

# Farmer's Diary

by John Lee

Ohmigod; it is summer again. Where did the winter and spring go? It seems that only last week we were filling liner trays, 4" pots and hanging baskets in the greenhouses and splitting up that last of the winter wood pile. Now when I go through the greenhouses, they are almost empty; the hardy perennials that we grew outside are beginning to sell well, and we are starting to pick field crops. Spring has gotten away from me again.

It seems that the older you get, the shorter the spring season, the quicker the years pass you by and the more urgent the conflict between time for work and time for re-creation. Management was once a process of organizing the work on the farm and making sure the bills were paid as promptly as possible. Now that the farm is apparently moderately successful and I am quite a bit older, management is beginning to look like juggling business and personal priorities. It is not that I suddenly have gotten old, mind you. More it is that my time in the harness with a full set of blinders has kept me on the straight and narrow, focused and possibly oblivious to other important events that were happening in my life.

One of the nice things about having a business that feels like it is moving in the right direction given management's supposed priorities, is that I, for one, can begin to contemplate an afterlife: call it life after work that is not co-opted by the potential of getting enough sleep for a change.

Now, we are not talking about trips to Disney World or Foxwoods here! My kids don't have kids who need or want my attention yet and although decrepitude may be incipient, I am so not ready for that much leisure time! Re-creation in this instance is more closely aligned with preservation of the species: budding agriculturists.

You may have noticed that there are not too many farmers in your neighborhood. At least that is my experience both where I live and in Boston and Brookline. Time on my hands means time to share the experience, to propagate new or eager converts to the veil of toil and

tears and help younger men and women who have a dream similar to my own. To be able to do this is a great privilege.

This year it has been unusual and truly gratifying to open my snail-mail and email regularly and read about people who are seeking career changes and wanting to know about opportunities in agricultural production and marketing. It is also gratifying to note that there are an increasing number of opportunities available for the truly motivated individual.

The demand for fresh local produce is booming here in the Northeast; there are more farmers markets than there are farmers, many CSAs have waiting lists for membership. There are state and local programs for getting onto good farmland and thereby helping to preserve important open space by keeping the soils in production, and there are now organizations which are actively working to get some fresh blood pumping through an old farmer's heart. Opportunity programs for immigrant and refugee farmers are beginning to flourish as we recognize that there is an untapped vein of agricultural know-how and will-to-work that is going begging.

What more could an arguably senescent farmer want than to be sowing and/or cultivating the seeds of opportunity off the farm while making a go of the home place? After all, who is going to do this work after I reach the tipping point? This is important work and who better to show the way than farmers themselves? It ought not be left solely to bureaucrats, the halls of well-intentioned academe or recruiters. Which reminds me: I had better get back to doing some work before pumpkin season is at hand!! ♦

**John Lee** is the manager of Allandale Farm (Boston's last working farm), which specializes in naturally-grown local produce. He writes for local news outlets and is deeply involved with farming and locally-grown issues in Massachusetts.