

Veggie Box Newsletter

Week 12, August 18

Welcome to week 12 of the Summer Veggie Box! What are the differences between big agribusinesses and small farms? The truth is, they both have their pros and cons. Large farms can sometimes be more efficient than small farms, since they can afford all the fancy machinery and they use mono-cropping (growing the same crop each year) which can yield greater profits. For this reason, large agribusinesses are able to sell their products at relatively low prices, which attracts many consumers. Despite efficiency, large farms tend to rely on chemical fertilizers and pesticides to restore their soil, since mono-cropping depletes the soil of its nutrients. These chemicals are often not handled responsibly and cause pollution- in fact, agriculture is the largest source of pollution of lakes and rivers. Additionally, large farms contribute to air pollution due to the miles of travel from farms to grocery stores across the country. Small local farms are better for the environment, as they require less travel, packaging, refrigeration, and usually less chemicals. Small farms also benefit their communities by maintaining open land and reminding neighbors where their food comes from. Thank you for helping the environment and our community as you support our local farms.



What's in the Box?

- Organic Watermelon**, *MSU Student Organic Farm, Holt*
- Organic Potatoes**, *Monroe Family Organics, Alma*
- Slicer Tomatoes**, *Hunter Park Garden House, Lansing*
- White Onion**, *Ten Hens Farm, Bath*
- Fennel**, *Ten Hens Farm, Bath*
- Organic Eggplant**, *Owosso Organics, Owosso*
- Organic Garlic**, *Owosso Organics, Owosso*

Add-Ons

- Bread**, *Stone Circle Bakehouse, Holt*
- Sweet Treats**, *Stone Circle Bakehouse, Holt*
- Meat Variety**, *Grazing Fields Cooperative, Charlotte*
- Honey**, *Beebehavior Ranch, Ovid*

Producer Spotlight

Beebehavior Ranch

Ana Heck was introduced to beekeeping in Nicaragua while working on an organic farm and with a women's beekeeping cooperative from 2011 through 2013. She began keeping her own bees in 2015 at her aunt and uncle's home in Minnetrista, Minnesota in the same spot where her grandfather had kept bees. Her aunt and uncle referred to their home as the "Behavior Ranch" since some of Heck's cousins got sent to their rural home as teenagers when they were misbehaving. The "Behavior Ranch" turned into the "Beebehavior Ranch" as the honey bee colonies thrived in the location. Heck moved her bees to Ovid, Michigan in the spring of 2019.

Crop Profile

Eggplant

Eggplant is grown for its edible spongy absorbent fruit widely used in cooking. Most people consider it a vegetable despite its botanical definition as a berry fruit, a member of the genus *Solanum* related to the tomato and the potato. Like the tomato its skin and seeds can be eaten, but like the potato it is not to be eaten raw. Raw eggplant can have a bitter taste, with an astringent quality, but it becomes tender when cooked and develops a rich, complex flavor. The fruit is capable of absorbing large amounts of cooking fats and sauces, which may enrich dishes.

Recipes and Tips!

Fennel-and-Potato Gratin

3 tablespoons butter
1 Veggie Box onion, sliced
2 Veggie Box garlic cloves, minced
2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
1 1/4 cups half-and-half
1/2 (10-oz.) block sharp white Cheddar cheese, shredded
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon freshly ground pepper
1/8 teaspoon ground nutmeg
Veggie Box potatoes thinly sliced
Veggie Box fennel bulb, thinly sliced
Garnish: rosemary sprigs

Preheat oven to 400°. Melt butter in a heavy saucepan over medium heat. Add onion ; sauté 2 to 3 minutes or until tender. Add garlic, and sauté 1 minute. Whisk in flour; cook, whisking constantly, 1 minute. Gradually whisk in half-and-half; cook, whisking constantly, 3 to 4 minutes or until thickened and bubbly. Remove from heat. Whisk in cheese until melted and smooth. Stir in salt and next 2 ingredients. Layer potato and fennel slices alternately in a lightly greased, broiler-safe ceramic 2-qt. casserole dish. Spread cheese sauce over layers. Cover with aluminum foil. Bake at 400° for 50 minutes or until potatoes are tender. Remove from oven. Increase oven temperature to broil with oven rack 5 inches from heat. Uncover dish, and broil 2 to 4 minutes or until golden brown. Garnish, if desired.

Spicy Roasted Eggplant, Tomato, & Ricotta Frittata

2 tbsp olive oil
Veggie Box eggplant diced
Veggie Box tomatoes, diced
salt and black pepper, to taste
6 large eggs
1 cup milk
1 tsp red pepper flakes
1 lb ricotta

Heat oven to 450F. In a large bowl, toss together the olive oil, eggplant cubes, and tomatoes. Season to taste with salt and black pepper. Spread on a parchment-lined baking sheet and roast for 20-30 minutes, or until eggplant is tender and tomatoes are bursting. Lower oven to 375F. In a second bowl, whisk together the eggs, milk, and red pepper flakes. Grease a 9-inch pie or tart pan. Stir together the egg mixture with the vegetable mixture. Pour into the prepared pan. Top with the ricotta. Bake for 30-35 minutes, or until set. Let cool for 5 minutes before serving.

Eggplant Parmesan

2 Veggie Box eggplants
2 tablespoons olive oil, divided
1 teaspoon sea salt, divided
Veggie Box onion, minced
2 Veggie Box garlic cloves, minced
Veggie Box tomatoes, crushed
1 teaspoon honey
1.5 ounces (about 3/4 cup) grated parmesan cheese (vegetarian, if needed)
6 ounces grated mozzarella cheese (about 1.5 cups)
Minced basil, for garnish

Preheat oven to 420 degrees. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Cut the tops off the eggplants then cut them into 1/2" thick slices. Lay them on the baking sheet, drizzle them with 1 tablespoon of the olive oil and sprinkle them 1/2 teaspoon of salt. Roast in the oven for 25 minutes. While the eggplants are cooking, heat the remaining tablespoon of oil in a medium-sized pot. Add the onion and cook until it is translucent, about 5 minutes. Add the garlic, honey, and tomatoes and cook for 15-20 minutes, or until the sauce has thickened. Reduce the heat, cover the pot, and simmer until the eggplants are cooked. Spread 1/2 cup of the sauce in a 9"x9" pan. Add a layer of eggplants, top with 1/2 cup of sauce and 1/3 of both the cheeses. Repeat until you run out of eggplant so that you have several layers. Put the pan into the oven and bake until the eggplant parmesan is bubbly and the cheese starts to brown, about 20 minutes. Remove the pan from the oven and let it rest for at least 15 minutes (or up to 30 minutes) before cutting into it.

