

I would not like to have to depend on the supermarket for most of our food. There is a relatively new saying that advises people to "know the farmer that grows your food." Farmers' markets and Community Supported Agriculture farms are great ways to do this for many people. For us, though, and for a lot of others, it is even better to grow some or most of one's own food.

There are many reasons for raising what ends up on our own tables. We don't spend nearly as much money in grocery stores and other food markets as most folks do. And, "food security" is an issue that is often overlooked by shoppers, industry, and government as well. It shows up once in a while when there is a flood, hurricane, or major snow storm. During those times the food on the shelves of the supermarkets disappears at an alarming rate. This indicates that most people don't keep supplies ahead in case of some emergency, but also should worry us when we realize the vulnerability of the food delivery system. It is not only a necessity for food to be grown, but fuel, roads, and vehicles must be adequate to move those calories to stores where people can buy them.

But, there is an even more important motivation for us to grow our own vegetables, fruits, meats, dairy products, and poultry products. We want to know how our food is produced. We want to know how the soil is treated, what the cattle, sheep, and other livestock eat, and we want to be certain that no pesticides or herbicides have been used on what will ultimately become part of us.

There is also the somewhat indefinable quality of *terroir*. We are often told that what we grow tastes "so good." We think that our food has wonderful flavor because of the environment in which it grows. We believe that what we produce here tastes like our farm. For us, that quality gives an extra incentive to plant a big garden, eat our own meat, and use those eggs with the orange yolks that come from the hens' ingestion of the weeds and grasses as they go where they wish day after day. It makes worthwhile the extra labor of milking a cow by hand, churning butter every few days all summer long to have a supply in the freezer--again, with that bright yellow color that comes from what the

cattle eat.

It also explains why my fingernails are pretty grubby looking from May through October. I spend a lot of time in the garden. I try to be there nearly every day, and most days, I am there for several hours. One would think that we might have a weed-free garden. But that is not the case. The weeds--or, more properly, those plants we don't sow ourselves--also find our environment propitious. Some of them are edible and even superior to those we have nurtured. Some purslane in the salad, for example, just makes it more healthful, and it tastes good, too.

Then, there is the "pest" problem. We sometimes have more "eaters" in our garden than we would like, but we try to protect the vulnerable crops, remove the pests by hand, or live with the situation. We pick off Colorado potato beetles, larvae, and eggs by hand. We use floating row cover to keep cabbage moths from laying eggs on broccoli, cabbage, and other related vegetables, and we have some "scare tape" to discourage birds from taking all the berries. We have a high fence to keep deer from the garden. Mostly, though, the animals and insects get some food, and there is enough left for us.

So, the garden is where I spend more time than in any other place during the summer months. When I am in the house, I am often freezing or canning what has grown in that garden. And, during the winter, when we enjoy meals from what we have in the freezer, root cellar, and fruit cellar, we can think back to where each food grew, and we can fully appreciate our labor of the past year.