



Philosophical Ponderings of a Farmer

The Re-localization of our Food System (c) 2020

Apparently, it takes a pandemic: public support for local farmers has been overwhelming this Spring, and I hope it stays that way long-term. Obviously I also hope we will get through this soon and that we can "go back to normal" in many aspects of our lives. But the pandemic has forced positive changes that we might want to keep around, such as greater reliance on our local food system.

Due to people's inability to access goods from afar and a fear of going to the grocery store, local CSA's and farm stands throughout the county have seen unprecedented (hmmm, did I actually jump on the bandwagon and use that term?) sales this Spring.

Unfortunately, farm businesses are still struggling. Struggling to replace all their anticipated restaurant sales; struggling to find employees; and struggling to keep abreast of all the happenings and new food safety requirements amidst the busiest season of the year.

I feel so fortunate on a regular basis that I chose to grow Hopscotch slowly and sustainably, and that I have a diversity of sales options upon which to rely. Because of my super small scale, I have always sold nearly all of my fresh produce through the farmers market and CSA. No farmers market in early April? No problem, I initiated a pre-order program on Wednesdays. I know most of my customers personally, so it wasn't too hard to pivot to a new system. Cancellation of the Wednesday Farmers Market? I guess I'll let a couple of folks from the waiting list into the CSA. But, for a farm that is a few acres larger than Hopscotch, the logistics of pivoting to direct-to-consumer sales can be daunting. Delivering smaller quantities to more people is time consuming - a lot goes into organizing, packing, and tracking orders.

My canned goods are of course shelf stable, so I don't really have to worry about how quickly they move. Having said that, each time I enter the processing kitchen, my heart drops at the sight of the empty shelves. I'm almost sold out of all my pickles, relish, and preserves until July! (Don't worry, I've already squirreled some away for you CSA regular share folks!).

I guess you could say business is booming. But as I look toward summer, I wonder if Hopscotch too will see the bubble burst. Yes, my CSA is bigger than it has ever been (thank you for signing up!), but will that fully make up for a lack of a Wednesday market? Probably not. And as much as I hate to admit it, a lot of tourists in town for festivals and events buy my products at the Saturday market. Maybe come spring 2021, the shelves at the processing kitchen won't be quite so empty and I'll have the exact same feeling, but for the opposite reason, each time I pass them. While the online farmers

market is amazing (I'm loving it!), sales are probably 1/3 to 1/2 of what they would be at the physical market during a regular year.

But then I remember how the community rallied together this spring, and I think, maybe everything will be okay. That maybe we can make lemonade out of lemons... And that maybe Jefferson County has been given a unique opportunity to reimagine its food system. Let's do it!

Here are a couple of articles I've read recently that you might enjoy:

[Small Farms are Experiencing a Surprising Boom. Here's Why.](#)

[Nearly a Third of Small, Independent Farmers are Facing Bankruptcy by the End of 2020](#)