

Roots & Sprouts

News and Ideas from the Belmont Farmers' Market

summer 2008

www.belmontfarmersmarket.org



Open June 12th
to October 30th

Thursday afternoons
2:00 to 6:30 pm

BELMONT CENTER

Conveniently located behind
the Leonard St. stores – in
the municipal parking lot off
Cross Street and Channing
Road – where it's easy to
run...

walk...

bike...

and "SHOP LOCAL" for food
and all your other needs!

The Belmont Farmers' Market
is a member of the Belmont
Center Business Association.

This month's issue of **Roots & Sprouts** is about the many ways people learn and grow through farming and gardening. Our feature article by Joan Teebagy describes our own Chenery Middle School courtyard and the wonderful ways it supports children's education. We have a profile of Sandra Curro, who grows thousands of plants in the Underwood Greenhouse with the help of volunteers, many of them school children. And in our Food for Thought section, Gretta Anderson shares her knowledge of organic farming. School will be out shortly, but farming never ends. Happy summer!

Lessons from a Garden

Everyone is learning in a vibrant community project

Hidden in the center of the Chenery Middle School is one of Belmont's treasures: the courtyard garden, complete with a goldfish pond and waterfall, a tripartite composting bin, winding paths, and a wide selection of native plants. I recently had the opportunity to visit the school garden with Phyl Solomon, a frequent Farmers Market volunteer with her husband, Paul, and a member of Habitat, the environmental education center on Belmont Hill.

A leader in the garden's creation, Phyl is the coordinator of the Habitat Intergenerational Program which helped guide the courtyard garden project. The membership of the group includes parents, teachers, seniors, landscape architects, and students. Chenery's school garden exists because people old and young, organizations, and businesses donated their time, effort, and resources. The Foundation for Belmont Education was one of those organizations that assisted with generous financial support.

Phyl showed me around on a beautiful spring day during April school vacation, when we had the garden to ourselves. The garden is so inviting that I could have stayed all day. It is planted with primarily native flowers, shrubs, and trees. Its variety includes a tall white birch, tiny wild strawberries, a small pond, and raised herb boxes. Talented student artwork hangs on the walls. Benches and

little wooden stumps are arranged for reading circles. A neatly organized shed and hoses are located in one corner. There is even an area for weeds (or "surprise plants") to grow for study.

Chenery's garden is designed not only for the education of students but also for the larger community. There are classes and activities for all ages. Its mission statement reads: "Our own Chenery Middle School courtyard garden goals are: To enrich the academic experience of the students. To foster positive multigenerational learning and hands-on experiences. To promote sound environmental stewardship. To create a garden that uses native plants, shrubs, and trees." A barren three-story courtyard in 2002, the garden recently received the National Wildlife Federation Certificate of Achievement.

Chenery's garden reflects a growing interest in school gardens for education. School gardens range widely in size and interest, from the grand Edible School Yard at the Martin Luther King Middle School in Berkeley, California, to a little strip of dirt where a nursery school teacher plants a row of peas with her students. Berkeley's Edible School Yard operates on a budget of hundreds of thousands of dollars. Many others exist with no budget at all and are run with the help of a

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Belmont's farming past: it's back!

An interview with Sandra Curro, BFM vendor and owner of the Underwood Greenhouse

When I met Sandra Curro recently outside her greenhouse, she and dedicated volunteers had just finished planting 500 tomato plants she will sell this spring and summer. She remarked about the heirloom tomatoes, "They're the kind you don't get at the big chain stores."

Sandra spends about 30 hours a week at the greenhouse during the growing season, but stops after July 10th when the heat in the old greenhouse is too much to handle. Volunteers are an important part of the operation: during school vacation week, some 10 to 12 high school students help out. In addition, she also gets help from the Girls Scouts, the Brownies, neighbors, and senior citizens. Sandra says the volunteers, especially the students, gain a better appreciation for the work involved, especially the amount of time required for watering and moving the plants around the greenhouse.

In 1980, Frank Curro, Sandra's father, purchased the greenhouse. Originally built for the Underwood family by Lord & Burnham, a renowned manufacturer founded in 1849, the large building contained a handball court where Teddy Roosevelt once played. Today it is devoted entirely to raising some 15,000 annuals and a number of perennials, with some plants being donated to the Belmont Garden Club for sale at Town Day. In June, Sandra and her volunteers will be selling plants at their stand at the Belmont Farmers' Market. You can also purchase her plants if you stop by the driveway entrance at 20 School Street.

Sandra and her husband use the revenue from her plant sales to help refurbish the greenhouse. "I love the building," she says, "but greenhouses are fragile things and very expensive to run. The winter is brutal, breaking glass and ripping off the roofing. You've got to watch constantly what the weather is doing to stay in balance with warmth, cold, and rain." All watering is done by hand, and a separate oil furnace in the basement helps to offset the cold.

Frank Curro was a wholesale florist at the Boston Flower Exchange for 50 years while living on Waverley Street just across from the greenhouse. "The happiest years of his life," Sandra recalls, "were puttering around the greenhouse, being friendly with gardeners, and keeping the place serviceable." She was the child who took an interest in her father's work. "I learned by doing. I would sneak over to the Underwood estate to watch."

An interest in our agrarian history continues with Sandra's niece, Catherine Caruso, an undergraduate at Wellesley College, who has recently won an award for her research on Belmont's ecological history. Catherine has worked with Gretta Anderson on her new acre at the Richardson property. Gretta and Sandra help each other out and, with Catherine, provide the current link between the old and the new in Belmont's farming story.

– Jane Sherwin

Another opening . . .

Come join us for the opening of the 2008 Belmont Farmers' Market on June 12th at 2 pm when Dr. Paul Solomon, former Selectman, will have the honor of cutting the ceremonial tomato line. Nathaniel and Benjamin Meyer will sound a trumpet fanfare for the occasion.

Looking ahead . . . June 26th is Welcome Summer Day at the Market – featuring Belmont's own Angelato's as guest vendor. To keep up with the latest Market announcements, or to volunteer to help on Market days, check out our website: belmontfarmersmarket.org. To be really in the know - ask to be put on the Market's weekly email list.

The season is upon us. June 12th can't come soon enough!



www.belmontfarmersmarket.org

Belmont Farmers' Market Committee

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2008 Vendors

- **B & R Artisan Bread** handcrafted loaves made with natural ingredients
- **Codman Farm** eggs, pasture-raised meat, corn, and pumpkins
- **Coutts Specialty Foods** jams, jellies, applesauce, relishes
- **Crystal Brook Farm** a variety of fresh goat cheeses
- **Dick's Market Garden Farm** produce
- **The Farm School** certified organic vegetables, fruits, flowers, soap, grass-fed meat
- **Fiore di Nonno Cheese** handcrafted fresh mozzarella
- **Hmong Farms at Flats Mentor Farm** fresh produce featuring Asian vegetables
- **Herb Lyceum** specialty herbal plants, herbal products and foods
- **Hutchins Farm** certified organic plants, vegetables, herbs, small fruit and apples
- **Kimball Fruit Farm** vegetables, fruit, pies, honey
- **Merrimack Valley Apiary** many varieties of honey
- **Nicewicz Family Farm** apples, peaches, plums, berries, vegetables, flowers
- **NorthStar Farm** perennial plants and cheeses made in Westport, MA
- **PetsiPies** sweet and savory pies and other treats
- **Shootflying Hill Sauce Co.** dessert sauces
- **Stillman's at the Turkey Farm** grass-fed meat
- **Thoreau Foods** organic cereals, toppings, smoothie boosters
- **Underwood Greenhouse** potted plants grown in Belmont
- **Waverley Place** flowers, herbs and perennials grown in Waltham



Food for Thought

Residents share their passion for fresh food, farmers' markets, and good living

"Hey lady, are you a farmer?" He looked to be about five years old. Holding his father's hand, he stood by the farm road watching while I disked the field. His second question, yelled loudly to be heard over the roar of "Bel", my tractor, was, "Is that your red tractor?" I smiled, nodded, and gave him the thumbs up. I felt like a rock star or some kind of hero.

There are many reasons why I am involved in small-scale, sustainable agriculture. I love being immersed in work that calls my whole being – mind, body, spirit – into action. Growing food helps me stay connected to nature, this community, my heritage, my values. It's deeply satisfying to have the seasons and weather dictate how I spend my days. I love working outdoors, under the sky. I enjoy eating food I've had a hand in growing. It's awesome to do work that elicits hero worship from small children.

Why have you chosen to buy locally grown vegetables, fruit, meat, and cheese? Why involve yourself in sustainable agriculture in this way? Exceptional quality and taste are reasons many folks cite. Others note the health benefits of eating food that's fresh and not soaked in chemical fertilizers and herbicides or drowned in chemical pesticides. Some say that the pleasure of eating is heightened when there's a connection with the source of our food, the farmland and farmers.

Eating locally isn't simply a result of seeking to maximize our pleasure. Intentionally or not, we are part of a growing community of farmers, eaters, food artisans, chefs, policy makers, and activists who are helping to build a regional food system that is economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable. (And you thought you were just buying tasty food!) Many of us are now savvy to, and appalled by, the real costs of the corporate industrial food complex – it poisons our environment, often exploits farm workers, and increases our dependence on petroleum. Buying locally grown food supports a food system that minimizes nonrenewable inputs, petroleum-based fertilization, chemical pest control, and fuel to transport food from a distant shore.

What kind of food to buy and who to buy it from—your decision matters. There are many motivations for buying locally: desire for the most pleasurable and healthy eating experience, concern for the environment, or solidarity with a grassroots movement that seeks to transform our food system. And from where I sit atop "Bel", my red tractor, your decisions to buy locally grown food make you the real hero.

– Gretta Anderson

Gretta Anderson operates the Belmont CSA on a small market garden in Belmont. You can find her produce at Kitchen on Common, Formaggio Kitchen, Craigie Street Bistrot, and Whole Foods. She blogs about her farming experience at www.BelmontCSA.blogspot.com.

*Be a hero:
buy locally grown*



Music at the Market

In case fresh, local, high quality isn't enough . . . the Farmers' Market will again provide live music on several market days – featuring some of Belmont's top young talented players. Check our website for dates, times and other details. Performers over the summer will include, in addition to brass players Nathaniel and Benjamin Meyers: violinist Julia L., the Lockett Family Trio, violinist Karen Allendoerfer, the violin duo of Julia M. and Mirella B, and violinist Xyla Foxlin.

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couple of dedicated parents or teachers. However, most budgets fall in between and operate with volunteer effort, donations, and grants.

The focus of the gardens varies from native shrubs and trees to active growing of herbs, vegetables, and flowers. Some also maintain worm-composting bins, or even raise chickens. The possibilities are limited only by climate, space, budget, and the imagination and interest of parents, students, and teachers.

The school gardens provide many opportunities to learn about healthy eating. Kids are usually very excited about watching plants grow and may be willing to try eating vegetables they've grown themselves. This experience is a wonderful way of expanding a child's dietary choices.

Children observe, discover, and learn so much from studying the growth and development of the garden. Some of the Chenery students' many activities have included growing herbs, tasting berries from the "wild" garden, and observing dragonflies on the pond. Among the possibilities are experiments for science class, measuring and statistical analysis for math class, and natural subjects for art class. While studying history, children can plant herbs that early colonists used or can cultivate corn, bean, and squash planted by Native Americans.

Lessons of life, death, seasonality, and ecological systems in the natural world can be integrated into every area of the school curriculum. Even

the unpredictability of outcomes in the garden's lifecycle, including the weather, teach children that, whether in the garden or in their own lives, not all results can be anticipated.

And of course, in addition to curriculum learning, children just plain enjoy garden time. They beg to work and study in the garden, seeing it not as a chore but as fun. Whatever their mission, size, or budget, a school garden provides rich resources. It becomes a place to learn, to discover, to nurture, and to experiment. School gardens grow children as much as children grow gardens.

To learn more about schoolyard gardens, including how you can support or help create them, check out the links below.

– Joan Teebagy

Twenty good reasons to have a garden and a kitchen at your school
<http://www.edibleschoolyard.org/howto.html>

CitySprouts school garden program, Cambridge, Massachusetts
<http://citysprouts.org/>

Edible Schoolyard garden program, Berkeley California
<http://www.edibleschoolyard.org/homepage.html>

"Chenery Courtyard Blossoms!" – **Cheetazine**, a student e-zine
<http://www.belmont.k12.ma.us/chenery/cheetazine/fall03.pdf>

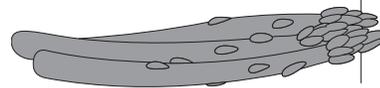
What's Fresh . . . in early summer

arugula
asparagus
escarole
flowers
green onions
honey
kale
lettuces
(butterhead, frisee, leaf, romaine, cos)
herbs
radishes
raspberries
rhubarb
spinach
sugarsnap peas
strawberries
baby summer squash

Easy Hot Asparagus Appetizer

Take advantage of the season's fresh asparagus with this simple, crunchy broiled asparagus appetizer. Think of it as a variation of the old "pigs-in-a-blanket."
Serve, enjoy, and then honor requests for your recipe!

Prosciutto—very thinly sliced
Dijon mustard
Fresh asparagus stalks of similar thickness
Parmesan cheese—freshly grated



Cut off the tip end of the asparagus stalks, making pieces 4-to-5 inches long including the tip. (Save the stalk bottoms for a delicious stir-fry.)
Halve each prosciutto slice crosswise.

For each appetizer, spread a slice of prosciutto with a thin layer of mustard and sprinkle with cheese. Place an asparagus tip onto the prosciutto so that it protrudes on either end. Roll up the meat around the stalk. Spread a light dab of mustard on the outside and sprinkle with more cheese which will adhere to the mustard.

Place on baking sheet and put sheet 3-to-4 inches under a broiler until the cheese bubbles, turning brown. Remove to a serving dish and spear each roll with a toothpick for easy pick-up serving.

– Susan Mead
a farmers' market shopper and vegetable grower