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RANCOCAS CREEK FARM

“Farmin’ Times”

Winter 2022

Hello and greetings from Rancocas Creek Farm! Well I must say, I do enjoy a real winter. We’ve had some nice cold days and nights and even some real snow! A true winter puts me at ease. When it is frigid outside as it is today, I don’t feel



guilty about sitting at my dining room table with seed catalogues strewn about and a sleeping cat next to them as I type out crop plans and the winter

newsletter. On a practical note, the cold has its benefits for the farm as it can knock back agricultural pests and diseases and it can help thwart invasive species. And a little hibernation here and there never hurt anyone. In fact, I make a motion that we add a 13th month to the calendar and call it ‘hibernational’ or something along those lines. A mandatory 30 days of doing a lot less to practically nothing. Not sure it would work given the math of the calendar but maybe a day of hibernation? Think on it.

Winter is a time for planning and dreaming. All the varieties of all the crops in all the seed catalogues look like can’t-miss homeruns. It can be hard to not want to try every variety. I have learned over time that staying true and simple is

the way to go while allowing for some new and interesting trials every year. I talk to a lot of farmer friends to see what varieties they recommend that we might grow at Rancocas Creek Farm. Oh but these catalogues are so tempting! Even the plant variety names are alluring: ‘Scarlet Kale’, ‘Avalanche Peas’, “Honeyboat Squash”, “Gourmet Peppers’ and “Obsession Basil”. It helps to have a budget to control a farmer’s desire to buy everything...



I have also learned that winters go by quickly. It may not always seem that way but we start our first seeds in late February in the greenhouse and once those first parsley, cabbage and onion seeds go into the soil, it is GAME ON. And the ‘game’ doesn’t really end until Thanksgiving. So these cold days are vital. There is a heck of a lot of planning to do and shares to sell so once we start farming we have a solid blueprint to follow. A farm season without a plan is like a ship without a rudder. And thusly I think and plan and type and repeat until we have what we hope is a good



CSA SHARES ARE AVAILABLE FOR THE 2022 FARM SEASON!

SHARES CAN BE PURCHASED AT: pinelandsalliance.org/join-the-csa

A CSA share is \$560 (\$540 for PPA Members).

A \$150 payment is due to reserve your share.

A \$205 payment is due February 10th and the final \$205 is due May 10th.



You can make payments on the website or mail a check made out to ‘Rancocas Creek Farm’ to:
Rancocas Creek Farm
17 Pemberton Rd / Southampton, NJ 08088

plan for the farm season. (Coffee and Bill Evans music help). There is outside work to do as well. Turning compost piles, maintaining and repairing equipment, catching up on building and grounds projects. This winter we are finishing our tool shed and building a second high tunnel. We are also involved in a new maple sugaring project sponsored by Stockton College. We will be tapping Red, Silver and Norway maples on the property and boiling down their sap into syrup. Sugar Maple sap has the



highest concentration of sugar and thus produce syrup with less energy and time but the other maples also produce sap that can be processed down into yummy syrup. We are one of several hubs in central and south Jersey participating. One of the goals is to get others involved in tapping and they can bring their sap to us to process then we share the syrup. This can be one way to use carbon sequestering trees to also provide food and income to growers. We will start our tapping in late January and I will keep you

Rancocas Creek Farm 2021 Harvest Totals

(In pounds)



- Watermelons: 7,787
- Tomatoes (field): 7,516
- Winter Squash: 6,205
- Cherry Tomatoes: 5,935
- Carrots: 4,081
- Beans: 3,322
- Cucumbers: 3,289
- Sweet Potatoes: 3,072
- Beets: 3,049
- Peppers: 2,758
- Cabbage: 2,667
- Greens: 2,478
- Cantaloupe: 2,412
- Lettuce: 2,117
- Radishes: 2,043
- Summer Squash: 1,963
- Potatoes: 1,913
- Turnips: 1,473
- Eggplant: 1,436
- Onions: 1,241
- Kale: 994
- Okra: 810
- Scallions: 581
- Leeks: 471
- Rhubarb: 376

Total 2021 Produce: 72,686 lbs





Thank You To Everyone On Our 2021 Farm Crew!

Assistant Manager: Jess Brandeisky

Farm Interns: Katie Green & Alex Robb

Part-time Farmers: Katie Goettle, John Hawkins, Tim Hawkins

Workshares: Colleen O'Brien, Monica Cahill, Michelle Kennedy, John Kij, Candie Leusner, Chelsea Molineaux,

Student Interns: Mike Baron & Henry Moyer

Partner Organizations: Kingsway Learning Center, Northern Burlington High School, AmeriCorps Rancocas Creek Watershed Ambassador Program

Volunteers: Too Many To Mention! But volunteers of all ages gave us hundreds of valuable hours on the farm and we appreciate you!



updated on how it is going (and we may need volunteers if you are interested!). We plan on expanding this project in subsequent winters and we even planted 50 Sugar Maples that should be ready to tap by 2048!! Winter also allows us some time to put the farm crew together. We were sad to lose Farmer Jess at the end of 2021. She worked so hard and was a great asset to our farm. And I know you enjoyed seeing Jess and her dog Bentley on shop days. Without question Jess helped the farm

achieve success during our first year as a CSA. So how do we replace her? First of all, Alex Robb is returning for the 2022 season. Alex was hired as a summer intern and wound up staying to the end of the year. Alex put his heart and soul into the farm and he will be taking on more responsibilities in 2022. I am also pleased to announce the addition of two new Apprentices: Chris Bunn



and Ezra Tischler. Chris grew up in the area and went to school in Maine. He has farmed and taught outdoor education in New England and Europe and is excited to be back on Jersey soil farming in Burlington County. Ezra went to school in PA and has some excellent experience working on farms and orchards in PA. He has also worked in the fields of environmental education and sustainable energy and is involved in the South Philly Food Cooperative. Alex, Chris and Ezra will be starting at the farm this winter and will be here until the end of the growing season. I'm looking forward to having the crew up and rolling at RCF!

But before we get going I'd like to take a quick look back at the 2021 season. To review, the Pinelands Preservation Alliance acquired what we now call Rancocas Creek Farm at the end of 2019 through a generous donation from the Yingling family. I joined PPA in January of 2020 to manage the transition of the 72 acres from conventional

soybean production to a farm operation that is focused on restoring soil health, managing storm water, planting a diversity of annual and perennial crops, growing food without the use of chemicals and involving the local community in a variety of ways on the farm. All of these goals are designed to complement the larger goal of PPA to strengthen and preserve New Jersey's Pinelands and the greater ecosystem it inhabits.

Looking back, I'd say that 2021 was pretty successful for us. On the infrastructure side we installed our well, got electric service to the farm, built a high tunnel and had deer fence erected to protect 27 acres of farmland. Some of these improvements were cost-shared by state and federal programs to assist farmers. We also bought a used 274 case-international off-set cultivating tractor from Kentucky. It is a 40 year old machine but an excellent tractor for cultivating and seeding and we put it to good use.



Add to that a host of implements purchased new and used and we were ready for some

serious food growing. Not a bad weather year really. The biggest challenge for us was a very dry April. This is when we are doing a lot of seeding and planting and without Spring rains, getting plantings established was a challenge and required a lot of irrigation. Then May hit and the script flipped completely. We went from very dry to pretty darn wet. It was nice to put our rain gear and muck boots to good use. It was also good to see our storm water management improvements in action. In April of 2020 with a grant from the Watershed Institute, we planted 1200 native trees and shrubs in the low areas of the farm where historically rainwater has collected and rushed off the farm eroding soils as it went. Our plantings are meant to slow, reduce, divert and absorb



stormwater protecting our farm, Vincentown and the Rancocas Creek. It is early but we have already seen an improvement and this should only increase as the trees grow and put down more roots.



By June we were ready to welcome shareholders to our first CSA distribution! Heads of lettuce, and bunches of kale, beets, greens and fresh herbs greeted our first customers. Later in June came peas, beans, flowers, carrots, squash, cucumbers, kohlrabi, scallions and more. Throughout the 20 week CSA season we grew and distributed over 50 crops. Some were real winners like watermelons, tomatoes, sweet potatoes, lettuce, garlic, carrots and winter squash. Others such as summer squash, eggplant, and kohlrabi were okay but we can do better. And (as always) we had a few crop failures. Shelling peas, spinach and rutabaga all were either total losses or poor yields. There are always surprises and challenges growing food which is why we believe that diversity is vital. Weather, insects, diseases, seed problems, critters and human error will usually thwart some crops but rarely will they affect every crop. Farming in the age of climate change requires resiliency on many levels and plant diversity is certainly one.

I can see already I am probably typing too much so I should attempt to wrap this up before it becomes a Tolstoy-like tome. I'd like to add that our farm and farms like it run on people. The type of farming we do is very labor intensive and the pace is often pretty quick. The days add up and the farm season is a grind. In this newsletter is a list of the people who worked so hard on the farm in 2021. It is a blessing to be able to work with such great people and to have them committed to sustainable, chemical-free farming. To those who worked on the farm I sincerely and

2021 CSA Share Breakdown:

We do our best to keep accurate records on how much food we harvest and distribute so we can know how we fared in a given year and so we can report our findings to you.

In 2021, over a 20 week period we distributed 251.4 lbs of produce in the farm shop and offered 55.3 lbs of u-pick crops making the total for a share 306.7 pounds. A share cost \$560 which translates to \$1.82 per pound.

And that number does not include the flowers which were open for 17 weeks with an average of 19 stems per week which totals over 320 stems per share!



BIRDS!

One of our goals at RCF is to try to create a healthy farm-ecosystem that is a place where we can grow high yields of high quality food and where we can provide food, forage and habitat for a wide variety of bird species. We believe these goals are not



Dickcissel photo by Ellen Bonacarti



Blue Grosbeak, Photo by Ernest Hahn

at all mutually exclusive. To that end we established a 5 acre native meadow, we planted over 1400 trees on the farm, we don't spray any chemical based herbicides or insecticides and we let some of our acreage grow a bit wild, mowing it only once a year. Plus our friend Alisa has been taking care of the Purple Martin Houses which already have welcomed 5 nesting pairs! In 2021 we had an amazing array of birds including some fairly rare species like the Dickcissel, Grasshopper Sparrow, Lincoln Sparrow, Harrier, Pippet, Virginia Rail and Blue Grosbeak. You can follow along or post



Tennessee Warbler

sightings at www.ebird.org and search for Pinelands Preservation Alliance HQ where 160 species have been observed! Thanks to all our birders including Steve Sobocinski and Jen Bulava from Burlington County Parks

genuinely say thank you. And the other part of the equation are the CSA Shareholders. Your commitment to the farm and support of the farmers makes this all possible. The CSA system is a covenant that offers the farmers some security and risk management and (we hope) offers the shareholder great produce, valuable time on the farm and a good value for your food dollar.

Farming is inherently risky and we are so grateful to have you as partners in this endeavor. Your support, energy, enthusiasm and feedback was incredible in 2021!! Every day we gain a few

minutes of sunlight. It may be frigid today but it won't last. Just like the fortune cookie I got over the weekend: "**Spring has sprung...life is blooming...**" And so we look ahead to 2022. We will be selling more shares and growing on more acreage. There should be many more blackberries to pick as our 2021 plantings should bear fruit! We may even get a crop of Asian Pears although we are probably still a year out from a true harvest (same with our blueberries). We hope to have some new crops like ground cherries, tomatillos, and spring broccoli based on your feedback. And

our aim is to grow every crop with higher production and quality than the previous year. We're getting some new equipment like a water wheel transplanter to allow us to be more efficient in the fields. We are working to install solar panels on the barn roof and we are increasing our composting efforts with a partnership with Jeffrey Miller Catering. We're also planning more events including bird walks, farm tours, food cooking and preservation and even movies at the farm! In every way we want to improve upon our successes in 2021. We are also striving to make the farm greener and more resilient with healthier, biologically active soils capable of holding more soil carbon and supporting vibrant, healthy plants. Its an ambitious year! OK – I REALLY need to end this. *Thank You* again for being a part of Rancocas Creek Farm and supporting the larger mission of the Pinelands Preservation Alliance. We are deeply encouraged by feedback like this: "Your farm has given me so much, but most of all HOPE." We look forward to seeing you at the farm!!

Farmer Jeff Tober



Rancocas Creek Farm Odds & Ends



In 2021 we donated 5,902 pounds of produce and pork to NJ Farmers Against Hunger and other regional foodbanks.



"I am so glad I became a shareholder! Visiting the farm is the highlight of my week!" Shareholder feedback



We were recognized as a Certified Wildlife Habitat from NJ Audubon in 2021!

We sold produce each week to the Farm & Fisherman Restaurant in Cherry Hill who loves to use our fresh veggies in the menu!



We harvested 280 bales of rye straw off of 2 acres for sale and use as a mulch for our crops.

