



High Ground Organics Community Supported Agriculture

Week 6, April 19th and 20th, 2017

No to the Organic Checkoff, by

Jeanne Byrne

The USDA has proposed imposing an Organic Check-off Program in which all organic producers would pay a percentage of their income to a federal program that would fund research and marketing for the industry as a whole. Think “Got Milk” or “The Incredible Edible Egg.” Small farmers are pushing back against this extra cost and layers of paperwork that we feel will favor large scale agriculture over small farms. Indeed, check-offs do not have a good track record for small farms. For instance, in the first 15 years of the federal mandatory pork checkoff, 70% of family hog farmers went out of business. It may have helped “the pork industry” but it certainly didn’t help the small farmers. There is also a history of corruption in checkoff funds being embezzled or misappropriated. And while it would be great to have help with marketing (farmers want to spend their time farming after all), one has to ask what sort of message the USDA will be willing to put out there, certainly nothing that implies that organic is better than conventional agriculture. How watered down would the message be? How about “Organic, because some people prefer it!” As one northeastern farmer pointed out, organic is a growing method, not a commodity. Below are the comments I dashed off to the Agricultural Marketing Service concerning the proposed rule this morning.

Comment: We farm about 40 acres organically in California. We sell our produce through a Community Supported Agriculture program, farmstand, and farmers market, plus some sales to restaurants and a local produce market.

We oppose the organic check-off program. We are concerned that this will take money from the small organic farmers and use it to further the goals of corporate big agriculture.

Organic producers do not all have the same marketing needs and messages. The large companies get into organic agriculture when economics push them towards that because they can get a better price for the product. This pressure is a positive force, certainly -- this is the way economic pressure should work, and it is good to reduce the use of chemical inputs on large farms. But a lot of big organic ag farms produce fruits and vegetables in ways that are more like conventional agriculture, just substituting organic inputs for

chemical ones. It is still very different from the organic production methods used on small farms.

Small scale organic farmers have a different approach entirely and we need to distinguish ourselves. We want a marketing campaign, for instance, that emphasizes superior land stewardship on small, diverse organic family farms. We extensively employ practices like crop rotations, cover crops, native hedgerows, using all organic seed, reducing tillage, preventing erosion, and caring for the land so that it will continue to be fertile for generations to come.

Organic marketing that is supposed to serve the umbrella of all organic agriculture-- large and small -- cannot possibly be positive for us. This is because when it comes down to it, we are not competing against conventional agriculture. We are competing against big organic ag.

Our customers are people who care about health and the environment. Marketing that convinces these people to buy organic produce from Costco is not helpful to our farm, but harmful. Our efforts at marketing concentrate on convincing people to know their farmer. We want people to shop at farmers markets, CSAs and local grocery outlets that buy their produce from local farms.

What would the organic check-off do for us? If anything, it would most likely siphon customer dollars away from our type of farm. We do not want to pay into that system that will market "organic" agriculture as a monolithic entity. We will need to continue spending our dollars to emphasize the different kinds of "organic" that set our farm apart.

If you would like to comment on this proposed regulation go to:

<https://www.regulations.gov/document?D=AMS-SC-16-0112-2265>

The comment period closes Wednesday night.

Veggie Notes, by Jason Johnson

Always rinse produce before use. Everything should be refrigerated.

If you are a positive person, it’s easy to see all the good that comes with rain. The ushering in of life, the beauty of the mist, flowers in the desert. Its cleansing power has been the muse of prophets and centuries of poets have failed to capture its melancholy. To grasp it fully would be to grasp the whole of science and to express it would be to tell of life itself.

Of course, we’ve all had enough of it at this point.

Rainy days make me crave heavy meals and this week I want to talk to you guys about chowder. Chowder is a thing of beauty and a beacon in nasty weather. It’s the kind of meal

In The Box
Butter OR Romaine Lettuce
Red Leaf Lettuce
Italian Parsley
Green Onions
Lacinato OR Scotch Kale
Shallots*
Snap Peas*
Sunchokes*
Mystery*

All produce is certified organic. Shallots and Snap Peas are from Phil Foster Ranches. Sunchokes and possibly some mystery are from Coke Farm. All other vegetables and fruit were grown by High Ground Organics. Note: last minute substitutions may be made.

you eat in wool socks from the comfort of your couch. It's also something that can be made without much thought and mine tend to contain mostly whatever is in my fridge.

This week, I'm going to pull out my dutch oven and start by heating a little olive oil in the bottom. When the oil is hot, I'll add chopped **shallots**, **green onion**, and garlic then sauté until caramelized, about 4 minutes. Then add vegetable broth. I usually use Pacific brand boxed veggie broth and I usually use the whole box for this recipe. It's best to have a second one sitting around to top off your chowder towards the end if need be. While the broth is heating up, peel and chop your **sunchoke** along with any other veggies you might be using. Definitely use the **peas** you are getting as well as any left-over carrots. I like to add potatoes and celeriac to mine. Be sure to chop everything nice and chunky. Avoid the **kale** at this point, we will get to that in a bit. When the broth is hot, add all the veggies and salt and pepper to taste (soup, in general, tends to take more salt and pepper than you are initially comfortable with), and cover the pot. Let this cook until all the veggies are nice and tender, about 25 minutes. When the soup is ready, remove about two cups (with lots of **sunchoke** and potato) and put them in a blender. Puree then add back in. This gives your chowder a nice creaminess without using any dairy.

While you are waiting on your soup to cool, sauté some kale on high heat with a splash of balsamic vinegar. Use this, along with some chopped **parsley**, to garnish each bowl.

This recipe, like all of mine, is open to a lot of interpretation. As it is now, the chowder is completely vegan, but could just as easily be made with chicken broth or with a ham bone. Classic potato chowders also tend to have a substantial portion of chopped bacon, so do what feels good!

Enjoy your veggies!

Chef's Notes, by Andrew Cohen

If you get **sunchokes**, a.k.a. Jerusalem artichokes, you have in hand what is probably in the top 2 "Ugliest Vegetable" for many people. Like celeriac, or celery root, the rough looking exterior covers an inside with distinct flavor, pleasantly so, that can be prepared in a number of ways to achieve wonderfully different results.

Sunchokes have a nice nutty flavor to them that sort of reminds one of sunflower seeds, which is not surprising as the tuber is the root of a type of sunflower, and has no relationship to artichokes or was it from anywhere near Jerusalem. They are, in fact, native to Eastern North America. They are creamy when cooked whole with a little water and a dab of butter in a covered pan with some herbs. The creaminess persists when you halve them lengthwise and oil and roast them alone or with other vegetables, but they pick up a little crispness to the outside.

Cooked as in the recipe for them presented this week, they are like a cross between French fries and potato chips, and they play well with other vegetables, as in the recipe combining them with **lacinato** and **green onions**. They make really nice soups as well, blending with leeks and green garlic to asparagus. I also think they are excellent in ramen. They can be served raw in salads- they resemble water chestnuts in this instance-sliced very thinly or up to a ¼ inch. They can be quickled too, and sliced thinly they resemble gari (sushi ginger). Adding a little ginger to the quickle juice is a great way to flavor them.

Sunchokes have been known to lower blood sugar levels in diabetics, in instances fairly dramatically. A diabetic friend of mine, after eating some, said he hadn't seen such low numbers without medication since he found he was diabetic. However-before you start messing around with these and your blood sugar, be sure you do your research. Also, after eating sunchokes (especially raw) some people find themselves quite "windy," so be warned.

One recipe I didn't get to type was a salad using both lettuces in the box, **green onions**, sliced, blanched and chilled asparagus, avocado cubes, blood orange fillets, and pea shoots with a mint lemon yogurt dressing.

I spent the last two weeks in the U.K., and I have to say-we are very lucky to live where we do and be able to partake of so many wonderful vegetables, at home or when eating out, at any time of day. I really enjoyed the food while there, but at times the vegetables were few and far between, and the variety at this time of year was nothing like here. So when you open up your box this week, take a second and reflect on how fortunate we are.

Gold Coins (Sauté of Sunchokes), from Chef Andrew E Cohen

These tubers are neither from Jerusalem nor are they related to artichokes. They are in the sunflower family, and have some of that nutty flavor. This recipe takes its name from my kids. Once when I was making this, they were watching and my daughter commented that the slices of sunchoke looked like gold coins. These are great-they taste like a cross between potato chips, French fries, and sunflower seeds. Just be sure to serve them hot, as they do not hold well. Peeling these is beyond tedious. Soak them in cool water for 5 minutes or so, then scrub them with a brush.

1 pound Jerusalem artichokes, well-scrubbed with a brush (a fresh nail brush works well.)	1-2 TBS sunflower, grapeseed, or olive oil
1 TBS best quality butter (Optional-the flavor goes really well here, but if you don't use it, you might need more oil.)	Salt and pepper to taste
1 tsp. fresh minced herbs such as thyme, rosemary, or sage	

Bring a pot of water large enough to hold the sliced sunchokes with an inch to spare to the boil.

Using a thin bladed, really sharp knife (otherwise you run the risk of the chokes chipping and cracking), slice the tubers into ¼ inch rounds. When the water boils, drop the coins into the water and cook just until a thin bladed knife tip will enter a little. The coins should not be cooked, but should no longer be raw. Drain well and put into a bowl. Drizzle with a bit of oil and toss to coat the coins all over.

Heat a large skillet-10 to 12 inches- over medium-high heat. When hot, lightly film with oil and heat up. Add the butter, and swirl to cover the pan bottom. Add the coins and toss to coat in butter.

Sauté until the coins are golden and crisp outside, and creamy/tender inside. Season with salt and pepper and scatter with the herbs. Toss and cook a few seconds longer to wake up the flavors of the herbs, then serve hot. Like French fries, these don't improve with sitting around.

Serves: 4