage
- *Apricots
- Broccoli OR Romanesco

* = Items in Box for 2

Roasted Fennel

Recipe by Elise Bauer found on simplyrecipes.com

This recipe makes 4 servings, take 10 minutes prep time and 40 minutes in the oven.

- 2 Fennel Bulbs (thick base of stalk), stalks cut off, bulbs halved lengthwise, then cut lengthwise in 1-inch thick wedges
- 2 TB (or more) of Extra Virgin Olive Oil
- 2 tsp (or more) Balsamic Vinegar

Toss fennel wedges with olive oil and balsamic: Preheat oven to 400°F (205°C). Place the fennel wedges in a bowl and toss them with 1 to 2 tablespoons of olive oil, just enough to coat them. Sprinkle with balsamic vinegar, again just enough to coat. Roast the fennel: Line a roasting pan or baking dish with parchment or aluminum foil brushed with olive oil. Arrange the fennel wedges on the pan and roast them at 400°F (205°C) for 40 minutes or until the fennel wedges are cooked through and beginning to caramelize at the edges.