

Four Friends' CSA News

The Bean Pole

August 5, 2008

2008 Season

Issue No. 28

Dear Shareholders and Friends,

This week's harvest contains: Summer squash/zucchini, basil, carrots, peppers, eggplant, mixed lettuce, onions, and garlic. Tomatoes are available for the full shares only this week. Soon there will be enough tomatoes for everyone.

Here's a recipe I thought you might like from The Enchanted Broccoli Forest, by Mollie Katzen. Ten Speed Press. P.O. Box 7123/Berkeley, California 94707. Copyright 1982._

"Pesto"

If you have never had cause to be glad you have a nose, pesto might lift you to new realms of nasal appreciation. One of the most aromatic of human concoctions, pesto is to your kitchen as the first hyacinth of Spring is to your garden.

Pesto is a powerful mash of fresh basil and garlic, moistened with olive oil, sparked by sharp cheese, and subtly textured by pulverized nuts. It is commonly used as a sauce for pasta, yet its thick, paste-like consistency makes it readily usable as a seasoning in the preparation of other dishes... It stores well in the refrigerator or freezer, so you can keep it on hand for a quick pasta dinner - or for whatever other special dish you might want it for.

This recipe makes about 2½-3 cups - plenty for 6-8 servings of pasta.

3 packed cups fresh basil leaves (no stems)

3-4 healthy cloves of garlic

¼-½ tsp. salt

¾ cup freshly grated parmesan cheese

¼ cup pulverized nuts

½ cup olive oil

(Optional ingredients:

½ cup (packed) fresh parsley

¼ cup melted butter

Freshly-ground black pepper)

- 1) Puree everything together in a blender or a food processor fitted with the steel blade - until it becomes a uniform paste, OR
- 2) Use a mortar and pestle, and coarse salt to pound the basil and garlic together. Stir in the remaining ingredients.

For PASTA: Toss room temperature pesto with hot, drained pasta (about ¼ cup pesto per serving - more or less, to taste).

STORE IN A TIGHTLY LIDDED JAR"

More about basil...

How to Select and Store

Whenever possible, choose fresh basil over the dried form of the herb since it is superior in flavor. The leaves of fresh basil should look vibrant and be deep green in color. They should be free from dark spots or yellowing. Fresh basil should be stored in the refrigerator wrapped in a slightly damp paper towel. It may also be frozen, either whole or chopped, in airtight containers. Alternatively, you can freeze the basil in ice cube trays covered with either water or stock that can be added when preparing soups or stews.

Basil is an excellent source of vitamin K and a very good source of iron, calcium and vitamin A. In addition, basil is a good source of dietary fiber, manganese, magnesium, vitamin C and potassium.

The name “basil” is derived from the old Greek word *basilikohn*, which means “royal,” reflecting that ancient culture’s attitudes towards an herb that they held to be very noble and sacred. The tradition of reverence of basil has continued in other cultures. In India, basil was cherished as an icon of hospitality, while in Italy, it was a symbol of love.

Soil under strain

A full-page feature in the Financial Times looks at soil degradation. Fiona Harvey writes, “As policymakers talk of raising yields in response to the food crisis, arable land is increasingly being degraded by pollution, erosion, misuse of fertilisers and poor farming techniques - and it is Africa where the problem is worst.”

According to Otto Spaargaren, head of the World Data Centre for Soils at the International Soil Reference and Information Centre, even if large quantities of fertiliser are applied to degraded soils, it would still take centuries to recover their health. Another potential difficulty is that the overuse of fertiliser can generate problems such as the acidification of the soil that has occurred in places such as Europe and Australia

Farmland across the world is affected, stretching from the wheat-covered prairies of the US to chemically contaminated tracts of eastern Europe and China. But the problem is most acute in Africa, where farmers tilling some of the world’s oldest soils are among the least able to take action to protect their most important resource. These problems are not new. Some archaeologists assert that civilisations such as the Mayans, the Easter Islanders and the Norse settlers of Greenland collapsed because of the depletion of their soils, caused by over-use, deforestation or climate change. More recently, the “dust bowl” of 1930s America provided a stark warning of the dangers.

What has changed is population pressure: there are now more than 6.5bn people on the planet, a figure that is forecast to rise to 9bn by mid-century. Though scientists estimate that there is enough suitable uncultivated land to meet increased demand until at least 2020, feeding the world demands that existing fields remain productive. The soil degradation problem has been worsening for decades but it has taken the food price rises of the past two years to spur policymakers to take the issue seriously. A report from the International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology, which found that the rate of yield increases was faltering, concluded that a large part of the reason was the declining quality of soils.

“Land degradation is certainly linked to the food crisis,” says Parviz Koohafkan, director of the land and water division at the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation in Rome. “It is not such a direct and immediate threat [as changing supply and demand pressures] but we will have more and more of a problem, as soils in many places are becoming less and less resilient.”

The reasons for soil degradation are as varied as the soils themselves. In the US, soils have been protected

since the 1930s, when the federal government was forced to take action on conservation. Nevertheless, North American farmers are still losing topsoil at 1 per cent a year, according to David Montgomery, a geologist and author of *Dirt: The Erosion of Civilisations*. The losses often occur through erosion by water, as downpours or even irrigation wash topsoil into rivers and dams. A study published in *Science* in the 1990s found that soil erosion cost the US economy about \$44bn (€28bn, £22bn) a year.

In Australia, one of the world's most important wheat producers, increased salinity is a serious problem, as farmers pump more water from underground aquifers and as years of heavy fertiliser and pesticide use take their toll.

The European Union is consulting on a Soil Directive to address the issue. According to a "[soil atlas](#)" published in 2005 by the EU's Joint Research Centre, in southern Europe nearly 75 per cent of soil had an organic matter content – a measure of fertility – low enough to be a cause for concern. "Soil is a non-renewable resource and we need to take action to protect it," says Arwyn Jones, a research scientist at the centre one of the authors of the atlas.

In Spain and Italy, in particular, the erosion of soil by water and wind is a serious problem. An increasing tendency for farmland to fall out of cultivation exacerbates the problem: when the crops are taken away, the bare soil is vulnerable until wild vegetation re-establishes itself.

Please go to this link for the article." [Full story: Financial Times](#)