



High Ground Organics Community Supported Agriculture

Week 25, August 30th and 31st, 2017

On Man and Machine, by Stephen Pederson

I belong to a network of growers from throughout the state and beyond who can post questions, via email, for the group as a whole. Last week the topic of automation on small farms came up and it produced an interesting exchange. Because the minimum wage will be rising to 15 dollars per hour over the next five years and overtime will now kick in after 40 hours a week, instead of 60, automation is a hot topic among the farm community.

Already, on the large farms around us and in the Salinas Valley, chemical thinning machines are being used in lettuce crops which leave plants at a desired spacing, while precisely killing the unwanted plants with herbicide. Large "Robo-Cultivators" are also being implemented, which use cameras to identify the crop plants and kill all the weeds around them with mechanical knives. Tractors with GPS guided, automatic steering systems are already commonly used to list up beds, and those that won't need a driver at all are right around the corner.

Where small, diverse, organic growers like us fit in this rush-to-automate remains to be seen. We are a small group, and here in the United States there has never been much interest among Ag-tech companies in serving us. Instead, most of the new developments are aimed at operations that grow on thousands of acres and are way beyond the reach of small farms like ours.

Even the few technologies that may be within our reach, like automated irrigation systems, present problems on diverse farms like ours. These systems are capable of using sensors that can determine when a crop needs water and send a signal to automatically turn on the pump to ensure they get irrigated when they actually need it. Now although the idea of having my farm irrigate itself while I am lounging on the beach sounds great, in reality, it is hard to imagine it working on our farm.

For one thing, I have never found an irrigation system that I would feel safe leaving unattended. Every time we irrigate our strawberries or squash or any crop we do on drip, we have to make the rounds repairing damage done by rodents, over-eager weeding crews, or even insects (Jerusalem crickets). And when it comes to overhead/sprinkler irrigation -- it's

another matter entirely. No matter how carefully they are assembled, the aluminum hook and latch pipes that we use are prone to "blow-outs" on occasion where they separate, sometimes hours into an irrigation set. Although I am sure it would be possible to design a system that would sense the change in pressure and shut itself down, I would love to see the robot that could wade out into the muddy field, latch the pipes back together again, and turn the pump back on. This is just one example of the sorts of difficulties you would

encounter in trying to automate anything in a complex farming system.

At this point the future is murky, and about the only thing that is certain is that farming around here is going to look very different in the next 10-20 years.

Veggie Notes, by Jason Johnson

Always rinse produce before use. Everything should be refrigerated.

I really pride myself on the ability to make a good sauce, and it doesn't get much better than a fresh tomato reduction. This week, try quartering your tomatoes and adding them, with a splash of olive oil, to a nice, heavy bottomed saucepan. Smash them thoroughly with your hands or use an immersion blender to break them down. You can alternately use a food processor. You want the end result to be a bit chunky, but not too much. Bring your tomatoes to a simmer then drop the flame down low. Keep the pan uncovered so moisture can evaporate and the sauce can thicken. Now, mess around with it a bit. You know good sauce when you taste it, so make sure to taste this one frequently. I tend to season mine with salt, pepper, balsamic, garlic, onion, and basil. Do your salt first, bringing it up slowly. Salt, taste, salt, taste. You will find it takes more than you thought, but you want to make sure not to over salt. Next do the pepper, which is less of an exact science, and add a

splash of balsamic and another splash of olive oil. Stir and taste again. The flavors should be nice and balanced. If it tastes a bit sharp, don't worry, the balsamic will mellow out as it reduces. If it tastes flat, you probably need a bit more salt, but try to hold off on adding more at this point. Just make a mental note. Let the pot simmer until it starts to thicken. When a good deal of the moisture has evaporated off, use a cheese grater or micro-plane to grate in 1/4 of an onion and a couple cloves of garlic. Stir and taste. Add a pinch more salt if it's still flat.

At this point, if the whole reducing procedure is taking too long and I get a bit impatient, I will add a pinch of flour to thicken the reduction. If you do this, make sure to sprinkle the

In The Box

Strawberries

Mixed Tomatoes*

Basil

Rainbow Carrots

Romanesco OR Green
Cabbage

Mixed Summer Squash

Green Beans*

*All produce is certified organic.
Green beans are from Coke Farms.
Tomatoes are from High Ground
Organics and Mariquita Farms. All
other vegetables and fruit were
grown by High Ground Organics.
Note: last minute substitutions may
be made.*

flour in slowly while whisking like a mad man. If you don't properly incorporate the flour, you will end up with tiny dumplings in your sauce. You can alternately make a roux in a separate pan, with olive oil and flour, then add that in. When the sauce is just about done and is nice and chunky, add as much minced basil as you see fit. You want to make sure you do this right at the end, or your basil will lose that nice bright color, and consequently, its flavor. Turn the burner off, cover your sauce, and set it aside. This sauce is great with pasta, especially penne. The trick to a great pasta dish is to finish your pasta in the sauce. If using dry pasta, boil until the noodles are almost done, about 7 minutes, then strain and add to a hot sauce with a splash of the pasta water. This makes sure your sauce clings to the noodle.

This week, though, I am going to try a gluten free recipe that I keep hearing about. I am going to use the above sauce and thinly sliced summer squash to make a decadent lasagna. First, I suspect I'll have to dry the squash out a bit. This can be done by slicing them into 1/4" slabs and placing them in the oven at 225° for about 30 minutes. You could also grill them for the same effect. Keep in mind this recipe is designed to be a base, so tweak as you see fit. Next, preheat the oven to 400° and add a layer those slabs to the bottom of a cast iron skillet. Next layer in some ricotta and basil, then chard, then sauce, then summer squash again, seasoning throughout with salt, pepper, and garlic. Repeat until your skillet is full, ending with a layer of summer squash. Cook for 30 minutes, then top with some mozzarella and cook for another ten. Let stand for ten minutes before serving. Garnish with basil.

Enjoy your veggies!

Creamy Carrot Tomato Soup Garnished with Summer Vegetable Dice, from Chef Andrew E Cohen

Although it says "Creamy" in the title, there is no cream, just a bit of yogurt for the smooth texture. You can, of course, skip the yogurt and the soup will still be quite good, if a little sweeter perhaps. The tomato adds acid and brightens the flavors of the soup, while adding liquid as well. As to seasoning, this soup is amenable to so many different herbs it makes this a truly versatile dish. The vegetable garnish is optional, so this can be a quick and simple dish as well.

1 bunch carrots, cleaned and chopped, except 1/4-cup, diced 1/4-inch and reserved	2-3 ripe medium tomatoes, peeled, seeded, and chopped, juices saved
1/2 small white or yellow onion	1/4 cup white wine
1 teaspoon, or to taste, fresh chopped thyme, marjoram, dill, or basil*	Salt and pepper to taste
6-8 cups light vegetable stock or water or a mixture	Olive oil as needed
1/2 to 1 cup plain yogurt or labne (avoid Greek yogurt)	2-4 green onions, whites sliced into 1/4in pieces, greens diagonally finely sliced into 1in long pieces
1/2 cup each fennel, summer squash, cut into 1/4-inch dice, reserved diced 1/4-cup carrot	White balsamic vinegar and/or agave syrup if needed
Myer lemon juice from half a lemon	

Heat a 3 quart soup pot over medium heat. When hot, film the pan bottom with olive oil. When hot, add the carrots and toss to coat. Cook, stirring frequently, just until a little gold shows up on the carrots. Reduce heat a little and add the onions. Cook, without coloring the onions, until they are translucent and tender. Add the tomatoes and stir, then season with salt and pepper. Add the white wine and cook until it reduces 90%. If using thyme or marjoram, add it now.

Simmer vegetables, stirring to break up tomatoes, for 3 minutes. Add 6 cups of the stock/water and bring to a simmer. If it seems there are a lot of vegetables to liquid, add more liquid. Bring to a simmer and cook until the carrots are tender enough to break down when squeezed with thumb and forefinger, but not until they are mushy and just falling apart. When the carrots are tender, transfer to a blender and puree. Be careful when pureeing hot things as they expand in the blender and can spray out and make a huge mess, not to mention burning you. Fill 3/4 full, cover the blender with a towel and start on low and work your way up to puree. Puree all the soup and return it to the rinsed out soup pot over low heat. Now is the time to add the labne or yogurt. Add 1/2 cup into the soup and whisk thoroughly to blend it in. Taste the soup, and if you wish, add the rest of it as needed. Keep the soup warm, but do not let it go past simmer at this point.

While the soup simmers before pureeing, bring a small amount of water to a boil and drop in the fennel and carrot dice for 30 seconds or so, just until they are no longer "raw". Rinse with cold water.

Mix the diced vegetables, except the scallion greens in a bowl, tossing to combine well. If you wish, toss the vegetable dice with the lemon juice. Use just enough to moisten the vegetables, then season lightly with salt and pepper.

Place a quarter of this mixture, or as much as you like, into the center of four pre-heated bowl.

If using dill or basil, add it to the soup now and stir in. Taste the soup for balance. If it seems to "rooty" or a little bitter, add a drizzle of agave syrup and stir in, then taste. If the flavors seem too flat or sweet, add a little drizzle of vinegar, stir in, and taste for balance. Once flavors are adjusted, ladle it into the bowls gently so the vegetable mounds stay fairly together. Drizzle the surface of the soup with a little olive oil, then scatter some of the finely sliced scallion greens onto the center of the surface of the soup and serve.

Chef's Notes:

*When it comes to herbs, really, this soup can take so many different ones. Add soft herbs like dill or basil at the end, hardier herbs and spice blends go in earlier. This soup could take Middle Eastern herbs like cumin and coriander, or use Ras-el-Hanout or a curry. Herbes de Provence and maybe a few olives slivers added in, or saffron could work as well.

If you do not feel like taking the time to dice vegetables, you can easily skip that step and the soup will still taste good. Do not let the onions brown or the soup will taste pretty sweet and not as bright. For this reason, the carrots are only cooked to show a hint of color so they taste more like a bright raw carrot rather than a caramelized long-cooked carrot. You can also skip the yogurt if you wish, or just add a dollop to each serving, perhaps forming a quenelle and placing it on the vegetable mound before adding the soup.

Serves: 4