



# TWO SMALL FARMS

## Community Supported Agriculture

### September 29–October 1, 2010

#### **Auction Day**, by Stephen Pedersen

One of the truest things my Uncle Jerry ever said was shortly after we bought our home farm back in May of 2000. “The one thing about living on a farm is that you are always surrounded by your work”, he said. So in the late stages of a long, hard season it is sometimes nice to have a quasi-legitimate excuse to get off the farm—if even just for one day. So when the notice for a fairly promising auction to be held in the west side San Joaquin Valley last Friday came in the mail, I was ready to go.

Actually, I have gotten some really good equipment at great prices at auctions over the years. At an auction in Salinas a number of years ago I bought a Bee-Gee scraper, and a good ring-roller. The year before in Castroville I bought a really nice off-set disc and a couple of pallets worth of tool bar clamps and cultivating knives. I even bought our first CSA delivery truck, a 1970 Ford F350 with a twelve foot box, “armstrong” steering, and the turning radius of an aircraft carrier, at an auction in Tulare.

What made this auction promising was that they listed a number of implements set up for 60” beds—something one rarely finds at auctions here along the coast. They also listed a huge number of 3” aluminum irrigation pipes (11,000 joints) something we are in need of for our new property. It didn’t hurt that it was to be held near Huron, in the west San Joaquin and would give me an excuse to take one of my favorite roads in the state—Hwy 198.

After staying up late to rewire the lights and to re-pack the bearings on my equipment trailer—something I only take to the more promising auctions—I headed out early the next morning and was at the Hwy 198 exit off of Hwy 101 before day-break. Between San Lucas and Coalinga, this stretch of highway begins and ends in barren, low hills, covered in golden-brown stubble. As one gains altitude, shrubs and trees appear in increasing numbers until you arrive at the lovely Priest Valley—surrounded by multi-trunked grey pines and valley oaks. This is the land of pipe fences, range cattle, Aermotor windmills—some still functioning, and flocks of black and white magpies sometimes twenty or thirty strong.

When I first decided to make farming my vocation, it was a place very much like Priest Valley that I had in mind for my farm to be— remote, quiet, with fields set in a small valley, framed by trees. That was before it dawned on me that in order to make living selling vegetables there needed to be someone to buy them at least somewhat nearby. Not to mention the

#### **Harvest Festival and Pumpkin Patch**

**Saturday October 9<sup>th</sup> 10 AM to 4 PM**

**Pumpkins, Strawberries, Rides,  
Music, Crafts, Farm Fun, Food!!!**

High Ground Organics, 521 Harkins Slough Rd.,  
Watsonville, all are welcome

impracticality of having to drive an hour and a half just to get the necessary supplies, like boxes, twist ties, and tractor and irrigation parts, that we rely on to keep the farm running.

In Coalinga I stopped for a fine plate of machaca with rice and beans at the Repollito (little cabbage) restaurant. From my seat I had a good view of the Joaquin ridge to the Northeast of

town, where Joaquin Murrieta, the notorious Mexican born outlaw, was supposedly gunned down in 1853. Although many suspected that the Rangers who shot him got the wrong man, that didn’t stop them from severing his head, putting it in a bottle with alcohol, and taking it on tour—charging people a dollar each to see it.

After breakfast I continued east on 198, past I-5 and into the west valley. Witnessing the scale of agriculture in the Western San Joaquin is to alter your frame of reference as to what a farm is. Mile after mile of cotton, processing tomatoes and pistachio trees. It is humbling to think that my entire farm would fit neatly into the corner of one of these fields. After less than ten seconds at 60 MPH you would be looking at it through the rearview mirror.

In time I came to a large field of romaine lettuce, looking somewhat out of place among the more traditional valley crops. Sometime ago the large lettuce growers from the Salinas valley discovered that they could grow lettuce here at times when there was very little competition from other growing regions throughout the country. I once spoke with a fellow who worked for Tanamura and Antle, one of the largest vegetable growers on the planet, who told me that when the owners of that company first bought a large parcel in Huron, the price of lettuce shot up over \$25.00 a case and the property paid for itself with a single crop.

The auction itself turned out to be something of a bust. As people who frequent auctions will tell you, how good an auction turns out all depends on who turns up for it. The best auctions I’ve been to are the ones that were sparsely attended. Not so good are the ones with big crowds and lots of hot-shots with deep pockets. These auctions become a sort of macho

### **This Week**

**Lettuce** <sup>HG</sup>

**Spinach** <sup>HG</sup>

**Tomatoes** <sup>MF</sup>

**Gold Beets** <sup>MF</sup>

**Delicata Squash** <sup>MF</sup>

**Apples OR Potatoes** <sup>HG</sup>

**Italian Parsley** <sup>MF</sup>

**Strawberries** <sup>HG</sup>

**Flowers: Mixed Bouquet** <sup>TF</sup>

spectacle where the auctioneer skillfully plays two or more bidders against each other and the price goes higher and higher—that’s the type of auction this was. Most of the “60 inch” implements actually turned out to be 80 inch equipment that was brought over from a farm on the coast and all of the irrigation pipe went for over \$40 a joint to an internet buyer (the auctioneer works out of a very tall converted camper shell on the back of a pickup truck that drives from lot to lot. It has a wireless connection allowing them to simultaneously take bids from people over the internet).

Instead of taking Hwy 198 back home, I drove through the oilfields north of Coalinga and got onto Los Gatos Creek or “Coalinga” road. This was probably the first road between King City and Coalinga and it is incredibly remote and windy. It is also where the DC3 carrying the deportees that Woody Guthrie immortalized in song went down on January 28th, 1948—my Dad’s fifteenth birthday.

*The sky plane caught fire over Los Gatos Canyon,  
A fireball of lightning, and shook all our hills,  
Who are all these friends, all scattered like dry leaves?  
The radio says, "They are just deportees"*

The bodies of the twenty eight migrant workers who died in the plane crash were taken to Fresno and buried in a mass grave. It was considered one of the worst disasters in the short history of aviation up to that time.

I returned home up Hwy 25 through Hollister in time for dinner. Even though the auction didn’t turn out as I had hoped, sometimes, when the work around me gets overbearing, a change of scenery has a way of putting everything in its proper perspective.

## Recipes and Notes

(see [www.mariquita.com/recipes](http://www.mariquita.com/recipes) for more recipes)

### Spinach & Apple Salad, from Chef Jonathan Miller

1 bunch spinach	½ cup hazelnuts (filberts)
½ red onion, thinly sliced	1-2 apples, cored and thinly sliced
1 garlic clove	salt
balsamic vinegar	olive oil
¼ cup parsley, chopped	4 oz fresh goat cheese, crumbled

Stem and clean the spinach. If the leaves are large, roughly chop them. Roast the hazelnuts in a 350 degree oven for about 8 minutes, or until the skins have darkened and begun to loosen off the meat. Wrap them in a cloth towel and allow to cool and steam for a few minutes. Gently but firmly rub the nuts together in the towel so that the skins rub off. Don't worry if every spec of skin comes off. Toss the sliced red onion in a bowl of ice water and allow to sit for 10 minutes. Drain and pat dry.

Chop the garlic clove with a pinch of salt. When it is chopped very fine, make a paste with it by mashing it with the side of your knife against the cutting board. Transfer the paste to a medium bowl. Add a couple tablespoons of balsamic vinegar to the garlic and whisk until smooth. Add a few tablespoons of olive oil, while whisking, until the dressing is emulsified.

Toss the spinach with the apples, red onion, goat cheese, and parsley, then add as much of the dressing as you like, tossing again. Serve with the hazelnuts sprinkled on top.

### Beet Salad, from Chef Jonathan Miller

(Featured in last Saturday's cooking class.)

1 bunch beets	1 bunch beet greens (stems trimmed and saved for another use)
1 shallot, thinly sliced	olive oil
balsamic vinegar	red wine vinegar
3 oz fresh goat cheese	2-3 TBL pine nuts

Roast your beets to your liking (I roast mine at 375 for about 50 minutes in a covered baking dish with a little water in it). Cool slightly, peel under cold water, then quarter or cut into eighths, depending on size.

While beets roast, wash your beet greens, then chop them into small pieces. Heat a large skillet and sauté the shallot in a little olive oil for about 30 seconds, then add the beet greens with a hit of salt. Sauté until wilted, about 2 minutes. Put the greens and all the pan juices on a serving plate.

Whisk a tablespoon or two, each, of the vinegars with a pinch of salt, then drizzle in some olive oil (about 3T), whisking, until emulsified. Toss the quartered beets into the bowl and allow to marinate while you finish the dish.

Toast the pine nuts in a skillet with a teaspoon of oil until golden. Spoon the beets onto the greens drizzling any extra vinaigrette around the greens. Arrange the goat cheese on the beets in clumps, then sprinkle the pine nuts on top. Serve warm or at room temperature.

### Steamed Potatoes with Shallots, from Chef Jonathan Miller

These are fine by themselves, but even more fun on top of some salad greens. My wife likes this with plenty of black pepper.

1 lb potatoes (not russets)	4 shallots, very thinly sliced
olive oil	sherry vinegar
black pepper	

Slice your potatoes (no need to peel them) into relatively thin rounds, then toss them in a steamer until they are tender but not falling apart, maybe 8 minutes. While they are still hot, toss them with the shallots, a couple tablespoons of olive oil and some generous splashes of sherry vinegar. Give them a generous grind of black pepper and toss in some salt and toss again. Good by themselves, but also great tossed with an herb like chive, or tarragon, then plopped on some cold salad greens.

### Parsley Vinaigrette, from Chef Jonathan Miller

2 cloves garlic	¼ tsp. peppercorns, ground
¼ tsp. fennel seeds, ground	2 TBL tarragon, chopped
¾ cup parsley, chopped	1 shallot, chopped
peel of 1 lemon	¾ cup olive oil
champagne vinegar to taste	

Combine all the ingredients together except the vinegar and stir well. Allow to sit for a little while so the flavors can develop. Just before serving, add a little vinegar, maybe a TBL, or to taste (the vinegar leaches color from the herbs—that’s the reason to hold off).

*From Mariquita Farm: tomatoes, gold beets, delicata squash, Italian parsley. From High Ground Organics: strawberries, lettuce, spinach, apples, potatoes. From Thomas Farm: flowers.*