



# Weekly News

## Rain, rain, and more rain—but no panic, yet ~ Michele Roy

Sunday mornings I always take a long meandering walk around the gardens to see how everything is doing. I must admit I was a little worried about what I'd find today! I'm happy to report, however, that there was more good than bad to be seen. The weeds are certainly taking advantage of the weather, especially in our paths which are the last things we fuss over. There were some spots under water but the plants were hanging on.

In general, though, everything looked vibrant and healthy (even through the weeds). Once again I will proclaim the wonders of our raised beds, and state for the millionth time how happy I am that we don't need to worry about getting a tractor onto the land.

We've had 4" of rain since Friday morning. I just checked the 10-day weather forecast and didn't see even one sun icon. Hopefully the forecasters are wrong about that!

Eric Sideman at MOFGA sends out a "Pest Report" every week throughout the growing season. His report this week explained the problems plants have with excessive rain. It's pretty interesting. The plants can be looking yellow and waterlogged—the yellow means that they are lacking in nitrogen. Organic growers depend on compost,



Here is part of the cabbage patch after the 4" of rain we got. Wet and weedy, but healthy!

manure, cover crops, or organic fertilizers like alfalfa or fish meal to supply nitrogen. These amendments need warm weather and soil for the biological activity which releases the nitrogen to take place. It's been fairly cool so far this season, so the nitrogen has not yet been made available.

The wet weather gives us another cause of low nitrogen. Roots of nearly all species of plants must have oxygen available to them and when the soil becomes waterlogged all of the air

spaces are filled. Roots stop absorbing nutrients, especially nitrogen. If it stays wet long enough the roots die. Also, excessive rain will leach nitrogen away (this is what causes algae blooms in streams and lakes) Farmers who use chemical fertilizers will have to reapply it. The nitrogen that was in organic forms such as seed meals, fish meal, compost and manure probably will still have much of the nitrogen left because the soil became cold and anaerobic before the bacteria converted the organic nitrogen to soluble nitrate. Farmers just have to wait for the air spaces to reappear in the soil and the bacteria to get to work. Come on, sun!

### Asian Peanut Slaw

(adapted from a recipe on *Epicurious*)

- 6 Tbl rice vinegar
- 3 Tbl vegetable oil
- 3 Tbl sesame oil
- 5 Tbl creamy peanut butter
- 3 Tbl soy sauce
- 3 Tbl (packed) golden brown sugar
- 2 Tbl minced peeled fresh ginger
- 1 1/2 Tbl minced garlic
- 5-7 cups thinly sliced cabbage
- 2 large red or yellow bell peppers, cut into matchstick-size strips (optional)
- 2 medium carrots, peeled, cut into matchstick-size strips

- 1/2 cup dry-roasted peanuts
- 4-8 scallions, chopped
- 1/2 cup chopped fresh cilantro (optional)

Whisk first 7 ingredients in small bowl to blend. (Dressing can be made 1 day ahead. Cover and chill. Let stand at room temperature 30 minutes before continuing.) Combine remaining ingredients in large bowl. Add dressing and toss to coat. Season with salt and pepper and serve. If making ahead, toss the peanuts in right before serving.

### Carrots to cards

~ Molly King

Last week I tried to explore a contradiction that bothers me: consumers need affordable prices while farmers need reasonable pay. One program that tries to meet both requirements is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance

(*Molly continued on page 2*)

## *Mrs. Baldacci goes to market ~Denis Thoet*

We invite all of our CSA members and all readers of our newsletter to attend the Gardiner Farmers' Market this Wednesday, June 24, at 4 p.m.

This is when Maine's First Lady, Karen Baldacci, will visit the market and take a look at our food stamp setup.

Thanks to three months of hard work by Michele, Market Manager Boo Hubbard, and friend Sarah Miller, the Gardiner market has become just the second in the state (Lewiston was the first) to be able to accept food stamps via EBT (electronic benefit transfer) transactions.

Those wishing to buy from the market vendors purchase tokens from the market manager in \$1 and \$5 amounts. They then spend the tokens with the vendors, and the tokens are redeemed by the market.

Complicated? Yes — most markets have volunteer vendor-managers who don't have the time to manage the financial requirements of EBT transactions. Boo Hubbard gets a modest stipend for the great work she does.

Costly? Yes— tokens cost \$150; a land line from Fairpoint costs \$40 a month, plus \$56 for installation. (These costs may possibly be reimbursable by the state.)



*Here's some of what we found when we uncovered all of the summer squash beds!*

Is it worth it? Definitely yes. Nearly 20 percent of Maine's population (180,000 people) are currently receiving food stamps. They are effectively barred from receiving fresh, local — and healthier — food that farmers' markets and farm stands provide.

Gardiner is a small market with a limited population base. Farmers markets in Portland, Bath/Brunswick, and Bangor can step up and do what needs to be done to provide good food to low income people. So far, they haven't.

The next major hurdle is to get the word out to everyone that the market can handle food stamps. Toward that end, Michele has been in contact with food banks and WIC (Women and Infant Care) officials, and Sarah is working on a dedicated route for Wednesday afternoons for Kennebec County CAP transports. Word of mouth is critical to the success of this effort.

Karen Baldacci is a dedicated gardener herself. When Michele and I met her at a recent reception at the Maine State Museum, she became very animated when talking about her gardens. Listening in, her husband, Gov. Baldacci, exclaimed, "I can't get her out of the garden!"



*These are the tokens that food stamp users can purchase for use at the Gardiner Farmers Market.*

*(Molly, continued from page 1)*

Program, or Food Stamps. They're no where near perfect, but I think Food Stamps at least intend to fill the gap between minimum wage and a living wage. Since their first incarnation in 1939, Food Stamps were actual pieces of paper that could be exchanged for goods at places like your grocery store, convenience store, and farmers' market.

In the 1990s, however, the US Department of Agriculture began to phase out the paper stamps in favor of Electronic Benefit Transfer (or EBT) cards. These snazzy cards work much like debit cards, and speed transactions in stores with credit card machines. Unfortunately, most farmers' markets (taking place in parks and fields) don't have the phone line required to connect such a machine. This small oversight is yet another reason why lower income families generally have access to less nutritious food; a bag of Doritos from the gas station is much easier to buy with Food Stamps than a pound of carrots at the farmers' market.

In my opinion, any effort at making farmers' markets more accessible is a worthy effort. Bringing EBT machines to Maine's farmers' markets will help to spread the benefits of local foods. Luckily, Michele and Denis agree. They're part of the tireless (and successful!) team who worked to bring EBT to the Gardiner farmers' market. On Wednesday, June 14, the Gardiner farmers' market became the second farmers' market in the state to offer EBT!