



High Ground Organics

Community Supported Agriculture

Week 27, September 14th and 15th, 2016

Agriculture and Water Quality in Elkhorn Slough, by Stephen Pedersen

As I start planning out the cover cropping scheme for our farm fields this fall, I am thinking back to the workshop I attended last summer at Moss Landing Marine Labs concerning water quality issues in Elkhorn Slough. Elkhorn Slough is a large brackish wetland whose main channel starts at Moss Landing Harbor (about 10 minutes south of us on Highway 1) and winds its way inland and to the North over six miles. Many of the issues facing Elkhorn Slough are similar to those affecting Harkins Slough, which borders our farm here in Watsonville, and our Lewis Road property is within the Elkhorn Slough watershed.

As someone who farms within the watershed, I have a keen interest in how the farms on the hillsides surrounding the slough are affecting the water quality. What was shocking to me in the information presented at the workshop is the fact that the Nitrate levels washing directly into the slough from farms pales in comparison to those coming in from the Old Salinas River.

Those of you who have been to the famous Phil's Fish Market have driven over the Old Salinas River to get there. Before the creation of a man-made river mouth some four miles to the South, the Salinas River used to meander northward behind the sand dunes all the way to its original mouth North of Moss Landing Harbor. During the summer, or in drought years, when the flow isn't strong enough to break through the sand barrier, the river reverts to its original channel and all of its contents are dumped into the Harbor—nitrates and all. From the harbor, the Old Salinas River flow is entrained on the flood tide into the main channel of Elkhorn Slough.

The problems associated with excess nutrients, like nitrogen, are numerous. Chief among them are algal "blooms"—the vast mats of brilliant green algae that are a common sight around the slough. These blooms can result in the depletion of oxygen available to aquatic animals and the mats themselves can smother vegetation on the banks of the wetlands.

The source of these nitrates in the Old Salinas River is almost exclusively agricultural run-off. Most of the farms in the lower Salinas Valley area are conventional vegetable and strawberry operations which use highly soluble, high analysis fertilizers. It is common practice to leave fields bare—listed up into beds ready to plant into in late winter/early spring. With

no cover crops in place to tie up the high levels of nutrients left over after harvest, they freely wash into open waterways when the winter rains come and end up in the Salinas River.

There are practices that farmers can take to prevent the run-off of nutrients into the waterways. Organic farming reduces potential run off problems simply because organic farmers do not use those super high nitrogen synthetic fertilizers. But planting cover crops is one of the best practices that can be implemented for farms during the rainy season. The plants absorb the nutrients and store them to be reincorporated into the soil when the cover crop is disced in and the field is

replanted. The roots hold onto the soil so that it is not washed down hills or into drainage channels during rain events.

Organic agriculture is about much more than simply not using pesticides that might be dangerous for people to consume as residue on the crop. It is a whole different approach to farming that addresses the many and serious issues that are caused by large scale conventional farming techniques. For many of these issues, we need more than just consumer pressure for organic food. We need to recognize and talk about the huge impacts that are caused by the practices being used and, as environmentalists have always pleaded, to find ways to "internalize the externalities."

Veggie Notes, by Jeanne Byrne

Always rinse produce before use. Everything should be refrigerated except **tomatoes** and **onions**.

Romaine lettuce is perfect for a Caesar Salad, whether you want to make it with or without egg and with or without anchovies. They are all flavorful and highlight the cool crunchiness of the romaine. Add the **cucumbers** if you get them, and **pepper** and **onion** slivers, and crunch away!

The **pepper** mix will have some spice. You can easily tell the **Padrons** from the **Hungarian hot wax peppers** if you want to use them separately.

The **Padrons** are smaller and darker green. If you have already become addicted to **Padrons**, as many of us are, you'll probably just want to grill or fry those up and eat them whole. The **Hungarians** add wonderful zing to salads, but go easy and slice them into small slivers if you are sensitive to spice. They can also serve as your heat for your homemade salsa. Another idea is to use all the peppers together with the purplette onions in a pepper and onion relish to top sandwiches or grilled meats or fish.

The **purplettes** have now been dried, so they can be stored outside the fridge like other onions. These small sweet onions are wonderful sliced thin on your salad. Or cut them in half

Cranberry Shelling Beans
Strawberries
Tomatoes
Cucumbers OR Padron Peppers AND Hungarian Hot Wax Peppers
Dried Purplette Onions
Romaine Lettuce
Collard Greens OR Scotch Kale
Dill

Everything is certified organic. All vegetables and fruit were grown by High Ground Organics. Note: last minute substitutions may be made.

and roast them with whatever else you happen to be roasting at the moment.

The **Scotch kale** makes nice kale chips--just strip the rinsed leaves off the stems, arrange on a baking sheet, spray with olive oil, sprinkle with salt, and bake at 300 until the kale is dry and crisp. It's amazing how some kids who won't touch greens cooked in other ways can absolutely love kale chips!

The fresh **cranberry shelling beans** need to be cooked. Remove the beans from the pod and then cook them up like you would dried beans (except you don't need to soak them because they are fresh), perhaps with some chopped **onion** and your herb of choice. The **collards** will go well with the **shelling beans**, especially if you decide to cook them up with a ham hock.

You can add **dill** to the beans or go with the standard pairing with fish such as salmon or sole. I was very excited a few years ago to learn that **dill** freezes very nicely. So if you can't use all of your dill at once, just put the unused portion in a plastic bag and put it whole into the freezer. Then when you need it take it out of the freezer and just snip off the amount you need with scissors.

Enjoy your veggies!

Web Store Orders

Tomatoes will be available on the web store for next week's delivery again. We are adding San Marzano tomatoes from Mariquita Farm in addition to the dry farmed Early Girls. San Marzanos are famously good tomatoes for making sauce, so if you haven't done your canning yet, these might be the ones for you! You need to place your order between Friday and Monday at 6:00 pm for tomatoes. Also on the web store: **strawberry flats** and **half-flats**, single **flower bouquets**, and **honey** (note: the price has gone down for the honey -- the bees had a really good year!) Web store orders (other than tomatoes) can be made until Monday night for Wednesday deliveries and Tuesday night for Thursday deliveries. csa.farmigo.com/store/highgroundorganics

Chef's Notes, by Andrew Cohen

Fresh shelling beans, a.k.a. "shellies," are a treat of autumn. When I interned at Chez Panisse, it was during "Shellie" season. Everywhere I went there would be someone shelling beans. The phone receptionist/reservationist was shelling while answering calls. A couple other people at desks were at it, as well as Alice Waters. It seemed as if a mania had struck. Of course, in a restaurant as busy as Chez Panisse, and one known for what it can do with **beans**, they needed a LOT of shelled beans.

You won't need that many, and you can even shell them over a couple days, and then hold them in the refrigerator if you must, and then cook them a day or two before using them. Use them in the two recipes this week, or any of the suggestions in those recipes. Mash them and whip them with plenty of flavorful oil and roasted cloves of garlic for a hummus-like beans spread/dip. Use them in a soup or vegetable stew, or mash lightly and use on grilled bread with tomato dice for starts or sides to a salad of lettuce, tomato, and cucumber.

Use **cukes** and **tomatoes**, and cilantro if you still have some from last week, to make Israeli/Arab Salad, and tabbouleh. You could make a panzanella salad variant with the **lettuce**, **tomatoes**, **Purplette onions**, **cucumbers**, and some day-old rustic bread (see recipe on site). The **Purplettes** were the original vegetable I "quickled" -- a sort of quick pickle -- for the High Ground Harvest Festival some years back.

The **Tomato Sauce/Glaze** is a fun recipe to master, and can be a good way to use ugly, over-ripe, or under-ripe (use a little sugar) tomatoes up. As a glaze you can use it on a lot of things. You can even use it on ice-cream. When cooked way down it turns into a syrup. Add a drop or two of balsamic vinegar or tomato juice and the results really point up that **tomato** really is a fruit.

Note: We can't print them all, but Chef Andrew's recipes are always available in full at highgroundorganics.com

Salad of Cranberry Beans, Tomato, Cucumber and Quickled Purplette Onion, from Chef Andrew E Cohen

2-3 cups Basic Braised Shelling Beans (See recipe on site), except cut onion and garlic into large pieces, and remove them before when ready to drain the beans	2 cups tomatoes, seeded and drained, cut into ½ inch dice
1½ cups cucumber, seeded and cut into ½ inch dice	1½-2 cups quickled Purplette onions (recipe on website)
8 cups lettuce leaves such as butter or leaf lettuce, washed, spun dry, and torn into bite sized pieces	1 cup, or as much as needed, 2 White Vinegars Dressing, or Basil Vinaigrette v.3 (see website)
Salt and pepper to taste	¼ cup lightly toasted pine nuts
-Optional- ½ to 1 cup soft mild goat cheese	

Cook the beans following the recipe with the above changes. When the beans are done, drain and remove vegetables and herbs from the beans, and drizzle with dressing while still hot. Use enough dressing so the beans are well coated. Toss and stir gently as the beans cool. Once cooled, season gently with salt and pepper and taste for seasoning. Add more dressing or salt if necessary. If not using within the hour transfer, covered tightly, to the refrigerator until ready to use them. Remove from refrigerator 30 minutes before using for salads or other cold dishes.

In a large non-reactive bowl, combine the tomato, cucumber, and half the quickles and toss gently to mix. Add enough dressing to coat the vegetables well. Toss to coat with dressing. Add lettuces and toss gently to combine. Taste, and add more dressing if it needs it.

Divide the salad between four chilled plates. If using the goat cheese, scatter little pillowy blobs of it around/on the salads. Place the remaining quickles in ploufs in the center of each salad and scatter with the pine nuts. Give a little grind of pepper to each salad and serve.

Serves: 4