



## Back to School

Labor Day and the Fair are over and the kids are off to school. Melon and sweet corn season is turning into pumpkin season. Greens are back in the boxes and I have been closely monitoring the winter squash for harvest. Storage carrots are due for a thinning and beets are starting to size up. Beans, tomatoes and cucumbers are still going strong but do not take them for granted—one frost is all it takes and we won't see these guys again till next summer.

## Reducing Waste on the Farm

Did you know that in the United States about 40% of our food goes to waste annually? This is an estimated \$165 billion dollars, not to mention the resources such as land, water, fertilizer and energy that goes into what we throw away. Waste happens at every level of food production- on farms, at restaurants, the grocery store and other institutions, and at home but I did not feel truly accountable for reducing waste until I started growing veggies.

Most farmers use measures to reduce waste in their systems but there are always challenges, especially during busy times when waste reduction might become a lower priority than harvesting or planting. Another challenge for farmers in waste reduction is the product standards set by consumers and institutional buyers. Wholesalers and consumers will reject non-uniform produce (i.e. the "wrong" color, size or shape). I know from personal experience that it is difficult to stack large piles of irregularly shaped apples or peppers so they won't topple over, but I don't know if that is a good enough reason to leave an "ugly" pepper in the field or a small apple on the branch.

Take cucumbers as another example. Because they are so prolific, it can be difficult to keep up with picking which can result in misshapen, discolored, or oversized fruit. According to one large scale cucumber farmer in a study by the Natural Resources Defense Council, only about one half of the produce grown actually leaves the farm and about 75% of the cucumbers culled by institutional buyers are edible.

This year I have challenged myself to reduce waste on the farm as much as possible and the small scale makes it easy to spot inefficiencies. The best way to reduce is keep the plants healthy and pick often to get the veggies are at their ideal size and ripeness, and then give them you as soon as possible after picking! You also may notice some "ugly" veggies in your box- a cucumber with a healed scar or a carrot with an extra appendage- that wholesalers would normally reject. Some things need to be picked more than once a week which keeps me busy harvesting something almost every day. Even harvesting frequently I run into the occasional split tomato, yellow cucumber, or oversized squash. If items do not meet the usual aesthetic standards I donate them to the food shelf regularly (depending on the quantities available I might lower the quality standards slightly for the CSA to ensure everyone gets a good variety

and quantity of produce i.e. split tomatoes after a heavy rain). If items are damaged to the point where they will not store, I bring them to a neighbor farmer who raises organic, non-gmo pork. I have also been doing a good bit of preserving so we can enjoy garden veggies in the winter time. Keep an eye out for some bonus items in the box that you can use to fondly recall your CSA this winter. If you are interested in canning or freezing let me know and I can try to get you some bulk items. The last option for substandard produce is to compost items that don't make it to the food shelf or pigs which will eventually go back into the fields to add nutrients. I am always looking for ways to improve this area and to make the farm closer to net zero in inputs and waste.

Reducing food spoilage is ultimately up to the individual and there are many things you can do at home such as composting and preserving. I can assure you that your support of the CSA is making a huge difference in our little corner of the world and I love the challenge of improving these systems. Some decisions can be stressful because I want to be a good steward of the planet and meet the needs of the CSA members, but I would not trade the responsibility for anything. If you have ideas, comments or would like to know more please let me know.

Source:

Plumer, Brad. "How the U.S. manages to waste \$165 billion in food each year." The Washington Post.  
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonkblog/wp/2012/08/22/how-food-actually-gets-wasted-in-the-united-states/>



## Box 14 Items

**Beans:** Make and freeze a green bean casserole for the winter to extend the bounty.

**Cucumber:** Add Cucumber slices to water for a hydrating beverage.

**Kale:** Crisp and tender curly kale.

**Celery:** Use the celery stalks for a snack or the sauce recipe below.

**Bulk Tomatoes:** This is your chance to make some sauce and can or freeze it for the winter when you are dreaming of garden tomatoes.

**Yellow Onion:** Yellow onions are sweet and delicious but do not store as long as the red or white onions so you might want to use them first

**Rainbow Carrots:** Great for snacking.

**Summer Squash:** Summer squash will be replaced by winter squash soon

**Black and Watermelon Radishes:** Watermelon radish are a little sweeter and the black radish are crisp and spicy. Something for everyone

**Hot Peppers:** Caution these peppers are **VERY** hot. If you aren't as adventurous, there is a jalapeño that is not too spicy in salsa.

**Herbs:** Parsley, Thyme and Rosemary will come in handy for many of this weeks' recipes or you can dry them.

## Recipes

### Sarah's Tomato Sauce

Bag of bulk tomatoes  
3 Tablespoons olive oil  
1 yellow onion  
2 stalks of celery  
1-3 cloves of garlic  
Salt and pepper

1 carrot  
1 cup chicken stock  
1 cup water  
Rosemary, thyme, sage and bay leaf tied into a bundle

Dice carrot, onion and celery. Add Olive oil to a large sauce pot and heat until the surface of the oil begins to shimmer. Add the carrot, onion, celery and salt to taste (about a teaspoon) so the veggies sweat and do not brown. Once the veggies are tender, core and dice the tomatoes and add to the sauce pot (you can peel the skins off before dicing by blanching in boiling water for a minute or just leave the skins on). Cook until the tomatoes begin to break down and the sauce comes to a boil. Add the chicken stock, water, and herbs and bring the pot to a boil again. Turn down to a simmer and let cook uncovered for 2-6 hours until sauce has reduced. Remove the herb bundle and puree the sauce in a food processor to the desired consistency. You can also pass the sauce through a food mill to remove the seeds. At this point, you can return the sauce back to the pot and cook longer if you want a thicker consistency. Cool the sauce and transfer to zip top bags or jars for storage in the freezer or refrigerator. Sauce can also be canned in sterilized jars for 35-40 minutes. Make sure to add 2 Tablespoons of lemon juice to the jars if using a water bath canner and use safe food handling procedures.

## Heirloom Tomato Topping

½ Cup Extra Virgin Olive Oil  
¼ Cup pitted olives of your choice  
2 Tablespoons brined capers  
¼ Cup finely chopped onion  
¼ Cup Basil leaves  
¼ Cup flat leaf parsley

¼ teaspoon crushed red pepper  
Sea salt  
Heirloom tomatoes sliced thick

In a bowl combine olive oil, olives, capers, onion, basil, parsley and crushed red pepper. Season with 1/3 teaspoon sea salt and toss.

Arrange tomato slices on a platter. Season with salt. Spoon topping over tomatoes and serve or marinate overnight. Topping can also be used on pasta, fish or meat.

## Green Bean Casserole

For the topping:

2 medium onions, thinly sliced  
1/4 cup all-purpose flour  
2 tablespoons panko bread crumbs  
1 teaspoon kosher salt  
Nonstick spray

For beans:

1 pound fresh green beans, rinsed and trimmed  
1 gallon water  
2 tablespoons kosher salt

For sauce:

2 tablespoons unsalted butter  
12 ounces mushrooms, trimmed and cut into 1/2-inch pieces  
1 teaspoon kosher salt  
1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper  
2 cloves garlic, minced  
1/4 teaspoon freshly ground nutmeg  
2 tablespoons all-purpose flour  
1 cup chicken broth  
1 cup half-and-half

Preheat the oven to 475 degrees F.

Combine the onions, flour, panko and salt in a large mixing bowl and toss to combine. Coat a sheet pan with nonstick spray and evenly spread the onions on the pan. Bake in the oven until golden brown, tossing every 10 minutes, for approximately 30 minutes. Once done, remove from the oven and set aside until ready to use.

Turn the oven down to 400 degrees F.

While the onions are cooking, prepare the beans. Bring a gallon of water and 2 tablespoons of salt to a boil in an 8-quart saucepan. Blanch for 5 minutes. Drain in a colander and immediately plunge the beans into a large bowl of ice water to stop the cooking. Drain and set aside.

Melt the butter in a 12-inch cast iron skillet set over medium-high heat. Add the mushrooms, salt and pepper and cook, stirring occasionally, until the mushrooms begin to give up some of their liquid, approximately 4 to 5 minutes. Add the garlic and nutmeg and continue to cook for another 1 to 2 minutes. Sprinkle the flour over the mixture and stir to combine. Cook for 1 minute. Add the broth and simmer for 1 minute. Add the half-and-half and cook until the mixture thickens, approximately 6 to 8 minutes.

Remove from the heat and stir in 1/4 of the onions and all of the green beans. Top with the remaining onions. Place into the oven and bake until bubbly, approximately 15 minutes. Remove and serve immediately.