

Roots & Sprouts

News and Ideas from the Belmont Food Collaborative

spring 2012

www.belmontfarmersmarket.org



*Opening Day
June 14th -
rain or shine!*

Thursday afternoons
2:00 to 6:30 pm
Belmont Center parking lot

in this issue . . .

Animal agriculture in Belmont
BFCI - not just a Market any more
Belmont Food Pantry turns 20
Recipe for pasta with goat cheese

A Study of Cycles

A peek into Belmont's pockets of animal agriculture

Interest in farming seems to be on the rise these days, and it's exciting to witness Belmont's growing role in animal agriculture.

Here in town, many raise backyard chickens, and there are also sheep and goats to be found. Liz Shaw owns sheep and goats that graze at Mass Audubon Habitat, while Joan Teebagy, Anne Stuart, and Mike Chase own goats at Belmont Acres Farm. Those involved in animal husbandry form a strong local community. Teebagy comments on how they "provide backup for each other," helping cover chores or getting together for large work projects. For these farmers, the cycles of every year provide a calendar of signs to watch for and work to be done.

Cycles of Lambing

The tasks that begin the annual cycle are breeding and then birthing, also called lambing. Sheep often are bred in the fall and give birth five months later. Lambs born in March or April will frolic around the farmyard for a month or so, and then the flock will be gradually introduced to pasture. The cycles of the young lambs and the cycles of the grass need to match up: Teebagy says that the animals will be "weaned and ready for grass when the grass is ready."

Shearing is another annual task: wool sheep need a haircut. Their wool coats are important for winter warmth, but in the summer heat they don't need so much insulation. Shearing

often happens in late winter or early spring, depending on the climate, the lambing schedule, and the shearer's availability.



Goats and sheep at Habitat

Photo courtesy Jennifer Angel

Cycles of Grazing

Once the animals are out on pasture, there are cycles of grazing. Rotational grazing is the process of moving a flock through successive small sections of pasture. Animals can be picky—if given a large area they will only eat the best grasses, whereas if they are given a smaller area they will graze more evenly. The flock will be moved onto the next area before the grass has been grazed so heavily that it

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More than a Farmers' Market

The Belmont Food Collaborative takes on new initiatives

Like the proverbial pebble in a pond, the Belmont Farmers' Market effort, started in 2005, has rippled into our community, taking on many forms. Indeed, realizing that its mission speaks to more than just the Market, in 2009 the BFM Committee formed an umbrella organization, the Belmont Food Collaborative, Inc. BFCI comprises the Market as well as other charitable and educational activities focused on fresh food, home gardening, and local and sustainable farming. Its recent achievements are highlighted below.

Accepting and Matching SNAP Dollars

In 2011 the Belmont Farmers' Market began participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the current name for the federal food stamp program. Through a grant from the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources, the Department of Transitional Assistance, and the Harvard Pilgrim Health Care Foundation, BFM is able to match SNAP dollars, up to \$25 per day per customer. In its first year of participation, BFM made 31 transactions and matched close to \$1,000.

Sharing the Bounty

The Food Collaborative and BFM vendors collaborate with three area organizations—the Boston Area Gleaners, the Belmont Food Pantry, and Food for Free—to help fresh produce reach the plates of families in need.

In 2011 the Boston Area Gleaners (BAG) delivered 1,200 pounds of fresh produce to the Belmont Food Pantry, which the Food Collaborative subsidized by paying BAG \$5 per box of produce to defray expenses. Laurie "Duck" Caldwell, Executive Director of BAG, explains that the boxes average 30 lbs. of produce and calculates that there are approximately 170 servings of produce in a 30-lb. box. By this math, BAG delivered 6,800 servings of fresh, local produce to Belmont's Pantry in 2011!

While BAG collects excess crops from farms, Food for Free collects unsold produce from market vendors. David Leslie, the Director of Food for Free, reports that food delivered from the Belmont Farmers' Market vendors in the 2011 season to shelters and pantries in the Boston area totaled 5,783 pounds of produce plus 85 baked goods.

Gardening Initiatives

The Pomona Project, launched in 2010, encourages residents to grow fruits and berries. During the winter, BFCI volunteers research which plants are optimal for Belmont's growing conditions and organize a group purchase at competitive prices. At this year's spring delivery, volunteers will distribute over 500 strawberry plants and 240 blueberry, raspberry, currant, blackberry, and fig plants. The BFCI also organized a "community seed swap" earlier this spring and will host a talk by Liz Gourley on edible landscaping this June.

Backyard Chicken Keeping

Did you know Belmont allows a household to keep up to five hens? Two BFCI board members teach chicken-keeping classes on a regular basis. Joan Teebagy, often cited in Boston publications for her popular workshops, gave one in Belmont this spring. Suzanne Johannet teaches classes to Chenery Middle School's Courtyard Club, whose members grow crops in the school's enclosed courtyard. She reports that many of the class participants are now keeping hens.

A Sense of Community

One radiating effect of the Food Collaborative that cannot be so easily quantified as the examples above is the increased sense of community it fosters. A few years ago Belmont resident Sallye Bleiberg wrote in *Roots & Sprouts*: "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." This feeling is shared by many of us today.

— Sara Cummins and Jennifer Angel



Belmont Food Collaborative Board of Directors

Kim Foster
Suzanne Johannet
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Evanthia Malliris
Cate McGrail
Becky Prior
Paul Santos
Hal Shubin
Vicky Slavin
Anne Stuart
Joan Teebagy
Heli Tomford

BFCI is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

Volunteers

Jennifer Angel	Dee Ippen
Faye Blazer	Susan Marsh
Jan Cannon	Kathy Martin
Sara Cummins	David Mitchell
Catherine Curro	Tom Neel
Sandra Curro	Steve Pinkerton
Deborah Deutsch	Mary Ries
Debbie Dobbins	Jane Sherwin
Tom Dorsey	Lucia Sullivan
Janice Frishkopf	Bill Tomford
Liz Gourley	Denise Umans

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



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2012 Vendors

Here are some of the vendors we expect in the coming season. There are more to come! Not all vendors will appear every week. Check the BFM website or e-newsletter for complete details.

- **ButterGirl Baking Co.** fresh baked treats made with a whole lotta luv
- **Carlisle Honey** local honey and hand-made beeswax candles
- **Coastal Vineyards** of South Dartmouth
- **Dan's Brick Oven Bread** natural whole-wheat sourdough
- **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
- **Goodies** award-winning, better-than-homemade cookies
- **Hutchins Farm** certified organic plants, vegetables, herbs, small fruit, and apples
- **Kimball Fruit Farm** vegetables, fruit, and plants
- **Lawton's Family Farm** fresh cheeses and veal
- **Mamadou Bakery** handcrafted breads
- **Nicewicz Family Farm** apples, peaches, plums, berries, vegetables, flowers
- **Pat-O's Pickles** hand packed small batch pickles
- **Samira's Homemade** Middle Eastern dips and salads, freshly made, delicious
- **Sea Street Soups** a bowl of goodness
- **Soluna Garden Farm**
- **Sfolia's Pizzelles** Italian treats hand-made in Belmont
- **Stillman's at the Turkey Farm** grass-fed meat and freshly cut flowers
- **Stow Greenhouses**
- **Turkey Brook Farm** home of Red Label Poultry, raised in the French tradition
- **Turtle Creek Winery** of Lincoln
- **Underwood Greenhouses** potted plants grown in Belmont
- **Well Fed Dog** complete, balanced nutrition for all stages of your dog's life
- **Westport Rivers Vineyard & Winery**
- **Wild Acre Inns** flowers, herbs and more



Food for Thought

Belmont Food Pantry Turns 20

In February of 1992, parishioners at St. Joseph's Church approached Patty Mihelich about the lack of food aid in Belmont, noting that residents needing assistance had to drive to pantries in other towns. Mihelich approached the Board of Selectman about the need for a food pantry here in town. With the help of local churches and a small start-up grant from Project Bread, the Belmont Food Pantry opened its doors in December of 1992 in the basement of the old Waverley Fire Station.

Today, the Pantry is located in the former Belmont Light Department building at 450 Concord Avenue, next to the Police Station in Belmont Center, with Patty Mihelich as its longstanding Director. The Belmont Food Pantry is a non-profit organization that depends entirely on town volunteers and organizations—including the Belmont Food Collaborative (BFCI).

According to Mihelich, "Collaboration between the Food Pantry and the Farmers' Market began when the Market invited shoppers to bring Pantry donations on Market days. When the Pantry started to offer fresh produce four years ago, it was initiated by the BFCI." To help the Boston Area Gleaners cover delivery costs, the Food Collaborative pays BAG a small fee for each box of fresh produce delivered to the Pantry.

In another example of local support, Savinos Grill and Conley's Pub & Grille each recently donated 10 percent of an evening's proceeds to the Pantry in response to the Belmont Citizen-Herald's "Gifts of Hope" campaign. Many of Belmont's schools, houses of worship, and scout troops also hold regular food drives for the Pantry.

As the Pantry celebrates its 20th year, Mihelich notes, "The need has changed tremendously over time. During the last three years, four new people have signed up every single month. When the Pantry opened 20 years ago, it served 16 families per month. It now serves an average of 100 families per month."

At a volunteer Meeting in March, attendees ranged from those with over a decade of helping on Pantry distribution days, to a college student who had volunteered in the 6th grade, to a new Belmont resident. The agenda listed tasks for which volunteers are needed, such as managing the website and email or managing one-time volunteer groups. Most volunteer jobs involve small time commitments. If you are interested in becoming a volunteer, you can contact: belmontfoodpantry@gmail.com



Each month, on the 1st and 3rd Saturdays from 8:30-9:30 AM and the 2nd and 4th Tuesdays from 5:30-6:30 PM, the Pantry is open for Belmont residents to receive food assistance, and for anyone to drop off donations. Small donations can also be dropped off at Shaw's in Waverley Square. (Check with the service desk for the location of the Pantry barrel.) For a list of needed donations, visit the Pantry's website: <https://sites.google.com/site/thebelmontfoodpantry/menu>

Monetary donations are, of course, also appreciated. Checks should be made payable to "Belmont Food Pantry, Inc." and mailed to: PO Box 291, Belmont, MA 02478.

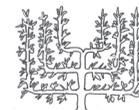
— Sara Cummins

Upcoming Talk

"Edible Landscaping"
presented by Elizabeth Gourley

Wednesday, June 20th 7:00 PM
Belmont Public Library, Assembly Room

Learn how to incorporate edible plants into your home landscape. Free.



(continued from page 1)

cannot grow back. In spring when the grass grows rapidly, the flock might cycle quickly through the pastures, while in the heat of summer the flock will move more slowly as the grass needs more time to rest and regrow.

Throughout the year there are also cycles of water availability. The moisture of spring leads to grass so rich that in order to avoid overeating and bloating you have to be careful how quickly you put your animals out on pasture. The freezing nights of winter can freeze the animals' water unless there is some sort of heating or insulation.

On farms where the pasture is cut for hay, a stretch of a few hot, clear days is essential for making hay. In our area, two cuts of hay will typically be made in a year. The first cut in May or June tends to be coarse, and the second cut in August is softer and greener. Teebagy says that Belmont Acres Farm does not make hay: "For a five-acre farm it is not realistic to make hay because of [the cost of the] equipment." Instead, the goat farmers

buy hay from other farms, another instance of members from the farming community supporting each other.

When animals are raised for meat, there are cycles of slaughter. And even for animals not raised for meat, old age brings decisions about what constitutes compassionate and responsible care.

Disruptions of Cycles

What about when these cycles are disrupted? The early 80-degree weather in March made Liz Shaw concerned about lambing, because the flies are out and the parasite load will be heavy (a hard freeze is necessary to kill parasite eggs in the grass on which the animals graze). Also, with "no real winter," Shaw says, "I put more wear and tear on the pasture because the grass sprouted up early—I had to take [the animals] off that pasture completely to give the grass a chance to grow back." Now, she says, "we need rain for the grass to grow, and the grass needs a nice rest."

The cycles of nature provide a routine, a chance to plan, and an opportunity to recognize cause and effect. Yet because of the interdependency of the many elements of farming, a change in one cycle might affect all the others in ways that are hard to predict.

Coming Full Cycle

Interest in small-scale agriculture represents a cycle in itself: young farmers today are re-learning a way of thinking about and existing in the natural world that their great-grandparents may have taken for granted. We learn to pay attention to the cycles of the days and the seasons, and as the weather turns to spring, we know it is lambing time.

— Rebekah Meyer, a graduate of Belmont High, will start her doctorate in veterinary medicine at Tufts this fall.



Willow, one of the ewes at Habitat

Pasta with Herbed Goat Cheese and Asparagus

This recipe comes to us courtesy of Westfield Farm. Located on 20 acres in Hubbardston, Massachusetts, Westfield Farm has been handcrafting goat cheeses since 1971, producing over 1,500 pounds of cheese per week.

- 1 clove garlic, peeled
- ½ cup nonfat cottage cheese
- ½ cup goat cheese
- 2 tablespoons plain nonfat yogurt
- ¼ cup mixed chopped fresh herbs such as tarragon, parsley, basil, thyme, dill, and chives
- salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
- 12 ounces pasta
- 1 pound asparagus, trimmed and cut into 1-inch pieces

Mince garlic in a food processor. When garlic bits adhere to the sides, stop the processor and stir down the sides.

Add the cottage cheese and goat cheese, and process until completely smooth. Add the yogurt and mix well.

Transfer the cheese mixture to a bowl, and stir in the herbs. Add pepper to taste and salt if desired. Set aside.

Bring a large pot of water to a boil and add 2 to 3 teaspoons salt. Add the pasta, stir until the water returns to a boil, and cook until *al dente*, about 10 minutes.

About 5 minutes before the noodles will be done, drop the asparagus pieces into the pot. Cook for the remaining time, then drain the pasta and asparagus and toss at once in a warm bowl with the cheese mixture. Serves 4.