

to clean water as it enters a waterway, we *use* ponds to recycle irrigation water and provide habitat to amphibians. Further, organic agriculture already requires adherence to strict federal standards for food safety and traceability.

Perhaps a better approach would be to **dis**-courage and better regulate processing at the largest scale and **en**-courage and appropriately regulate those at the smallest. A single lapse at a single, industrial plant can send out hundreds of thousands of pounds of tainted beef. Meanwhile, smaller plants move at speeds that can be easily inspected by human inspectors; likewise, smaller fields and smaller harvests limit the extent to which product can be commingled as spinach was in 2006. Small producers and processors can more easily trace their product and can contain any potential problems, of which there have tended to be fewer.

Appropriate to Risk, and Some Good Old American-Style Choice

Regulate these different endeavors in a fashion appropriate to its risk. Solutions that will work for small and medium-sized farmers are not expensive or require product-changing technology. Should our eight acres of produce that you buy through the CSA require commingling, tracking, and tagging technology? All producers should be trained for on-farm produce safety, yes, but other procedures should be scale and buyer-specific.

Farmer Joel Salatin famously wrote a book entitled, "Everything I Want to Do is Illegal." He means that as a producer and a consumer. Free, intelligent choice based on full disclosure and understanding should be available to anyone who wants it. Any of us should be able to knowingly purchase any product we want, be it raw milk, pasteurized cider, greens grown in diverse fields, beef slaughtered locally, or meat that is free from irradiation or genetically modified organisms.

I'll leave the rostrum now. As always, your comments or criticisms are welcome (just keep the latter to a minimum).

Be great,
Mike

FIELD NOTES

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Potatoes

These potatoes are harvested fresh. They have not been let to cure and may not store long like a storage potato. In the meantime, please keep them in a cool, dry, dark, and well-ventilated place. This week we're harvesting Yukon Gold potatoes, which have a rich taste. You might try them roasted or steamed, and they'll also mash well. If you overcook them, they may fall apart on you.

Cape Gooseberry (Poha, Ground Cherry...)

Remember these from last year?

Use them in desert, sauces, salads, or simply as they are by unwrapping them from their lanterns. Inside the gooseberry husk is a golden berry related to tomatillos, tomatoes, peppers, potatoes, and the rest of the love apple family.

Food Safety

Remember the spinach scare of a few years ago? The peanut butter problem of the past year? Tomato tempest? It's back in the news again, though generally on back-pages and online news sources.

As we've written in past newsletters, most crops are twice-washed before they go in your SHARE box. Of course, it is always safest to wash your veggies again at home, before you use them. You can be assured that we follow both the strict guidelines required for organic certification, and best practice for washing and packing produce. You know just where your food comes from, how it's grown, and how it's packed.

THIS WEEK'S HARVEST

Basil
Beets
Cape Gooseberries
Garlic
Green Peppers
Potatoes
Salad Greens
Tomatoes

Hot Peppers to take

Food safety is in the news again not because of particular *E. coli* scares, but because of a recent White House Food Safety Working Group report, and food safety bills working their way through Congress. I admit that I can only barely keep up with what's going on (I hope you follow it more closely), but I'd like to use some soapbox space this week to comment as a small farmer myself (well, I farm a small farm).

It is certainly good news that the federal government recognizes there are problems with our food system. There are a few developments, though, that strike me as problematic. Our food system is not going to be transformed overnight, and any food safety bill moving through Congress should be sure to be:

- Scale appropriate
- Risk-based
- Science-based
- Written to provide tiered compliance alternatives appropriate to the farm size, the market served, and the risk assumed.

To start, there are recommendations by the new food czar that would “strengthen state and local roles” in the country’s new food safety system. What this may amount to is a shift of the burden for funding food-safety operations to the state and local level. While local control over the food supply is desirable, it begs two questions: where will this money come from (where will it come from in any case), and is this the most effective approach? I don’t know the answer to either, but would point out that in the 2008-2009 peanut butter event, the FDA had farmed out inspections of the particular factory to Georgia authorities, who documented sanitation lapse even while product distribution continued. Regardless of whether federal inspectors would have been more responsible in taking action, in many cases such as this one, existing rules should have kept the product off of the shelf.

The second and more pressing problem relates to scale. As currently written, food safety bills should encourage the small- and medium-scale farms and food processing facilities that would most effectively constitute a local and regional food system. This is the scale at which agriculture can be sustainable – and held the most accountable. These farmers would disproportionately bear the burden and expense of new regulations. Further, certain provisions could hinder beginning,

sustainable, and organic farmers’ access to markets, require expensive fees, and lead to the dismantling of important conservation practices and wildlife habitat.

Have you had any fresh, local apple cider recently?

For one thing, small businesses that wholesale part of their product (for example, selling to Whole Foods, MOMs, or even the local coop) would be required to pay the same fee as any industrial scaled facility. Technology and fee-based regulations often results in further consolidation of the food industry. For example, despite the current demand for local meat, local slaughterhouses are in decline, due largely to complex regulations and the expense to meet them. This happened in the juice business too, when the technology required for apple cider production was too expensive for small-scale producers.

Multifunctional Agriculture?

These regulations may well also affect conservation and environmental efforts at a time when we should be working to ensure that agriculture is a part of the *solution* to these problems, not furthering them. After *E. coli* was found in bagged spinach a few years ago, a number of the biggest growers and buyers started a program of protocols for growing greens safely, called the “leafy greens marketing agreement,” and these protocols are being proposed for inclusion in food safety bills. In an effort to sanitize produce, they require bare-dirt buffers, the elimination of habitat for plants or animals, the removal of any water or ponds near fields...They call for the sterilization of farms. They send their own inspectors and refuse to buy from growers who don’t meet their terms.

Of course, companies want to limit their risk of contamination. But to what degree are these protocols science-based? Surprising little is known about how *E. coli* gets from the gut of a cow to the dining room table. It is most likely related to the industrial model of monoculture and confinement, not the agrarian one of polyculture and space (the rise of the most virulent strains seems to be related to the growth of feedlot agriculture and the stomach upset feedlot diets cause cows.) Regardless of the risk at the large scale, sterilizing agriculture is an impossible task, and in our view an undesirable one. It is not clear that these rules will produce safer food to eat; and they conflict directly with organic and sustainable growing practices. We *cultivate* hedgerows to harbor beneficial insects and wildlife to manage pest populations, we *plant* riparian buffers

SUMMER TOMATO AND BELL PEPPER SOUP

INGREDIENTS:

1/2 C (generous) finely chopped roasted red bell peppers from jar (or make your own!)
2 1/4 C tomato juice
2 tbs extra-virgin olive oil
1 tbs prepared white horseradish
Generous dash of hot pepper sauce
6 grape tomatoes, cut in half
4 1/3-inch-thick rounds soft fresh goat cheese
Additional extra-virgin olive oil (for drizzling)

1 1/3 C finely chopped tomatoes (about 11 ounces)
1 tbs red wine vinegar
1 garlic clove, pressed
Fine sea salt
2 tbs thinly sliced fresh basil

DIRECTIONS:

Combine first 8 ingredients in large bowl; whisk to blend. Season soup to taste with sea salt and freshly ground black pepper. Cover and refrigerate until well chilled and flavors blend, at least 2 hours. **DO AHEAD:** *Can be made 6 hours ahead.* Keep chilled. Ladle soup into 4 bowls. Top each with 1 goat cheese round and 3 grape tomato halves. Sprinkle with freshly ground black pepper and basil. Drizzle with oil and serve.

Recipe from www.epicurious.com.

Cut along dotted line for 3x5 recipe card



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UPCOMING EVENTS

(complete details at www.accokeek.org)

CANNING YOUR HARVEST

Saturday, July 25, 2009, 9:00 a.m. to Noon
Education Center, Rain or Shine
\$15 Members, \$20 Non-Members

This workshop will include a demonstration as well as a thorough discussion of everything it takes to can delicious food safe and successfully. We will have samples for tasting. Our instructor will be Marla Luther, who has a PhD in Food Science from the University of Maryland, and is certified in safe food handling and processing.

LADYBUG FLY AWAY!

Saturday, July 25, 2009, 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.
Free, A National Children's Museum Event

Come and learn about the citizen scientist Lost Ladybug Project which invites children and families to help scientists find out why native ladybug species are disappearing. Special environmental theatre performances by the Foundation will take place on at 11:30 a.m., 1:30 p.m., and 2:30 p.m. Event takes place at the National Harbor. Make a ladybug craft, then take part in a live ladybug release at American Market! Ladybug releases are at 11 a.m., noon, and 1 p.m.

For more information about this or other events, please call the office at 301.283.2113, or by email us accfound@accokeek.org.