



## TUV HA'ARETZ CSA 2015

### MANY THANKS TO OUR VOLUNTEERS !

#### 6/16 [Week #4 – B]

5-8pm Pick-up

**Ayelet Sela**

**Eli Kizhnerman**

**Azar Abramov**

1pm Truck Unloading

**Ilona Michalowska**

**Valeria Vavassori-Chen**

**Joanna Gallai**

8pm Unclaimed Shares

**Lenny Fuchs**

#### 6/23 [Week #5 – A]

5-8pm Pick-up

**Ayelet Seal**

**N Joshi**

**Pamela Calo**

1pm Truck Unloading

**Ilona Michalowska**

**Joanna Gallai**

**Jessica Keane**

8pm Unclaimed Shares

**Volunteer needed –  
please contact Israel  
IWARC@GMAIL.COM**

TUV HA'ARETZ CSA at the  
Forest Hills Jewish Center  
106-06 Queens Blvd.  
Forest Hills, NY 11375  
tuv@fhjc.org

- **Tuv Ha'Aretz CSA:**  
foresthilstuvcsa.com
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- **Golden Earthworm Farm:**  
goldenearthworm.com
- **FHJC:** www.fhjc.org
- **Hazon:** www.hazon.org

# TUV HASHAVUA BEST OF THE WEEK

## Meet Our CSA Farmer: Matthew Kurek

*Judith Mermelstein & Maki Hoashi, Tuv Ha'Aretz CSA Members*

At our CSA's kick-off meeting the week prior to the start of deliveries, Golden Earthworm Farm's (GEF) farmer/owner Matthew Kurek visited to speak about what he does and to answer questions from members. Last month, the core members who handle administrative duties for our CSA (see newsletter #0 for names and tasks of core members) had toured the farm on the North Fork of Long Island in Jamesport, northeast of Riverhead.

GEF's income is derived 90% from CSA shares; the rest of their income is from farmer's markets and vegetable stand sales.

In addition to the physical work of farming, being a certified organic farm entails a lot of paperwork. All harvest records must be documented, including any use of products affecting soil health, pest control, and plant diseases. No herbicides or insecticides are used; insect barriers keep some vegetables under cover of blanket-like protection to control weeds and pests. The farm has 75 acres divided between two parcels about six miles apart; this aids in the staggered growing of vegetables and pest/disease control. In addition, complex Long Island laws protect some land from residential or commercial development, and the farm has some of that open space within its boundaries. Some of that land can be used to house packing/washing equipment for the vegetables, but it cannot be built upon.

Regarding questions about the weights of the shares – they vary as the season progresses. Earlier when there are leafier, fluffier vegetables, the volume may be large but the weight light. Farmer Matt points out that in terms of dollar value, the less dense vegetables are often higher priced than the heavier root vegetables, which come in the autumn. Springtime crops can include pricier vegetables such as cherry tomatoes, garlic, salads, arugula, and greens.

The Kurek family has been farming for 16 years. Initially they started small and have grown to service nine CSA groups in Queens and some smaller groups on Long Island, including those that come to the farm for their pick-ups. In contrast to the groups in Queens, the smaller groups tend to be less formal and drop-offs can be in garages and driveways of private houses. The Queens CSAs require organized washing, packing, and trucking to locations like a church or a synagogue, and timing can be important.

Every October, Golden Earthworm invites CSA members to the farm for tours and activities. Core members encourage everyone to take the opportunity to visit the farm – one member's spouse declared that his visit changed his understanding and deepened his appreciation of what it entails for the vegetables grown there to get to his table.

There are years when some crops fail due to weather, disease, and bad luck. Last year, for instance, there were no sweet potatoes or parsley. This year, weather and growing conditions have prevented the farm from holding its usual June-weekend "U-pick" strawberry events, although there were enough strawberries to include in the shares. There is a 3-year cyclical epidemic of black mold that is affecting basil plants. The farm is experimenting with direct-seeding methods rather than greenhouse sprouting in an effort to mitigate the mold issues. It's just a reality of farming that disease and insects will affect yield. When that happens, the farm will pack what it can; this explains why one CSA may get a different box of vegetables than another. Even if GEF doesn't have enough of one vegetable, they'd rather distribute the small amount rather than not give it out at all.

The farm grows 50 to 60 different vegetables, so there is a good variety, including different breeds of the same crop at different times of year, etc. From week to week, weather will affect vegetables greatly. For instance, in cooler weather, leafy vegetables grow well at a predictable rate. However with warmth and rain, growth can double or

triple in a week; too much sun, however, can cause these vegetables to wilt or die. Anticipated harvesting time determines when a crop is planted. However, without warmth, sun, and rain, crops like tomatoes and watermelons will fail. Too much rain can drown a field; two years ago, there were very few tomatoes distributed.

GEF grows organic strawberries and baby watermelons – these fruits are distributed in the regular shares. Fruit shares are grown by Briermere Farms, and GEF distributes them to fruit-share subscribers. Unlike GEF, Briermere is not organic, as they must use low-residue spray methods to keep disease and insects at bay in Long Island. The variety of fruit available is more limited than the variety of vegetables because tree crops cannot be rotated like vegetable plants; once a tree is planted, a commitment is made to grow that particular fruit.

Crops are rotated throughout the seasons to help keep soil healthy and to take advantage of insect and weed seed cycles – weeds can kill some plants if they are not managed. Basically, the farmer's knowledge is used to manipulate soil fertility and pest control to grow higher-quality plants. Even so, a disappointing box is sometimes unavoidable, and the farm will try its best to make it up in other deliveries and will even overplant. Of course, they also don't want to waste food.

Approximately 20 people work on the farm; 95% of the harvest is weeded, irrigated, and harvested by hand. GEF experiments with mechanical harvesting methods, but in general, other than potatoes and string beans, some measure of hands-on harvesting is required for all crops. Last year, there were experiments with a salad-greens harvester; the amount of weeds in each share of lettuces was high, but the weeds are edible and tasty.

The sandy soils of Long Island mean irrigation is required. GEF has three wells at different depths – from 40 to 160 feet – to supply water in dry times. When the weather is wet, they have to worry about the migration of diseases between fields. And if thunderstorms threaten, they can't risk going out to work in the flat fields. It never ends!

GEF maintains a website which is a great resource for storage tips, photographs of the crops (important if you don't know what they are), recipes, etc. The plants grown are not the same as those grown for supermarkets, and thus some of the vegetables do not respond as expected for storage. Greens on root vegetables must be removed immediately, and the greens can often be eaten – even carrot tops. Farmer Matt notes the autumn carrot tops may be sweeter, since breeds with different properties are used as the growing season progresses.

When asked how the long, hard winter has affected his growing plans, Matt said a "good old-fashioned winter" is useful for killing off some insects and bacteria in the soil. In addition, some quick-growing crops respond well to cooler weather. So, though planting took place later, the cold winter has not been detrimental.

For instance, the first planting occurred in mid-April: radishes, arugula and mustard grow to harvest maturity in four to five weeks, so the first share contained these crops. The second crop contained red kale, bok choy, salad turnips, and head lettuces. Carrots will not be planted till June. And as the season continues, the soil will be adjusted and cycled to balance the plants to be grown.

In closing, Farmer Matt thanks us for supporting his farm. He noted that though growing vegetables and fruit is complex and a bit stressful, the CSA has removed the concerns he would have otherwise regarding how to sell his vegetables. His family has the assurance of support from the CSA community, which Matt says really has transformed the whole business of farming, as well as of how people acquire their food and feed themselves.



## WHAT'S IN THE BOX??

### Fennel, Red Romaine Lettuce, Toscano Kale, Bok Choi, Escarole

**Fennel, Kale, Rice Gratin** | Serves 4-6  
*Martha Rose Shulman* | [cooking.nytimes.com](http://cooking.nytimes.com)

- Salt to taste
- 1 bunch kale, stemmed
- 3 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 1 medium onion, finely chopped
- 1 ½ lb bulb fennel, trimmed, quartered, cored and chopped (about 4 cups)
- Freshly ground pepper to taste
- 2 large garlic cloves, minced
- ¼ cup chopped fresh dill
- 3 eggs
- ½ cup low-fat milk (2%)
- 1 cup cooked rice, preferably short-grain
- 3 oz Gruyère cheese, grated (¾ cup)
- ¼ cup breadcrumbs, or a mix of breadcrumbs + grated Parmesan (optional)

Bring large pot of water to a rolling boil. Add salt and kale. Blanch for 2 minutes, transfer drained kale to a bowl of cold water. Drain and squeeze hard to expel excess water. Chop medium-fine.

Heat 2 tbsp of the oil over medium heat in a large skillet and add onion. Cook, stirring often, until tender, about 5 minutes, and add fennel and salt to taste and continue to cook, stirring often, until the fennel is very tender and fragrant, about 8 minutes. Add garlic and kale, stir together for another minute, then stir in dill. Season to taste with salt and pepper, and remove from the heat.

Preheat oven to 375F. Oil a 2-quart baking dish. Beat eggs in a large bowl. Whisk in milk and salt to taste (about 1/2 tsp). Stir in fennel and kale mixture, rice and Gruyère, and combine well. Adjust seasonings. Scrape into baking dish. Sprinkle breadcrumbs over the top and drizzle on the remaining oil. Bake 35 to 40 minutes, until set and the top and sides are beginning to color.

Remove from oven and allow to sit for at least 10 minutes before serving. This is good hot, warm, or room temperature.

## DRIVERS WANTED!

We are still in need of a few additional volunteers for some unclaimed shares delivery slots:

- 06/23 (A-week) NEXT WEEK!
- 07/07 (A-week)
- 09/01 (A-week)
- 10/27 (A-week)

If you have access to a car, please email me directly with the date(s) you can help.

Even if you have already fulfilled your volunteer requirement by doing another task, you can still take one of these shifts. Any volunteers are greatly appreciated!

**TWARCH@GMAIL.COM**