



# BLACKBROOK FARM

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## Holy Summer

We did end up having one real week of summer here on the farm last week. That is the kind of heat that tests everyone's tempers. Even though Ayla and I are getting married and we're supposed to be all lovey dovey and stuff, we've been pretty much at each other's throats, thanks to the summer heat and the pressure of the wedding. Just imagine the pros and cons of living together with and working together with your closest friend in the world. Farming is just that. We rely and depend on each other in every sense. Sure, we get to hang out all day on the farm, but we also have to make tough decisions together; decisions we rarely agree over. Ask us anything and you'll get two different answers. How many acres are you growing next year?

James: "Twelve."

Ayla: "Six."

That about says it. We're two peas in a pod. Why would there be only two peas in a pod? Was there something wrong with the fertility, or did it need to get irrigated, or was it too weedy? Why are there only two peas in this pod!?! Something is definitely wrong...

Here on the farm, we've been seeing a new norm: dry falls. Don't count on rain in September, or October. Heck, throw out August and July too! Just don't count on rain period. Especially, though, don't count on rain in the fall. This has made a big difference on how farmers like us spend our time during this part of the year. We should be focused on fall harvest and seeding additional fall and winter storage crops, but now we can't focus on either. What we really have to focus on is water, lest we have no crops to harvest at all. We've been watching our eggplant dry up and shrivel.

## What's In the Box:

**German Butterall Potatoes-** (Full Share Only) these are possibly the worlds best roasting potatoes. They them in tin foil packets on the grill with onions, garlic, butter, and rosemary, or roast them in the oven the same way.

**Sweet Corn-** We tracked down some sweet corn from another local, organic farm for members this week. It wasn't easy, either. It must be a hot seller for everyone.

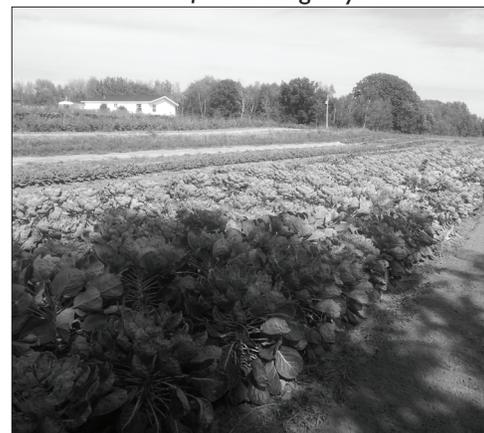
**Watermelon/Cantaloupe-** We have a lot of these out in the field right now, but they won't turn ripe! This fall holds a lot of melons in it for CSA members.

**Green Top Carrots-** These carrots are Mokum variety. This is the first time we've given you this variety this year. You'll notice, they are the sweetest carrot ever.

**Tomatoes-** We loaded you up with heirloom tomatoes this week since they are coming in so heavy right now. Everyone should have gotten our favorite heirloom this week, the Hillbilly Potatoe Leaf. Its large and yellow with orange streaks and knarly scaring. Yummy!



James had to remove some "widow makers" before the big day.



Brussel Sprouts, a snapshot of what to come

### Smoked Braised Greens

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Ingredients

4 strips bacon, sliced

3 cloves garlic, sliced

1 onion, sliced

Pinch red pepper flakes

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

3 bunches dark leafy greens, such as kale, mustard greens, Swiss chard and collard greens, stemmed and inner ribs removed, leaves roughly chopped

1/2 cup chicken stock

Directions

Heat a large pot over medium-high heat. Add the bacon and render until you have enough fat to saute the garlic and onions. Add the garlic and onions and

## What's in the Box

We know you don't really like eggplant anyway, so it's one crop we're happy to let die. Just kidding! We watered half of our eggplant with drip tape when we watered our bell peppers, but the other half that wasn't convenient to water did not get watered. That's how it goes on a farm: if it's not easy to do it doesn't get done. That is because we spend half or our time managing a crisis and the other half trying to deal with important tasks. The important is the victim of the crisis. Important things will not get done if they are not made easy to do.

So, we have to continue to make irrigating an easier task to perform, so that it too does not become a crisis. The same is true with everything on our farm, especially as we continue to expand our operation on our new farm next year. As capacities increase, systems will be tested. And some systems will break. But we expand because we have to. There is an economy of scale that works for a one acre farm, and an economy of scale that works for a five acre farm, and one that works for a twelve acre farm, and so forth. At each scale, there is an economy that works. Things on a one acre farm work a certain way. You need to fetch top dollar for what you sell. You need to have some other way of paying your mortgage. You do not need to invest very much in order to make your farm operable. If you farm five acres, you need more equipment. You need a tractor. You need a pack shed. You need systems. You need to have low overhead. At each economy of scale in vegetable farming, there are additional expenses, yet different returns. We always have to work harder for greater profits, if many profits at all. If we work smartly, we may be able to pull this farming thing off after all!

On a final note, we came up pretty short on boxes this week when we packed for the CSA. Someone has been forgetting to return their boxes! Remember, Reuse is the second R of recycling. Your farmers have to replace boxes that are not

**Peppers-** Lotsa red this time around.

**Braising Mix-** Don't worry about the holes in the leaves: they don't taste like anything. Darn flea beetles are hard to keep at bay. This is a great mix just saute with your favorite seasonings and enjoy by itself. Eating vegetables was never so easy.

**Arugula-** Arugula lovers, this is perhaps the best arugula we've ever grown. It is super tender and robust in flavor with very minimal flea beetle damage (holes in the leaves).

**Cucumbers-** Cucumbers... Still looking nice out of the high tunnel.

**Red Onions-** Great for salads. These came out a little small this year again, and we think it is because of the potassium deficiency

**Garlic-** The larger bulbs with 5 to 7 cloves are german red. We want to grow a lot more these varieties since they are so easy to use.

**Savoy Cabbage-** (Full Share only) This is nice to use the same way you would use napa cabbage, like in a stir fry.

returned. Not to guilt you or anything.

Also, please come to our wedding reception this Saturday. In lieu of a harvest party this year, we are inviting all our members to come to our reception on Saturday evening. It is a potluck event, though we will be providing bahn mi sandwiches with our own roast pig as well as beer and wine for those who care to imbibe. Come see the farm and celebrate with your newlywed farmers! There'll be a band and everything. We'd love to have you from 4:00pm at our farm, 827 15th st Clayton, WI, 54004. Call Ayla for directions at 828-702-0444. Hope to see you there!

Yours Truly

Ayla and James

saute until soft, about 5 minutes. Add the pinch red pepper flakes and season with salt and pepper and cook for 1 minute more. Add the greens in handfuls, adding more as the greens start to wilt, tossing with tongs until all the greens are wilted down. Add the chicken stock and cover. Cook until the greens are tender, about 10 minutes.

### A Note on Melons

Melons are one of the trickier crops to grow. For one thing, this climate has too short of a summer season for them, so we have to grow them in plastic mulch and keep them covered in low tunnels (like a mini greenhouse). Another thing that makes them tricky comes when its time to harvest. It is very difficult to be certain when a melon is ripe. I know that some of the melons that went out this week were not 100% ripe, and you should be aware of that. If you have a melon or cantaloupe that is not completely ripe, you should simply leave it sit out on the counter for a few days until it fully ripens. Here's a few ways to know whether your melon is ripe or not:

**Cantaloupe:** These should be yellowish in appearance, not green. They are easy to tell when ripe since they will emit a strong cantaloupy smell. If them smell great, dive in.

**Melons:** These are harder to tell when ripe. You'll want to tap on their outsides with your knuckles. If the flesh feels hard like metal and gives off a high pitched "pink," you should wait a few days. If the flesh is softer like a softball and and gives off a lower pitched "punk" sound, dig in today.

Everyone will enjoy at least one awesome melon from our farm this year. If your's wasn't completely amazing, don't loose heart. There will be many more melons this year.