

Roots & Sprouts

News and Ideas from the Belmont Farmers' Market

spring 2009

www.belmontfarmersmarket.org



Welcome to the fourth season of the Belmont Farmers' Market and our newsletter, *Roots & Sprouts*. As the Town celebrates the 150th anniversary of its incorporation, our first issue reminds us of Belmont's long history of farming – a story that continues to 2009. Today, the Belmont Farmers' Market promotes local food, farming and the open marketplace as a lively community meeting and shopping locale. Join us! Volunteer with us, shop with us, make music with us. You'll enjoy it. See you at the market!

– the Belmont Farmers' Market Committee

*Opening June 11th -
rain or shine!*

**Thursday afternoons
1:30 to 7:00 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!**

In this issue . . .

**Nineteenth-century farming in Belmont
Belmont's Victory Gardens
Growing up on Belmont's last farm
Sofra's recipe for Cacik, a yogurt sauce**

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

Living Off the Land Back Then

A Sesquicentennial Tribute to our Town's Agrarian Roots

At its incorporation in 1859, which we celebrate this year, Belmont was filled with farms and market gardens, growing produce and meat for the Boston and New York markets. As our historian, Richard Betts, has recorded so well, these market gardens continued well into the 20th century, winning awards and providing jobs and revenue for so many. As far as I know, Belmont did not have its own farmers' market until 2006.

One day, however, dozing in the sun, I dreamed about shopping in the old, historic "Town of Farms." In my dream, I am back to a time at the turn of the previous century. I take a basket on my arm and walk north on Grove Street, towards the Skahan farm and greenhouses. Patrick and Sarah Skahan came from Ireland in 1854 and established an agricultural business with their family. Where the Grove Street cemetery is now, the Skahans built greenhouses and were famous for their lettuce for at least two generations.

Still heading north, I'm almost immediately in the midst of the Hittinger enterprise, founded on 40 acres of rich land between School Street and Fresh Pond by Jacob Hittinger in 1847. I wander among the orchards and vast

greenhouses run by Jacob, his son and his grandson. Then I stop at the Hittinger store at 450 School Street and purchase beets, string beans, and cucumbers. I walk up to the Shaw farm, between Grove and School Streets south of Washington. I see the high clay chimneys that, on every farm, were part of the greenhouse heating system. I purchase quinces, plums, and mushrooms, and my overflowing basket turns into a small tip cart, in order to hold everything.

I then head east on Washington Street to see what's happening at the Richardson farm, known today by many as the "Sergi Farm," and

A dream of shopping at Belmont's 19th century market gardens

now in an agricultural trust, thanks to the Ogilby family. Here I pick up asparagus and spinach from Lydia Ogilby's grandfather, Jay Howard Richardson. I continue north along Bright Road, past the two farms owned by the Bright brothers, Fred (to the west) and John (to the east). I walk down Baker Street, noticing to the west, billows of smoke arising from the Parry Brothers' brickyard stacks in the distance (no Clay Pit Pond or high school there yet). I say *buon giorno* to the Italian families newly arrived from the North End to settle in Belmont and provide essential farm labor.

(continued on page 4)

Back to the Future

A Brief History of the Belmont Community Gardens

The renewed interest in vegetable gardening is evident everywhere, from the number of people applying for community garden plots to the newly-turned garden on the White House lawn. Here in Belmont, residents have been coming together to garden for over 65 years. The Belmont Community Gardens trace their history back to the victory gardens of World War II.

During the war, Americans were urged to grow their own vegetables to help in the war effort. The Victory Garden Program was wildly successful: the USDA estimates that there were 20 million victory gardens across America in 1943. These gardens produced over 40% of the fresh vegetables grown for that year.

Belmont residents were actively engaged in the effort. In Town Meeting, March 8, 1943, it was noted that, "there have been numerous requests to the Board of Selectmen for the use of town property which may be available to be made over to such Victory Gardens." A motion was made by Selectman Charles R. Betts, and was unanimously passed. Belmont residents responded enthusiastically, and the Victory Gardens Committee received nearly 600 applications by April 3. This overwhelming response stimulated the donation of three extra gardening areas by town residents, in addition to the town-owned area on Concord Avenue. By harvest time, the gardeners had produced 50,000 cans and jars of vegetables.

After the war, the four gardens were eventually reduced to the single town-owned area. In 1969, the Concord Avenue site was slated to become part of the high school campus, and the gardens were moved to their current location at Rock Meadow. This area, purchased by the town in 1968, already had a history of agricultural use. From the late 19th century until World War II, Rock Meadow was known as McLean Farm. The farm raised cows and pigs, providing McLean Hospital with dairy and pork products. The area was actively farmed until about 1945, when wartime labor

shortages forced its closure. The farm was then fallow until the gardens were moved to the area.

Around this time, backyard and community gardening became popular again nationally. The 1970s brought the oil crisis and increases in food costs, and the Rock Meadow gardens experienced a major surge in interest, bringing the number of plots to about 100. After a decline in active gardeners in the 80s and 90s, the number of community gardeners is again on the rise.

According to the Conservation Commission, there are several reasons for this. For one, the meadow restoration project has put Rock Meadow in the news, and made it easy to find on the internet. Secondly, Belmont's Conservation Agent, Mary Trudeau, is now

actively managing the garden. And again, rising gas and food prices, as well as the movement toward fresh and local food, is fueling a renewed interest in community gardening.

The gardens, still located at Rock Meadow on Mill Street, are now called the Belmont Community Gardens. For an annual fee of \$25, gardeners can rent a plot, which includes access to water taps throughout the garden. The gardens are again in great demand: there are currently around 100 plots, and there is a waiting list for plots in 2009. Gardeners interested in applying for plots can contact Mary Trudeau by phone at (617) 993-2667 or by email at mtrudeau@town.belmont.ma.us.

– Becky Prior

Material for this article includes information from the USDA website; The Belmont Citizen Reporter ("35 Year-Old Victory Gardens Still Maintained" by Ed Moran, August 10, 1978); the Belmont Conservation Commission website (overview of Rock Meadow by Victoria Thatcher); and "A History of Rock Meadow in Belmont, Massachusetts" by Curtis Adams.

Thanks also to Mary Trudeau, reference librarian Charles Odell of the Belmont Public Library, and the Belmont Historical Society.



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2009 Vendors

- **Coutts Specialty Foods** jams, jellies, applesauce, relishes
- **Dick's Market Garden Farm** vegetables, fruit and plants
- **essie's homemade** tastefully wholesome baby food
- **The Farm School** organic vegetables, fruits, flowers, soap, grass-fed meat
- **Fiore di Nonno Cheese** handcrafted fresh mozzarella
- **Firenze** artisan gelato & sorbetto
- **Follow the Honey** local raw honeys bottled in beautiful glass
- **Goodies** award-winning, mouth-watering homemade cookies
- **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, fruit pies, honey
- **Mamadou Bakery** handcrafted breads
- **Nicewicz Family Farm** apples, peaches, plums, berries, vegetables, flowers
- **Sassy River Sauces** savory sauces without the fat
- **Shootflying Hill Sauce Co.** dessert sauces
- **Siraco** sharpening knives and garden tools since 1953
- **Stillman's at the Turkey Farm** grass-fed meat and freshly-cut flowers
- **Underwood Greenhouse** potted plants grown in Belmont
- **Waverly Place** flowers, herbs, and perennials grown in Waltham



Please check our website's vendor page for information about individual vendors and their frequency at our Market. While you're at the site, sign up for the electronic newsletter to receive regular Market updates and more.

Food For Thought

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

I look out on fields of squash and tomatoes, my family's farm. I've grown up on the only farm in Belmont, Massachusetts. The farm is small, a few acres of land tucked away among rows of houses near the Belmont and Cambridge town lines. I live on the farm with my mother, my father, my thirteen-year-old brother, my grandmother, and her dog, Sizzle. This is a world of clapboard barns, zucchini, 1930s tractors, and soft brown dirt. Growing up on a farm has defined much of who I am.

From mid-April to November I wake up to the rattling exhaust pipes of tractors that should have retired half a century ago, followed by the heavy jingling of plows bumping over dried corn stalks or semi-frozen earth. The farm has been my playground. I learned to walk, ride a bicycle, and drive on it. I made mud patties and fairy houses and gathered wildflowers from the woods as a little girl. As a teenager, I have learned about community supported agriculture (CSA), organically grown crops, and the importance of land conservation. I still love to make the occasional bouquet from flowers grown on the farm.

The farm has taught me the history of our town, too. When I was a little girl, my grandmother, Lydia Ogilby, would tell me about the Richardsons, our ancestors, who worked the land for 250 years before me. She would take me into the barn and show me the old horse-drawn cart that my great-great-grandfather used to take the vegetables from Belmont to Faneuil Hall in Boston every Wednesday for

the first quarter of the 20th century. While walking the dog, my grandmother would point out the old stone walls marking the boundaries of the farm. She would tell me the stories of Lucky, the legendary 19-year-old horse who drank a beer before he would plow

the fields. Lucky and the other horses are long gone, and the cart is full of dust and cobwebs, but learning about history on the same piece of land where I grew up

has made me realize the importance of the town's connection to the farmland.

There's a bumper sticker on the back of my father's pickup truck that says "No Farms, No Food." Because of my family's bond to the last farm, I have learned that land is not something to use and discard for cash, but something that "must be cared for." If a farmer wants her land to sustain her, she must protect the land. I think that I've learned more life lessons from the farm than I have ever learned in a school room.

--Grace Ogilby, Carlton College, Class of 2012

In 2002, the Ogilby Family donated to the American Farmland Trust and the Belmont Land Trust deed restrictions on Richardson Farm that will keep it open land for agricultural use in perpetuity. The property has been in the family since 1634 when their ancestor, Abraham Hill, received the parcel as part of a land grant from King Charles I.



(continued from page 1)

My goal is the Warren Heustis farm on what we now call the Uplands. Like the Hittingers, the Heustis family farmed their land for three generations beginning in 1845. They had a large piggery, so I stop to purchase a roast or two and some sausages made from locally-raised pork. My imaginary tip cart becomes a mule-drawn, four-wheeled wagon. Heading north on Brighton Street, I have to be careful, because Brighton Street is the route for cattle and other livestock, including turkeys, being driven to Brighton for slaughter.

My mule and I stop by one of the many Frost farms in the area north of Cross Street. The Frosts came to this area in 1635 and their descendants farmed the land well into the 20th century. Later they leased some of their land to the Scarfo family, who arrived from Sicily around 1900 and continued as farmers until the 1990s. The Scarfos produced every-

thing from radishes and zucchini to basil and tomatoes, all of which I add to my wagon. At this point, I have enough food for a very large dinner party, but realize that I've forgotten to buy flowers. I wander back past what will some day be the Winn Brook School to the greenhouses of Belmont Gardens, founded by Walter Lenk, who in the 1920s developed and patented the Belmont gardenia, and buy corsages for all my guests. Then I head north again toward Pleasant Street and the fields of the Hill family, and stop to speak with the Wellingtons and the Winns and gaze out across the greenhouses and fields along Blanchard Road, where the scent of celery hovers in the air.

In my dream, I head south on Common Street, my mule by this time working hard. There are orchards all around me, along with houses, and soon I come to the Slade farm, which

stretches down the hill from Slade Street to the Town Field. Fortunately, Mr. Slade has a fine crop of apples to sell me because by now I'm thinking I have enough food for a banquet for hundreds, and I'll need a lot of apple pies. If my mule were not so tired, I'd head over to Rock Meadow where McLean Hospital keeps its cows for milk.

Finally, I arrive back at the town center by the current parking lot. In my dream, the white awnings of the Belmont Farmers' Market are up, and I can purchase the Asian pea tendrils and amaranth that I need to round out the feast. In my imagination I see hundreds of Belmontians there to help unload the bounty, and together we prepare a feast to celebrate our Town's 150th anniversary.

– Jane Sherwin, writer,
former *Roots & Spouts* editor, has a
special interest in Belmont's farming history.

Cacik

Translation: anything green with thick garlicky yogurt.

Pronounced "jah-jik," cacik can also be used as a dip or eaten on its own as a side dish. It is similar to Greek tzaziki and Indian raita.

2 cloves finely chopped garlic
Juice of half a lemon
1 bunch scallions, roughly chopped
1 cup chopped cucumber
1 cup steamed spinach
1 cup shelled peas, blanched
2 tablespoons chopped fresh dill
½ cup curly parsley, roughly chopped
2 tablespoons finely chopped mint
2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
3 cups thick Greek-style yogurt
Salt and pepper to taste



In a small dish, stir the garlic and the lemon juice until combined. Let stand for 10 minutes. Prepare the vegetables and herbs, place them in a small mixing bowl, and season them with salt and pepper.

In a larger bowl, whisk the oil into yogurt and add the lemon juice mixture, whisking to blend well. Incorporate the vegetables into the yogurt mixture and stir until evenly distributed. Season with additional salt if desired. Serve over meatballs or on a flatbread with mixed greens

Makes 4 cups. Serves 6. You can add anything else green that you like or that is seasonal. Other good fall/winter options are Brussels sprout leaves or thinly sliced sautéed leeks.

– With appreciation to Ana Sortun's *Sofra Bakery and Café*, 1 Belmont Street in Cambridge, featuring sweets and savorys inspired by the cooking of Turkey, Lebanon and Greece and by the vegetables grown on her husband's Sudbury farm.

– Greek yogurt is available at *Sophia's Greek Pantry*, 267 Belmont Street in Belmont.