

Meanwhile Back at the Farm...September 11, 2001

Howdy Folks,

Wasn't last week's harvest just great. We practically had to hammer the tops on the coolers. This time of year is often so abundant. Plants are finishing their life cycles and fruiting where earlier in the season they were only producing vegetative matter. Fruits aren't just things like peaches. Any reproductive part of the plant is really a "fruit" in the general sense. Ears of corn, tomatoes, summer squash, which are generally thought of as vegetables are actually all "fruits". We often associate intense flavors with fruits. They are far more memorable than say the flavor of spinach leaves. Why is that? Plants produce sweet flavorful fruits for a variety of reasons. First of all the sugars or starches stored in the fruit are fuel for the germinating seedling. Its kind of like stored solar energy while the baby plant is just getting going. The other main reason for all that sweetness and good flavor is to get animals to disburse the seeds.

Plants don't have legs so they get animals to do the distribution thing for them. When you bite into a tomato and swallow the seeds, they go through your digestive tract intact and in a natural setting you would plant them by pooping. In fact tomato seeds are a large part of sewage sludge and when sludge is deposited on the soil tomatoes sprout big-time. When birds eat berries they later poop out the seeds so that's why you'll see blackberries sprouting along fences (where birds sit.) So it's all about temptation and seduction, all these fruit flavors.

Respect—For years organic producers have been complaining to the USDA that for all the billions that go into ag research virtually none of it went into Organic research. Doesn't seem fair since organic is the fastest growing segment of the food industry (which is now a 950 Billion dollar business-all food not just organic). Well, the USDA has finally given us our token organic researcher. Eric Brennan our sole organic researcher has discovered by talking with farmers over the last couple of months that the two main priorities are improving soil fertility and non-chemical weed control. Well, like, duh!

But what the USDA gives with one hand they take away with another. Until now, organic certifiers for the independent agencies like CCOF provided advice and guidance to farmers along with certification services. Under the new federal organic laws, certifiers need to act more like cops and their giving advice is now considered a conflict of interest. In the past the certifiers were more like extension agents than cops. Even with the uneven playing field and the various impediments the number of organic farms has gone up 18 percent since January 1st this year and there are now 7800 organic

farms in the US.

For those of you who have been following the grape industry especially since the Glassy Winged Sharpshooter became an issue, the current crop reports will seem like a serious come uppance for the 800 pound gorilla. The years of getting \$1800 to \$2000 per ton of grapes is looking permanently like a thing of the past. Those without long term contracts are probably not going to get more than \$300 per ton for their fruit, especially if they aren't from Napa or Sonoma. All those southern California and central valley vineyards from classy joints like Lodi are having to seriously dump their grapes. The wild over-planting of grapes in the last ten years has finally started to take its toll and there is so much Chardonnay you could float the French Navy in it. Ironically a thinning out of vines due to the GWSS would probably be a financial boon to the industry overall helping bring supply and demand back in line. Given that it takes over \$50,000 per acre to set up a vineyard, and a waiting time of about 8 years until you get your first good harvest, we may start to see a stop to the headlong rush in grape planting. Couldn't come soon enough as far as I'm concerned. A recent trip to the Calistoga area astounded me in terms of the massive buildup of grape monoculture in what should be the premier vegetable and fruit growing regions of California.

This week we planted a lot of seedlings. About 1000 broccoli plants, 1000 cauliflower plants, 1000 savoy cabbage and 500 red cabbage plants went into the ground this week. These will not be ready during the remainder of this season but are planned for a Winter Share to follow this season. Although it is not yet certain that Ed will be continuing the CSA through the winter like I did over the last 8 years, we are planting as if we are going to do one to keep our options open. He will decide on the winter share around the start of October a few weeks before the end of this season. Stay tuned for more news on this front.

The Food

Genovese Basil: A strong pesto basil.

Corn: Sugar Buns variety-This time of year you'll probably encounter a bit of corn earworm damage. Corn earworms are little caterpillars.

Mizuna: Beautiful serrated leaves from Pescadero.

Cho-Ho: A bok-choi like mustard green.

Summer squash: These plants are booming at Matadero

Cucumbers: Various types-Both lemon and normal types.

Tomatoes: The emblem of summer

Turnips: Another Pescadero special- These aren't usually available until late October.

Onions: Some of the last of the Spring crop.