



Shareholder Newsletter

August 19, 2005

Big Helpers

Brian holding cherry tomatoes
& Tom holding a heirloom
cantaloupe.



Little Helpers

Hannah and Emily helping
grandma (Farmer Renee)
harvest .



Oats and Community

Last week, every shareholder's box had a small bouquet of oats in a plastic bag. Although it wasn't for eating...I meant it to be food for thought. The idea of the oats being in the box was to share the idea of community.

As I was driving by a field of shocked oats, the thought occurred to me, that farming has had a therapeutic value for me. It has put many things into a perspective different than what I would experience in modern urban life. I wanted to share some of that aspect of farming.

I thought about the stories I'd heard about threshing crews and community. This idea of "community" is an aspect of farming that is now still present in Amish life and that truly binds them, but it also was a real force in everyday farm life only a generation ago.



Shocked Oats

So, O.K....food gathering can now be done at a drive up window. It's easy to forget that human history has been fashioned around our ability to feed ourselves. That need to feed ourselves has caused humans to settle, migrate, be at peace, or go to war. When a population is comfortable with their food supply...they can do other things with their time and culture flourishes.

But there is some nugget of human need that is met in the "culture of agriculture" that creates a condition that allows humans to expand and thrive, a condition where there is a real need for each other in order to accomplish a good and common goal. Threshing time was, and for some still is, a time like that.

Threshing time is a time to harvest grains. Grains, being not as perishable as other foods, can be stored up for use over time, therefore, settlement in a "place" follows their cultivation. So, grains themselves have helped to establish physical communities. And, because, in times passed, farming was done with more primitive equipment, people needed to work together to plant and harvest those grains. The need to pull together for such a good and necessary common goal, the grain harvest, helped build the other aspect of community.

Threshing is the harvest-time task prominent in the minds of most elder farmers. Technically, threshing (or "thrashing" as it is commonly pronounced) refers to the process of separating the grain, like wheat, oats, or barley, from the stalk. Threshing machines also removed (fanned or winnowed) the useless chaff from the seed. For farmers of the early 1900's, however, "threshing" signified more. It was the peak period of neighborhood activity which occurred the end of every summer, in late July or early August.

The threshing run started when all the neighborhood farmers had finished , or nearly finished, cutting their and stacking their shocks. Each year the order of farms was reversed, so that a family at the end of the run one year would be at the beginning the next. Accompanied by men from each farm with teams of horses, the threshing rig traveled from farm to farm. Its arrival heralded the culmination of the grain harvest. The seed planted in the spring, now multiplied, was gathered from the fields and stored away for the winter.

Excerpt from Threshing Days by C. Garthwait

A fairly good idea of what happened during threshing time from Threshing Days by C. Garthwaite will give a little insight into that kind of community.

A hard working threshing crew of men and boys from nine or ten farms in the "run" required a huge meal prepared by the women of the host farm. Often neighbor ladies would come to help prepare and serve the noon dinner for the crew. Working together, taking turns preparing meals for each other, and getting the job done as well for others as you would for yourself, was essential. I'm sure petty differences had to be put aside or even resolved in the process.

Amish communities still harvest grain in this old way, which is how I came to see the field of shocked grain.

Most farmers in my neighborhood combine their oats (grain) and bale their straw into either "small squares" or big round bales. But both combining and baling are now done by single operators. The idea of community is thinning because most farmers don't really have to work together now.

Community may have to come from those of us who have the same good and necessary common goals....which is why I started doing CSA.

Our newsletter for last week is coming a week late. Some of the information might be old news by now.

But, in case you are still wondering what the fruit was that was in the full share pint containers that wasn't tomato-like...those pretty red fruits were rose hips.

I planted Rosa rugosa to be able to get those very big fruits for the various rose hip concoctions I wanted to try. Adele Davis said that during WWII, the English survived vitamin deficiencies because of "their hips and their hops." Yep, rose hips are the ingredient you generally see on the vitamin C bottle as the source for C. I'm going to be planting more of those wild rose bushes to get a greater harvest in the future for those of you interested in using them.

The tornadoes that touched down very near to us were record in number. It caused us only high winds, heavy rains, and a muddy harvest. That caused a general and unexpected delay and made us a little late last week at each delivery site. Thanks for your support through thick, thin, and tornadoes.

Farmer Renee and the Crew



Big round bales of oats



Cemi with small square oats bales