

Picnicking With A Purpose

By Dayna M. Reidenouer

A total of 1,000 pounds of tomatoes was harvested during the second week of August at Homefields Care Farm, a non-profit community-supported agriculture (CSA) program that provides employment and training for disabled individuals. Located on a 23-acre organic farm at 150 Letort Road, Millersville, Homefields grows more than 300 varieties of produce. Arguably, though, the greatest product that comes out of Homefields Care Farm cannot be quantified.

"Homefields uses agriculture ... for therapeutic value," said board vice president Allison Hawthorne. She elaborated on the benefits of working on the farm: plenty of sunshine and Vitamin D, opportunities for working independently, the pride of watching something flourish, and chances to perform meaningful labor.

"The CSA brings people to the farm

to blend with people who have different abilities," added co-founder Linda Strauss. "Prejudices dissolve. As a community, we become more whole. We put people before produce."

Every week from spring through late fall, CSA shareholders can come to the farm to pick up their portions of that week's harvest. In addition to about 10 varieties of tomatoes, the farm grows lettuces, kale, turnips, herbs, broccoli, snap peas, strawberries, blueberries, eggplant, onions, cabbage, peppers, green beans, zucchini, cucumbers, potatoes, collards, Asian greens, arugula, popcorn, squashes, kohlrabi, garlic, and more. Strauss noted that the farmers like to focus on heirloom and indigenous varieties. The CSA has introduced folks to the less-familiar French breakfast and watermelon radishes as well as the Japanese mustard green called mizuna.

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Preparing to prune flats of baby bok choy at Homefields Care Farm in Millersville are (from left) lead farmhand Emily Bishop, supervisor Elizabeth Swope, volunteer Ben Harsh, and home care assistant Ambar Escobar. The seventh annual Picnic in the Fields event on Sept. 22 will support the farm.

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The plethora of produce from Homefields Care Farm will be featured during the seventh annual Picnic in the Fields event that will be held on Sunday, Sept. 22, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Two local chefs will present a "Taste of Homefields" tasting menu made from vegetables and herbs in season at Homefields. Additional professionals will prepare a vast repast of vegan and non-vegan fare, including pulled pork, baked chicken, caprese salad, Southern vegetable wraps, rustic tomato tart, chocolate pecan pie, and more. Soft drinks and alcoholic beverages will be available as well.

Attendees will be welcome to explore the farm, and there will be a variety of entertainment for children and adults. Bobbi Carmitchell & Friends will perform live music. A Lancaster County Career & Technology Center instructor and some students will offer activities and games and supervise free play for children age 3 and up. Giant Jenga, cornhole, and other lawn games

will also be available.

A silent auction will run throughout the event, and attendees may bid on original artwork, Fulton Theatre and Laserdome tickets, and edible items.

Picnic attendees will also be introduced to some of the farms that supply non-produce items for CSA shareholders who opt in. The items include coffee, bread, mushrooms, eggs, meat, cheese, and fruit.

Hawthorne noted that because the success of the CSA is critical to the continued operation of Homefields Care Farm, the farm has created several ways that households may participate. In addition to the usual shares and half-shares, households have the option of purchasing four-week sampler shares if they want to try it out. Shareholders receive referral discounts, and regular shares are prorated for those who sign up after the season begins. Additionally, individuals may buy shares and donate their produce to a food bank. Currently, any leftovers are given to The Loft in Millersville.

There is a cost to attend the picnic, with separate prices for adults and for youths ages 13 to 17. Children age 12 and under will be admitted free of charge. Tickets may be purchased in advance at www.homefields.org/picnic, or they may be bought at the event starting at 10:30 a.m. Tickets will

include unlimited food and beverages, parking, a short shuttle ride to the venue, games, and activities. Handicapped-accessible parking and restrooms will be available.

For more information about the picnic, readers may email events@homefields.org.