



TWO SMALL FARMS

Community Supported Agriculture

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The Price You Pay, by Stephen Pedersen

We sell our organic strawberries at our farm stand and in farmer's markets for what I consider a very reasonable price, but we occasionally have people who ask why they are so expensive relative to the \$.99 pints they can find in their grocery store.

I could tell them that they usually get what they pay for—in my opinion those \$.99 berries are worth just about that. Large scale growers choose varieties that are hard enough to withstand shipping long distances and pick them when they are only half ripe. Additionally, the high analysis synthetic fertilizers they use result in higher yields but sacrifice flavor even further.

I could also tell them that the person or company that grew those \$.99 berries is probably at that time losing money on them. Due to the increased productivity of new varieties and the fact that the acreage of berries grown in coastal California increases each year, there is invariably a tremendous glut of berries in May and June driving prices downward. In a typical year the prices for conventionally grown berries will bottom out below \$5.00 a case (12 pint baskets). That probably just about covers the cost of the box and the labor to fill it. It doesn't come close to covering the extremely high costs of production associated with strawberries in this area.

My favorite answer, however, is to tell them that they pay for those \$.99 berries one way or another. At that point they either leave looking perplexed or ask for a further explanation.

When I was going to school at the University of California at Santa Cruz, those in the Agroecology department liked to use the phrase "sustainable farmers internalize the externalities." That organic farmers absorb the costs that conventional growers pass along to society in one way or another is a concept that I understood in an abstract way at the time. But I never really fully understood it until I had spent some years living and farming here in the Watsonville area.

Our farm is located along Harkins Slough, the largest and least disturbed of the five "fingers" of the Watsonville slough system, a series of shallow freshwater estuaries. "Least disturbed" being a relative term, for although the slough hosts an impressive array of birds and mammals around its periphery, the water quality has been severely degraded. Sedimentation, over-nutrication and pesticide contamination from surrounding farming operations are primarily to blame.

In the spring several years ago I took a day off and paddled the canoe eastward to the head of our slough with our two daughters. When we couldn't paddle any further we beached the canoe and began to explore an abandoned farmstead on a parcel that the Federal Fish and Wildlife service had recently purchased. The driveway to the farmstead is located at the base of a bluff on top of which sits a large conventional strawberry field with highly

erosive sandy soils. The wintertime run-off from this field is channeled into a deeply eroded gully in the bluff, through a culvert beneath the driveway, and into the slough. When I first came upon the fan shaped alluvial deposit of sediment on the slough side of the culvert I was astounded that such a huge amount of material could come off of a single field. Measuring at least three feet thick in the middle by over 100 feet wide it has to contain many hundreds of tons of silt and sand. And what came along with it in the way of highly soluble synthetic fertilizers one can only guess.

Unfortunately this is just one of many examples of poor land stewardship in the strawberry fields around us and in North Monterey County. If you were to approach the growers responsible many would undoubtedly tell you (with some truth) that taking the measures to prevent such degradation are too expensive when they are operating with such thin margins.

We too have steep erosive sandy slopes on our farm and we go to great length to ensure that that kind of failure doesn't occur. The steepest slopes we take out of production entirely during the winter, watering up a stabilizing cover crop as early as September. We plant grasses on all of our roadways and spread straw on the steepest sections. Any run-off that does occur during winter is

channeled into a riparian buffer-strip that we planted the year after we bought this farm. The willows, cottonwoods, box elders, and other trees together with low growing sedges slow down any run-off to the point that nearly all sediment drops out and any water leaving our farm is clear.

I have always dreamed of having a farm with a fine swimming hole that one could dive into after work on a hot afternoon. Yet, although there are lots of creeks, sloughs, and even a river here in the Pajaro Valley, the water quality is mostly so poor that one wouldn't think of swimming in them—which seems like a real shame to me.

There are reasons for hope, however. The 300 acre farm that adjoins us to the east and south was recently purchased by The Land Trust of Santa Cruz County and they are taking steps to make sure that property is managed more responsibly. Also, seven parcels within Harkins Slough itself have been transferred to the State Fish and Game department, and the aforementioned sizable parcel on the opposite bank was purchased by the Federal Fish and Wildlife service. All of these groups and agencies are working together to help improve the water quality within the slough. If they are successful, and if more growers work to internalize the externalities, maybe going for a swim won't be so unthinkable after all.

(Revised from an article originally printed in 2006)

This Week
Strawberries ^{HG}
Italian Parsley ^{MF}
Chantenay Carrots ^{MF}
Red Romaine Lettuce ^{OR}
Loose Spinach ^{MF}
New Potatoes ^{MF}
Gold Beets ^{HG}
Mystery ^{HG}
Flowers: Mixed Bouquet ^{TF}

From Mariquita Farm: carrots, parsley, lettuce, spinach, potatoes. From High Ground: strawberries, beets, mystery. From Thomas Farm: flowers.

Recipes and Notes

(see www.mariquita.com/recipes for more recipes)

Chimichurri, from Chef Jonathan Miller

½ cup grapeseed oil	½ cup olive oil
2 TBL white wine vinegar	½ cup parsley, chopped
½ cup cilantro, chopped	4 roasted red peppers, chopped (from a jar is ok)
4 garlic cloves, chopped	2 TBL onion, chopped
1 TBL lime	2 tsp. crushed red pepper flakes
salt and pepper to taste	

Combine everything together and allow to sit for at least 20 minutes before using. Check again for seasoning. Use any seasonal combinations of vegetables to grill for this, including summer squash, asparagus, hard squashes, onions (even spring onions), carrots, and early corn. Toss your veggies, sliced (if necessary) into even sizes, in some oil, salt and pepper. Grill until cooked through to your liking and serve with the chimichurri on the side. You can also serve these in a sandwich topped with a little chimichurri and some cheese.

Fregola Salad, from Chef Jonathan Miller

This pasta salad is different from others you have had. It's a bit addictive, though, so be careful! My wife loves a lot of sherry vinegar in hers. I prefer just a dash or two. Either way, you'll find it delicious. Fregola are small balls of pasta, about the size of peas, toasted. They can be challenging to source, but they are worth it.

8 oz fregola	small handful parsley, chopped
2 large red onions, sliced thickly into rounds	1 bunch carrots, halved lengthwise
small handful cilantro, chopped	small handful pine nuts, toasted
olive oil	a few dashes sherry vinegar

Boil the fregola in heavily salted water until al dente, about 14 minutes. Drain and toss with a little bit of olive oil and allow to cool. Toss the carrots and onions with some olive oil and salt. Grill (or roast in a 400 degree oven) the carrots and onions until nicely charred and completely cooked. (If you are roasting them in an oven, the carrots take around 30 minutes, the onions about 60.) Don't be afraid of a little bit of char; a little tastes really good here. Chop the onions and carrots into bite sized pieces and toss with the remaining ingredients, including the cooled fregola. Add some salt and pepper and pass additional sherry vinegar at the table. If you want to change this up a bit, top it with some quality cheese or a grilled meat.

Chick-Pea, Garlic, and Parsley Dip, from *Gourmet*

19-oz can chick-peas, rinsed and drained (about 2 cups)	2 garlic cloves, chopped and mashed to a paste with ½ tsp. salt
½ cup packed fresh parsley leaves, washed well and spun dry	¼ cup water
¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil	3 TBL fresh lemon juice
toasted pita wedges or toasted French bread slices	

In a food processor blend all ingredients except oil until smooth. With motor running add oil in a slow stream. Season dip with salt. Serve dip with toasts. Makes about 2 cups.

Three Nice Parsley Ideas, from *Fine Cooking*

*Mix chopped parsley with minced garlic and breadcrumbs to make a savory crust for roast lamb or a baked bean gratin.

*Flavor mashed potatoes with a pesto made with parsley, olive oil and garlic.

*Toss whole parsley leaves with sun-dried tomatoes, prosciutto and parmesan cheese. Dress with a light oil and vinegar dressing for a different, vividly flavored salad.

Slow Roasted Beets, from Chef Jonathan Miller

I know that roasting beets is very common. However, we usually roast things pretty hot, anywhere from 350-425 degrees. Try a little lower temperature and a little longer cooking time and they come out perfectly luscious. If you really want to crank up the beetiness of the dish, incorporate the beet syrup. It's very easy to do, especially if you buy your beet juice instead of juicing the beets yourself. Finish with a quality goat cheese and you have a perfect first course.

1 bunch beets	1 cup beet juice
1 tsp. red wine vinegar	grapeseed oil
olive oil	Goat cheese

Heat the oven to 300. Toss the beets with a tablespoon or so of grapeseed oil, cover them, and roast them until they are tender, about 1½ - 2 hours. Peel and cut into desired sizes, then toss with a little olive oil and salt.

While the beets are roasting, boil the beet juice with the red wine vinegar until it has reduced to a syrup. Serve the roasted beets in a small pool of beet syrup next to a nice hunk of the goat cheese.

Roasted New Potatoes & Cheese, from Chef Jonathan Miller

your bag of new potatoes	½ lb double cream, or your favorite brie, sliced into thin slices
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Boil your potatoes in salted water until fully cooked, maybe 15-20 minutes, depending on their size. Peel or don't peel your potatoes, as you prefer, but halve them with a knife or fork. Sprinkle with a touch of salt and pepper, then broil them for a few minutes until they are lightly browned. Pull them out, top them with a slice of cheese, then put them back under the broiler and heat just long enough to melt the cheese. Serve warm.

Romaine Beet Salad, from Chef Andrew Cohen

Chop romaine lettuce into 1 inch bits. Wedge beets (cut into wedges) and toss with a lightly sweet vinaigrette and chill. Toss beets with some blue cheese, or feta, or a goat cheese, add in some toasted almonds and some golden raisins and toss to mix well. Lay over the romaine lettuce and drizzle a little more dressing over all. This salad can work with spinach as well, but I would turn up the sweetness of the dressing a bit more. You could do this using a sweeter vinegar or by adding a sweetener to the dressing. This will offset the earthier flavor of the spinach.

Vinaigrette

2 TBL balsamic or sherry or other vinegar	4-6 TBL extra virgin olive oil
salt to taste	black pepper to taste (opt.)
1-2 chopped green onions OR	2 tsp. apricot or berry jam

Whisk it all together.