

Roots & Sprouts

News and Ideas from the Belmont Farmers' Market

autumn 2009

www.belmontfarmersmarket.org



Open rain or shine!

**Thursday afternoons
1:30 to 6:00 pm
until October 29th**

BELMONT CENTER

**Conveniently located behind
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Cross Street and Channing
Road – where it's easy to
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**BEST OF
BOSTON
2009**
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In this issue . . .

**Remembering Grandfather's Farm
Primer on Organic Wines
Missing the Market over the Winter
Recipe for Roasted Autumn Vegetables**

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

Remembering Life on the Farm

The Belmont Farmers' Market takes a local writer back to her own childhood and her grandfather's farm

Up until this year, I reaped the bounty of my grandfather's garden. Each time I visited him, he handed me a bag of vegetables. As I walked to my car, he followed me, gathering more vegetables and tossing them on top of the ones he had already packed.

He and my grandmother had a system. He grew corn, raspberries, strawberries, beans, peas, peppers, zucchini, peppers, potatoes, and butternut squash. He plowed the fields and fought the woodchucks. They picked together. And then he piled their bounty everywhere: in bins, buckets, and baskets. He left them at the foot of the stairs, the counters, and the tables. My grandmother held the daunting task of cutting, paring, peeling, husking, blanching, freezing, and canning.

What they couldn't eat or store, they gave away. Hence, someone in Newburyport was always going home with a bag of ten overgrown zucchini. The food pantry got used to a delivery of a thousand pounds of butternut squash because Gramp didn't like squash, but he grew it. And then, three years ago, Gram passed away. Gramp no longer had his partner or his system.

He still farmed. He still grew and harvested. But he wasn't quite sure how to store all of these vegetables. And so he gave away even more. He believed that we should use everything, including the rotten ones. "Here ya go, you can just cut out those soft spots," he'd say, handing me a moldy tomato.

A few years ago at 87, Gramp had begun to lose his balance, falling down steps and sometimes off ladders. He started to make

frequent trips to our family doctor with scrapes, sores, cuts, and bruises from his falls. The doctor reminded Gramp that he didn't need to be climbing ladders, riding tractors, or hauling vegetables. His kids told him to "knock it off" and "quit driving the tractor around," but not for a minute did he change his ways. Instead, he visited the town football coach and finagled a set of football pads off of him. He wore the pads on the tractor. If he fell, he fell with pads on. "What do you say about that?" he asked his kids.

Growing up, I took it for granted that beautiful fruits and vegetables surrounded me. I often saw picking vegetables as a chore. My mother would say, "Gramp wants us to go pick the strawberries today." "Ughhhhhh..." I'd sigh, the epitome of teen angst. I hated kneeling down in the dusty August dirt to pick the strawberries. I'd skim over my row and profess that I was done. My mother would lift up a leaf, find a berry, and say, "What's this?" And I'd go start the row again.

But then somewhere along the way, probably when my parents stopped making me help, I fell in love with the farm. I loved driving up the big, bumpy driveway and seeing my grandfather's cap bobbing through the 6 foot corn stalks. His blue eyes would twinkle as he'd hold up a prize melon or recant the story of how he finally tricked that ol' woodchuck. Even at 80, my grandmother would kneel in the dirt, wearing a big straw sunhat, picking what was ripe and ready. I'd return from college, grad-school, and then my own family life, to see that things were just the way I remembered. No matter what had gone on

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Decoding the Wine Designation

What are you buying when the label says “organic?”

With the trend to avoiding the use of pesticides and herbicides in consumables, many winemakers are changing to sustainable and organic methods of viticulture with positive results. Some have found that healthy soil will resist pest and disease attacks better, resulting in better grapes that make better wine. This addition of active microbial life in the form of naturally decaying compost and manures replaces what would have been an opportunity for pathogens to flourish.

In fact, the number of organic vineyards is growing faster than the number of wineries that are certified organic. But organic grapes do not make organic wine; certain methods of production also need to be followed to be able to attach an “organic” designation.

Beyond the treatment of the soil in which the grapes grow, there’s the question of adding sulfites in the production process. Sulfite, or sulfur dioxide, is used as a preservative in wine to prevent bacterial spoilage. However, when a wine contains sulfites at high levels, some sulfite-sensitive wine drinkers can have what they believe to be allergic symptoms.

Winemakers who do add sulfites believe that removing herbicides and pesticides in the vineyard is enough to be designated “organic.” However, the National Organic Program (NOP), a branch of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), is more precise. It has set guidelines for the processing and labeling of organic products and maintains a “National List” of allowed and prohibited substances. Accordingly, today there are four categories that organic wines can claim: “100% organic,” “organic,” “made with organic ingredients,” and “some organic ingredients.”

The claim “sulfite free” or “no added sulfites - contains naturally occurring sulfites” means that no sulfites have been added, but that sulfites may occur naturally during the wine-making process. While it is questionable whether wine without sulfites naturally occurring during fermentation is possible, the claim means that the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (BATF), which regulates and limits the use of sulfites in wine, has not detected any sulfites at such low levels and none were

added by the winery. However, if the wine-maker adds sulfites resulting in more than 10 ppm., the wine will need to be labeled “sulfites added.” Only the “100% organic” and “organic” categories must meet the criteria of no added sulfites.

What do the local wine merchants think?

Nick Martinelle, buyer for The Spirited Gourmet in Cushing Square thinks that organic wines showcase their flavors in a purer sense – that is, not hampered by chemical manipulation in a lab, multi-filtering techniques to remove sediment, or intense oak aging to obscure or mask the natural aromatics and textures. “The sulfites in wines do cause some people some problems,” he says. “My wife’s friend actually breaks out in hives when she drinks wine. I do think that aside from sulfites, tannins could cause some headaches for people but it’s not the only cause. In reality, there is no one thing that is proven to cause a reaction in people.

“The apricot test is a fun test though,” he adds. “If you eat dried apricots – loaded with sulfites – and don’t get a headache, you’re not allergic to sulfites. People need to eat food when they drink wine, and drink more water, too, as they can get acid overload or dehydrated.”

Carolyn Kemp, owner of Vintages in Belmont Center believes organic wines have come a long way, with more high-quality, artisanal producers willing to label their bottles and take credit for what they’ve been doing all along. Biodynamic culture (aligns organic processes to natural cycles and more) is more comprehensive, rigorous and “mystical.” She concludes, “The bottom line is – do they taste terrific?”

For a list of suggested organic and biodynamic wines from Vintages and The Spirited Gourmet, see belmontfarmersmarket.org.

– Laurie Levy,
with thanks to Fred Bouchard of Belmont
who writes about jazz for *DOWNBEAT MAGAZINE*,
wine and spirits for *BEVERAGE BUSINESS MAGAZINE*,
and teaches at Berklee College of Music.



www.belmontfarmersmarket.org

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2009 Vendors

- **Coutts Specialty Foods** jams, jellies, applesauce, relishes
- **Dick's Market Garden Farm** vegetables, fruits, and plants
- **The Farm School** organic vegetables, fruits, flowers, eggs, grass-fed meat
- **Fior d'Italia** pasta in many different shapes and flavors
- **Fiore di Nonno Cheese** handcrafted fresh mozzarella
- **Firenze** artisan gelato and sorbetto
- **Follow the Honey** local raw honeys bottled in beautiful glass
- **Goodies** award-winning, better-than-homemade cookies
- **Happy Halo Whisper Cakes** treats that redefine what healthy tastes like
- **Hmong Farms at Flats Mentor Farm** fresh produce featuring Asian vegetables
- **Hutchins Farm** certified organic plants, vegetables, herbs, small fruit, and apples
- **Kimball Fruit Farm** vegetables, fruit, honey, and plants
- **Mamadou Bakery** handcrafted breads
- **Nicewicz Family Farm** apples, peaches, plums, berries, vegetables, flowers
- **NorthStar Farm** perennial plants and fresh organic eggs
- **Samira's Homemade** Middle Eastern dips & salads, freshly made and delicious
- **Sassy River Sauces** savory sauces without the fat
- **Sergi Farms** Belmont's only remaining working farm
- **Shootflying Hill Co.** dessert sauces
- **Siraco** sharper knives since 1953
- **Stillman's at the Turkey Farm** grass-fed meat and freshly-cut flowers
- **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

Oh, am I going to miss the Farmers' Market now that the end of the growing season is upon us! The Market has become an important weekly event for me. Every week I carefully arrange my work schedule around it. What else will I do with that block of time in the middle of my Thursdays? Work? I would so much rather be at the Market!

The Market is a feast for my eyes and, later, my family's stomachs. I revel in the stunning colors of the produce in their fresh-picked state. Why does produce look so much better at the Market than in the grocery store? Natural light instead of florescent? Or is fresh-picked produce actually more intensely colored than grocery store produce, shipped from state to state and sitting in bins for days before I buy it? But really, does the color matter? It is the taste that knocks my socks off. Nothing, and I mean nothing, tastes as good as produce picked in the morning and eaten that same day.

Even if the Market's wares did not taste better than grocery produce, I would still shop at the Market. Why add to my personal carbon footprint by purchasing food trucked from California or even Pennsylvania when I can buy food grown locally? Some people may think that it costs more to shop at the Market. Yes, some items may cost more, but some cost less. Any additional cost is more than offset by what I believe is healthier food for me. Also, I want a healthier earth to be here for my grandchildren, if I ever get any of those darling little creatures, so I try to do my part.

A special appeal of Belmont's Farmer's Market is the variety of organic produce for sale. While organic food may or may not taste better than conventionally grown food, I believe it is better for our bodies not to ingest pesticides and chemical fertilizers, and I know organic farming is better for the health of our rivers and streams. I do not like to have to worry that the chemicals that grow our food have become part of the contaminating agricultural runoff we may later be eating because it has now become part of the food chain.

The other special appeal of the Belmont Farmers' Market is the sense of community I find there. How lovely to run into friends and acquaintances, stopping for chats about our families, politics, and what new foods have arrived on the scene on any given Thursday. Over the years I find that my community has grown, now including the farmers at the Market with whom I talk and from whom I buy.

And, oh, there is another, most wonderful special appeal for those Thursdays when it's market day. My husband Peter and I talk as we make the two-mile round trip walk to and from Belmont Center. Aha! Now I know what I can do with that break from work in the middle of my Thursdays! Peter and I can, of course, continue our healthy walks and good conversation until the Market opens again next year.

— Sallye Bleiberg,
Belmont Town Meeting member
and Farmers' Market shopper

Enjoying More Than the Market

One of the meticulously maintained antique John Deere tractors still in use at Sergi Farms in Belmont.



Mike Chase photo

(continued from page 1)

in my life, the farm was always the same. No matter how old I was, my grandparents would always send me off with bags of vegetables, a little bit of home, to add to whatever I was eating at my apartment.

This year, my grandfather passed away at 90.

I no longer get to hear his stories about what's going on "uptown," or how many ears of corn he got. This year, I didn't get bags of vegetables passed to me by his calloused hands. And so when I visit the Farmers'

Market, it's not just about getting fantastic food. I imagine who raised each vegetable. Who planted it, nurtured it, picked it. Did anyone have to fight a woodchuck? Did the rains hurt the tomatoes? How hot was it when someone picked the strawberries? Because for 37 years, I saw how much love a farmer puts into his crops. I wonder if there is a young granddaughter reluctantly helping out or an older granddaughter joyfully picking berries. I wonder if there is an older farmer who is getting unsteady on his feet but just can't give up his plants.

And then, I bring the bags of vegetables home and sit with my daughter on the back steps and repeat the tasks that I did with my grandparents. Together we husk corn and snap beans. And though I live in a house with a city plot (and not a single corn field or melon patch in sight), I can carry on the traditions of my grandparents. The Belmont Farmers' Market makes it possible.

— Amy Cooper Rodriguez, Belmont resident, free-lance writer, and stay-at-home mom who shops at the Market with her two children



A familiar Belmont summertime landmark – the sign for Sergi Farms, the one remaining farm in what was once a town of farms.

Thank you!

October 29th brings down the curtain on the Belmont Farmers' Market's fourth year. And what a year it was! Highlights included collaborating with town organizations on the One Book One Belmont project featuring Barbara Kingsolver's book *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*; welcoming Belmont's own Sergi Farms as a vendor; and being rated "Best Farmers' Market of 2009" by *Boston Magazine*.

But as always, our real success came thanks to you – our energetic volunteers, vendors, musical entertainers, chef-demonstrators, and loyal shoppers. All of you made the BFM the place to be on Thursday afternoons in the summer. Many thanks!

Have a good winter. See you in 2010!

Roasted Root Vegetables

To celebrate the garden harvest, try roasting root vegetables. When the vegetable sugars caramelize in the roasting process, you will continue to savor your garden during the fall and winter seasons.

- 3 parsnips, cut into 2-inch chunks
- 4 baby turnips, quartered
- 3 carrots, cut into 2-inch chunks
- 1 pound butternut squash, peeled and cut into 2-inch chunks
- 1 pound sweet potatoes, peeled and cut into 2-inch chunks
- 2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh rosemary*
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh thyme*
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh sage*
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh herbs such as parsley, thyme and mint to garnish*

Preheat the oven to 425 degrees.

Arrange vegetables in a single layer in a large roasting pan. Sprinkle with the garlic and herbs, drizzle with oil, and season well with salt and pepper. Toss all the ingredients together until they are well mixed and coated with the oil. (You can let them marinate at this stage to let the flavors be absorbed.)

Roast the vegetables at the top of the preheated oven for 50-60 minutes, until they are cooked and nicely brown, turning them half way through the cooking time.

Serve with a good handful of fresh herbs sprinkled on top and a final seasoning of salt and pepper to taste.

*If you don't have fresh herbs, one tablespoon fresh is equivalent to ¼ to ½ teaspoon dried, crumbled or one teaspoon ground herbs.

— Adapted from *VEGETARIAN BIBLE: FRESH FROM THE GARDEN*
by Nicola Graimes, Fiona Biggs and Lorraine Turner, editors