

Red Lodge Area Food Partnership Council

Gather

Some springs, apples bloom too soon.

The trees have grown here for a hundred years, and are still quick to trust that the frost has finished. Some springs, pink petals turn black. Those summers, the orchards are empty and quiet. No reason for the bees to come.

Other summers, red apples beat hearty in the trees, golden apples glow in sheer skin. Their weight breaks branches, the ground rolls with apples, and you fall in fruit.

You could say, *I have been foolish*. You could say, *I have been fooled*.

You could say, *Some years, there are apples*.

- Rose McLarney



Hands-On Canning Class – Sept 20

If you are interested in learning the hot water bath canning technique of home food preservation, Lisa Terry, Stillwater County's Family and Consumer Science agent, will offer a class on Thursday, September 20 at 6:00 pm at the Red Lodge Roosevelt Middle School located at 413 South Oakes (cross street is 15th St W). Lisa will also cover food safety related to canning and the basics of food preservation. Join us to learn how easy it is to preserve your own food or just refresh your knowledge. Contact Janet Peterson at (406) 425-3806 or foodpartnership@gmail.com.

Farmers' Market Continues

Remember the Farmers' Market on Fridays, 3:30-6:30 pm at Lions Park through September 28. After that, the market moves to the Elks Club on the second Thursday of each month beginning October 11th.

This time of year, the market is brimming with produce. Winter squash are appearing while tomatoes have still been in abundance. Add some fresh baked bread and goat, lamb or beef and your meal is complete.

Watch for upcoming news about a harvest festival at the September 28 market.

AERO Annual Meeting - Oct 26-28

Please consider attending the AERO (Alternative Energy Resources Organization) Annual Meeting to be held at the Yogo Inn in Lewistown, Montana. The date is set for October 26th-28th. The keynote speakers will be Zach Jones & Jim Howell of Grasslands, LLC as well as Shane Smith with

the Cheyenne Botanic Gardens in Wyoming. Grasslands, LLC is the land management arm of The Savory Institute, and enters into long-term ranch management contracts using the holistic framework. The Cheyenne Botanic Gardens inspires, beautifies, and enriches the High Plains through gardening, volunteerism, education, and stewardship. For more information, go to <http://www.aeromt.org/event/38th-annual-meeting/>.



Kids at the Farm

By Alyssa Charney

After all my visits to the Espenscheid Farm, there's still no sweeter sound or sight than sixty 1st and 3rd graders wandering about the farm and asking questions:

“Where can I find the broccoli??”

“Is this a good munching carrot?”

“When is it time to dig for potatoes?”

“Can we bring a chicken egg back on the bus?”

It was only the second week of school and I was able to bring two 3rd grade classes, one 1st grade class, and ten high school helpers over to the ranch for a visit.

There were three different stations that all of the classes visited. We learned how to harvest potatoes (like a treasure hunt because the plants give us clues of where to dig), why it's ok to munch into the carrots we just dug up (no chemicals ever go into this organic farm), and how to raise chickens, turkeys, and ducks!

There were no lesson plans for any of the stations. Instead, I wanted this first exploration to be driven by the students' curiosity. I will have plenty of scheduled lesson time in the Youth Garden and in the classrooms this coming year, so the field trip was all about creating an open space where students had the freedom to discover a camouflaged grasshopper, examine a buried beet, or yank up that stubborn carrot.

But during our morning at the ranch, I was able to step back and take on the spirit and curiosity of my students. I was able to simply enjoy the beauty, knowledge, and nourishment that one of my favorite places has to offer.



Wholesome Foods Garden Update

As many of you know, Robin Taylor has been managing the Wholesome Foods/Espenscheid Farm garden this summer after the untimely departure of two full-time gardeners leaving acres of produce to waste away. With a great deal of help from community members, much of the garden has been saved and is supplying wonderful produce to the Red Lodge farmers' market, restaurants, and schools on a weekly basis, as well as to markets in Billings. This has been a learning experience for

many of us non-farmers and we would like to share a few of the lessons learned through this involvement both from our hands-on experiences and through talking to farmers who are making organic gardening successful around the state.

1. Don't plant more than you can manage. The almost eight acres planted were far more than two gardeners could handle. With weeding, watering, harvesting and marketing, this size garden would take several full-time people. We learned about labor models from other farmers, including the use of interns.
2. Plan for ease of maintenance. Design the garden to make it easier to weed, water and harvest. For example, taking advantage of mechanical cultivating of weeds would be advantageous. Also, picking roma tomatoes is faster if they are planted together instead of interspersed with other varieties. Granted, there may have been a reason for planting this way, but harvesters aren't seeing the benefits.
3. Pest control needs to be addressed throughout the season and time allowed for upkeep. The flea beetle was a big problem this year and the habitat must be eliminated this fall.
4. Have a floor plan for the garden and share it with others. I'm sure there was a plan during planting, but it was gone when Robin took over. There continued to be surprises among the weeds for some time.
5. Grow what you can grow well, what there is a demand for and what will give you a good financial return.
6. Cultivate some produce that your competitors don't grow and try new varieties. Why try to sell the same thing as everyone else? We've enjoyed having some unusual varieties available to offer and to try ourselves.
7. Make sure you have several strong markets in place before the growing season begins. The most successful organic farmers have a diverse business model. For example, sell CSA memberships so you will have income you can count on before you plant. Then, also plan to sell produce to restaurants and at the farmers market so you know you will always have a way to weather unforeseen challenges, such as a change in restaurant chefs, a particular crop that doesn't do well or one that produces way more than you expected, etc.
8. Volunteer! Our community is packed with people willing to give their time. We appreciate and thank all of you who are helping to make this project a success.

We also thank Dick and Patricia Espenscheid for giving us the opportunity to learn while getting our hands in the dirt.

Focus on a Producer

By Kate Jones

It all started as a small business Becky Stahl ran out of her home six years ago, consisting of only two flavors of jam. As she developed more variety, she became involved with the farmers' market. She found that her products sold very well at the markets and grew in popularity quickly.

The beautiful jellies, jams, and syrups Becky makes and sells are home-cooked with no preservatives or corn syrup. Her most striking products are the jalapeno jellies, the wildberry jellies, jams, and syrups and two berry flavors of chipotle glaze. All the wild berries are hand-picked by people Becky knows and the other ingredients are purchased locally. Among the places

to find Becky's product is the Swanky Fork in Red Lodge, the Good Earth Market in Billings and the Farmers' Market. When asked what her favorite part of her job was, Becky responded that it had to be meeting all the people. "You really have to be a people person to do this kind of job", she says.

Becky's Berries was the recipient of the Business Champion of the Year award in 2011, given by the U.S. Small Business Administration. The business is located at 10A Kem Lane, Absarokee, MT 59068. For more information you can visit www.BeckysBerries.com or email her at orders@BeckysBerries.com.

Fun Run

The Food Partnership Council would like to thank all who contributed their money and time for another successful Fun Run. Red Lodge is an amazing community!

Farm Tour

Four producers hosted a group for the FPC Farm Tour on August 25th. Our hosts were Tom Kress, Johnson's Laurel Farmer Market, the Never Done Farm and Hope's Homemade. We thank them for sharing their time and knowledge with us.



Mmmmm.....Zucchini

During our Farm Tour in August, Barbara Kress served a moist, flavorful zucchini cake. We asked for her recipe to share. Many of you may know Tom Kress from the Farmers' Market. Tom grows vegetables in Laurel.

Chocolate Zucchini Cake

1/2 cup soft margarine or butter

1/2 cup vegetable oil

1 3/4 cups sugar

2 whole eggs

1 tsp vanilla

1/2 cup sour milk (or substitute 1 Tbsp vinegar in 1/2 cup milk and let it sit a few minutes)

2 1/2 cups unsifted flour

4 Tbsp cocoa

1/2 tsp baking powder

1 tsp baking soda

1/2 tsp cinnamon
1/2 tsp cloves
2 cups finely diced zucchini
1/4 cup chocolate chips (optional)

Cream butter, oil, and sugar. Add eggs, vanilla and sour milk; beat with mixer. Mix together all the dry ingredients and add to creamed mixture; beat well with mixer. Stir in diced zucchini. Spoon batter into greased and floured 9x12 pan; sprinkle top with chocolate chips. After sprinkling with chocolate chips, bake at 325 degrees for 40 to 45 minutes, or until toothpick or cake tester comes out clean and dry. Add cream cheese frosting after cake baked and cooled.

Want to get More Involved?

Join FPC or attend our meetings as a guest if you're interested in learning more. The next meeting is September 20 at 4 p.m. We meet once per month at the Red Lodge Area Community Foundation, 24 West 13th Street in Red Lodge. Meetings include discussion and progress reports on subjects such as gardening, producer/consumer coordination, composting, and school food programs. Contact Martha Brown at mbrown.mt@gmail.com or call (406) 445-7214.

Suggested Browsing

Montana State University Extension Service has several publications (MontGuide) that provide guidance for food preservation. Check it out at <http://www.msuextension.org/store/products>.