

# Roots & Sprouts

News and Ideas from the Belmont Farmers' Market

October 2006

[www.belmontfarmersmarket.org](http://www.belmontfarmersmarket.org)



*Open through  
October 26th*

**Thursday afternoons  
2:00 to 6:30 pm**

**BELMONT CENTER  
In the municipal parking lot  
behind the Leonard St. stores  
off Cross St. & Channing Rd.**

*In this issue . . .*

**Belmont's farming roots  
Meet our farmers: Butterbrook  
Organic Farm  
Food for Thought: Belmont Farmers'  
market builds community  
A Thai salad dressing from Patou**

*Roots & Sprouts, a publication of the Belmont Farmers' Market Committee, closes the first season of the market with a look backward at Belmont's own history as a farming community. Not so very long ago, our streets and blocks were fields and gardens. Historian and writer Jane Sherwin reveals the farmland under our feet.*

## Pigs and Peaches

### *The Hidden History of Belmont*

One of the joys of having a farmers' market in Belmont, aside from the produce itself and the good company of the vendors and shoppers, is to delight again in the echo of Belmont's history as a farming town. By the end of August our farmers' market had welcomed more than 15 vendors from many towns, including Bolton, Boxford, Lexington, and Belmont itself. At a recent market day I cruised around the entire circuit, as I always do, to see what new produce the season is bringing, what the best prices are, and whether there are any new vendors.

At the Nicewicz Family Farm stand, along with the sweet corn and ripe tomatoes, I saw a wooden box of Clapp's Favorite pears, a variety that used to grow in Belmont's many orchards. Reading awards lists in the *Proceedings of the Massachusetts*

*Horticultural Society* of a hundred years ago, I found the names of Belmont farmers cited for the quality of their Clapp's Favorite pears, as well as their Bay State strawberries, apples, cucumbers, cabbages, and celery.

As we talked, Tom Nicewicz said he didn't know that Belmont had been a farming community. He's in good company—how many residents know that until about the mid-twentieth century Belmont was filled with working farms and market gardens, and that we were well known in Boston and New York City for the quality of our produce?

There were the big farms, like the Hittingers' magnificent 40 acres between School Street and Fresh Pond, and the Shaw Estate between Grove, Washington, and School Streets, but there were a wide range of sizes of farms and market gardens all over town.

Until probably after the mid-1900s, anyone with a vegetable garden could set up a stand



*The renowned Heustis pigs were among many quality products from Belmont farms at the end of the 19th century. The pigs were imported from England and raised on what is now the Belmont Uplands, near Alewife.*

outside their house and sell their produce. My neighbor recalls people coming up the street with wooden carts, calling out their vegetable wares. I've also heard that people from Cambridge chose Belmont as the best place to buy fresh produce. Belmont children spent their summers picking beans and tomatoes for money to buy a bike. People on Walnut Street have told me how, as children, they used to sneak over the fences and snatch the pears and apples from the farm on Walnut Street adjacent to the Pequotsette Park.

*(continued on page 4)*

Photo courtesy of the Belmont Historical Society

# Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food

## Meet Butterbrook Organic Farm

Each issue of **Roots and Sprouts** will introduce one of our farmers or vendors. We'll tell you about how they got started, how they grow or produce their products, and what they will bring to the Belmont Farmers' Market.

Farming is a long family tradition for Guy McKay, the founder of Butterbrook Organic Farm (a/k/a Butterbrook Farm). Guy's grandfather came from Italy at the beginning of the twentieth century and started farming on the Shaw Estate not far from Belmont High School. Later, his father bought 20 acres of more affordable land in Lexington contiguous with another family member's farm.

As a boy, Guy always loved farming on his family's farm. Dissatisfied with the taste of pesticides and chemicals on produce, he grew his own garden without chemicals, not realizing that what he was doing was organic gardening. Although Guy had received a degree in electrical engineering from Northeastern University and worked for several years in the industry, he decided to learn more about this alternative method of farming and to return to his agrarian roots.

Guy and his wife, Sheryll, started Butterbrook in Acton as a family farm in 1991. Guy runs the farm; Sheryll takes care of the farm stand and farm store. Guy is very proud to say of the farm, "We are a 100% certified organic farm and that is all we do." The farm has 10 acres under cultivation, including acres in Acton, Westford and around Massachusetts, some of which are used for soil improvement purposes.

Their summer crops include a variety of lettuce, red chard, kale, collards, broccoli, carrots, green beans, beets, asparagus, tomatoes, watermelon and berries, as well

as fresh herbs, flowers, plants, and more. In addition, they have fresh eggs and chickens fed organic feed, leftover greens and, being free-range, add insects and grass to their diet.

With 9,000 square feet of greenhouses, the farm is open throughout the winter, except on Sundays. In addition to Butterbrook's fresh winter greens and storage crops, the store carries organic farm products from other Massachusetts and New England farms. Butterbrook also sells its products to area restaurants, schools and commercial businesses.

Guy offers free spring workshops to new farmers and those interested in organic greenhouse management. He is a member of and works with NOFA (Northeastern Organic Farming Association) and gives workshops regarding the sustainability of the soil. As he says, "Leave it better today than it was yesterday."

Guy is a firm believer in farmers' markets; they are more profitable for the farmer, and the consumer receives the freshest produce. His loyal followers can find him at the Lexington Farmers' Market on Tuesdays and at the Belmont Farmers' Market on Thursdays.

—Andres Aguirre

*Butterbrook Organic Farm*  
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Acton, Massachusetts  
978-263-1396  
[www.butterbrookfarm.com](http://www.butterbrookfarm.com)

## What's Fresh in... October

apples  
beets  
broccoli  
brussel Sprouts  
cabbage  
carrots  
cauliflower  
celeriac  
celery

garlic  
herbs  
kale  
leeks  
lettuce  
melons  
onions  
parsley  
parsnips

pears  
potatoes  
pumpkins  
raspberries  
rutabagas  
spinach  
swiss chard  
turnips  
winter squash



### [www.belmontfarmersmarket.org](http://www.belmontfarmersmarket.org) **Belmont Farmers' Market Committee**

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### **We thank our many volunteers!**

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Alice Janjigian Victoria Thatcher  
Laura Justin DeLynn Walker  
Art Kreiger Lily Wasserman  
Betsy Lipson Rae Yan

### **It's not too late to help!**

#### **Contact us at**

[belmontfarmersmarket@gmail.com](mailto:belmontfarmersmarket@gmail.com)

Roots & Sprouts is a publication of the Belmont Farmers' Market Committee.  
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Printer: Belmont Printing Co.

## 2006 Vendors

- **Blue Heron Organic Farm** *occasional* produce and plants grown in Lincoln
- **Busa Farm** a variety of produce grown in Lexington
- **Butterbrook Organic Farm** herbs, vegetables, honey, flowers, eggs and more
- **Coutts Specialty Foods** fine jams, jellies, applesauce and relishes
- **Dick's Market Garden Farm** a large selection of seasonal produce
- **Fiore di Nonno** fresh mozzarella, handcrafted daily "as Grandfather did"
- **Kimball Fruit Farm** vegetables, fruit, pies, honey
- **Leslie Wolf Baking** rustic fruit tarts and scones made in Belmont
- **Melissa's Flower Farm** potted herbs, annuals, cut flowers, dried flowers
- **Nicewicz Family Farm** apples, peaches, plums, berries, vegetables, flowers, more
- **NorthStar Farm** quality perennials and ornamental plants
- **Old Friends Farm** *occasional* field-grown cut flowers, shitake mushrooms and select salad greens
- **Sassy River Sauces** all natural, low-fat, healthy pestos, spreads and sauces
- **Thoreau Foods** organic breakfast cereals and toppings, smoothie boosters
- **Toscanini & Sons** breads and baked goods
- **Underwood Greenhouse** *occasional* potted herbs, annuals, perennials and tomato plants grown in Belmont
- **Waverly Place** *occasional* mums grown in Belmont's McLean greenhouses



## Food for Thought

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

*Paul Solomon is the Chairman of the Belmont Board of Selectmen, and a retired pediatrician. Phyl Solomon is an educator and coordinator of the Habitat Intergenerational Program at Habitat, the MassAudubon wildlife sanctuary in Belmont. They have lived in Belmont for many years.*

The Belmont Farmers' Market—what a wonderful addition to the Belmont community. We mean "community" in the local sense, but we also mean it in the larger sense for several reasons:

- The market opened due to the visionary hard work of a diverse group of Belmont residents.
- A number of town departments have helped in the development of the market, and they continue to be supportive.
- The market provides for residents with special needs easy access to market vendors – no steps or doors!
- A weekly market meeting place attracts friends we often see, others we meet less frequently and an opportunity to make friends with people we never knew before.
- The market is a gathering place for a diverse group of people to meet in Belmont Center. Attracting more people to the Center helps the Center's businesses, as well as offering local and regional small businesses (farmers, bakers, flower growers, etc.) a market place to sell their wares.

The Market is also educational as it reminds us that many of the foods we buy in supermarkets in any season are not grown in our area in all seasons.

Our first experience with farmers' markets was in a parking lot (sound familiar?) on the

Embarcadero in San Francisco about 15 years ago. There, we sampled an unbelievable variety of produce from one of the most prolific fruit and vegetable-producing areas in the world. Talk about educational – we learned that there were at least a dozen varieties of peaches, and tasted them all! We were hooked on farmers' markets.

We are equally taken with the variety of products available in our small, new market: the sauces and spreads, the homemade cheese and baked goods, fruits and vegetables, flowers and plants, all from slightly more than a dozen vendors, all from our region of Eastern Massachusetts. We are impressed with the entrepreneurial spirit of those who work the booths. They are the proud owners of small businesses that require specialized knowledge, long hours and commitment. It feels good to support them! We attend the market almost weekly. It has become a great and convenient place for us to shop.

Launching the farmers' market took many months. It required patience, commitment, leadership, diplomacy and tenacity, but NO appropriation of funds from the Town of Belmont! This is "volunteerism" at its best. It is what a small town is all about. We are proud to be citizens of a community that now has its own farmers' market.

*–Paul and Phyl Solomon*

## Thank you!

Many thanks to all the volunteers who brought their talents and time to the first season of the Belmont Farmers' Market. We also thank the local merchants who have supported the market and participated in our special events:

- Charlesbank Bookstore
- Patou Thai Restaurant
- Rancatore's Ice Cream
- Stone Hearth Pizza

The market has also been made merrier by musicians from our schools:

- Julia McLean
- Ella Williams
- Nathaniel Meyers
- Benjamin Meyers

We thank them especially for serenading our shoppers and vendors, and hope they and other young performers will join us in the 2007 season.

(continued from page 1)

Many immigrant people from Italy went to work on Belmont farms, walking across town each day from Baker or Trowbridge Streets, or riding out from the North End. They worked in Lexington, Arlington, and Watertown, as well. Ralph Stevens, who grew up in one of the Shaw farmhouses, describes “the Italian ladies in shawls singing as they picked the beans.” These people stayed to raise families in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and became part of the Belmont community.

Rock Meadow, the conservation land, was farmland for McLean Hospital. Cows grazed in the fields, and the hospital grew much of its own food. I dream of Rock Meadow becoming farmland again, its large fields full of community-supported agriculture. Even the hotly contested Uplands were used for farming. This land was given as a wedding present by Amos Hill to his daughter, Lucy Ann, and her new husband, Warren Heustis, and the family farmed the property for 100 years.

In their time the Heustis family were highly successful farmers. Not only did they produce award-winning strawberries, but they also imported a new breed of pig from England, raising as many as 2,000 pigs at one time. Pig farms may smell, but for Warren Heustis, they were an innovative investment. The farmers and market gardeners of his time were comparable to the software designers and high tech entrepreneurs of today. The money was in farming, the science and technology of agriculture were growing, state and federal governments were supportive, and the land, as a form of capital, was open space with rich soil.

Belmont’s remaining active farm, widely known as Sergi’s Farm, has been tilled since 1633, and is easily accessible from Glenn Road off Blanchard Road. Worked by the Sergi family since the 1940s, the nine acres of land are the private property of the Ogilby family, descendants of the Hill and Richardson families; they are responsible for

its preservation as farming land through an agricultural trust. Its corn and vegetables are eagerly sought by residents of Belmont and surrounding communities.

Belmont also has at least one working greenhouse, the large and beautiful Underwood greenhouse at the corner of School and Common Streets across from St. Joseph’s Church. During the first part of the summer, Sandra Curro and her family, present owners of the greenhouse and property, were vendors at the Belmont Farmers’ Market. In addition to Leslie Wolfe’s scones, tarts and biscotti, and the Curro family’s nursery plants, how wonderful it would be if we could begin to see again the presence of Belmont farms at our own Farmers’ Market.

*–Jane Sherwin leads the “Farm Where You Live” oral narratives project, under the auspices of the Belmont Historical Society. She can be reached at 617.489.1834 or j.sherwin@verizon.net*



## **Pumpkin Day at the Market!**

Celebrate Halloween and decorate a pumpkin at the Farmers’ Market, October 26, 2:00-6:00. Children under 12 may purchase and decorate a small pumpkin with decorating supplies courtesy of the Belmont Farmers’ Market. Children must be accompanied by an adult.

## **Patou’s Thai Dressing**

*The bright, full flavors of heirloom tomatoes and grilled vegetables pair well with the flavors of Thailand in this salad dressing from Patou Restaurant in Belmont Center.*

- 2 tablespoon palm sugar, crumbled
- 3 tablespoon fish sauce
- 2 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
- 6 tablespoon lime juice, freshly squeezed
- 2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 2 small Thai bird chili, seeded and finely chopped

1. In a bowl, combine palm sugar, fish sauce, olive oil, and lime juice; mix well.
2. Add garlic and chili; stir gently.

Serve with heirloom tomatoes, grilled eggplants or any fresh vegetable.

For 4-6 servings

*Note: Palm sugar and fish sauce can be found at local Asian supermarkets.*