

## Support MFA!

Everyone's contributions of all kinds help make MFA more effective in our role building a more sustainable food system. Please consider how you may support us, and contact us today.

- *Spread the word on sustainable agriculture and local foods*
- *Become a Big River Farms CSA member*
- *Introduce MFA to new people and resources*
- *Mentor a new farmer*
- *Volunteer:* help on the farm, in the office, at events, or with professional skills (IT, graphics, photography/videography and writing, legal, real estate, transportation, farm land prep, etc.)
- *Cash Contributions:* remember us when you receive your Economic Incentive check from Uncle Sam. All contributions to MFA are tax-deductible. We will be sure to use your funds wisely and as locally as possible, to further support local economic development.
- *In-Kind Donations:* please remember us when you upgrade your things; we

can use your good condition, second-hand items. A partial list of equipment needs include:

- *Delivery and Farm-use Van*
- *Various Farm Equipment (totes, wagon, tools, etc.)*
- *Tractor implements*
- *Manure spreader*
- *Compost and Composting materials*
- *Picnic Tables / outside tables and chairs, canopies*
- *Computer (desk-top of basic capacity)*
- *Office materials (Book shelves, desks, chairs, cabinets, supplies, etc)*
- *Vacuum Cleaner*
- *Kitchen items, as toaster, hot plate, silverware, etc.*
- *If you have something, just ask us...*

### COME VISIT OUR FARM!

**Spring Open House** – Saturday, May 17, 2008, from Noon – 4pm.

**Summer Family Fest** – Saturday, August 9, 2008, from Noon – 4 pm.

**Fall Harvest Party** – Saturday, October 11, 2008, from 4 pm – 8 pm.



Kids learn to love vegetables



## MFA DIGEST

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Issue 3

Spring 2008

## May Farm? Big River Farms!

by Glen Hill

Many of you may be wondering what happened to May Farm CSA? May Farm is alive and well and, basically, it got married! May Farm CSA started as an individual program of MFA in the 2005 season and has grown very successfully under the expertise of Farm Manger Josh Bryceson. MFA also operates two other main programs – the New Immigrant Agriculture Program, a beginning farmer training program since 1999, and Big River Foods, a marketing and distribution program, since 2007. To build on all of these programs' positive synergies, resources and opportunities towards building a more sustainable food system, MFA has integrated the three programs into "Big River Farms", a comprehensive sustainable agriculture production, training,



Wonderful heirloom tomatoes

markets. Big River Foods develops wholesale markets for the skilled yet developing farmers, which increases farmer's income. Selling wholesale brings new challenges, especially in production, harvesting, post-harvesting and packing. Inspired by the new opportunities in marketing, farm revenues, and the various benefits of sustainable agriculture, the farmers are actively seeking more knowledge and

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### Looking for Big River Foods?

Big River Foods brand produce (Heirloom Tomatoes and Grape Tomatoes) from our farmers on Big River Farms will be sold at retailers in August and September.

- Byerlys/Lunds
- Festival Foods
- Kowalski's
- Chipotle (green bell peppers)
- And retailers serviced by Brooks, Coop-Partners, Wholesale Produce Co., Whole Foods Distribution and J&J Distributing.

MFA DIGEST

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Spring 2008

## Thank You to Our Funding Partners

MFA works with an extensive group of individuals and partners. Here we wish to express our gratitude to our funding partners over the past year until the present.

- *AgStar Fund for Rural America*
- *Bush Foundation*
- *Hugh J. Andersen Foundation*

- *Institute for Social and Economic Development through the Office of Refugee Resettlement*
- *Minnesota Environmental*

- *Fund and its sponsors*
- *National Immigrant Farming Initiative through Heifer International*

- *Otto Bremer Foundation*
- *Western Bank, St. Paul, MN*
- *USDA Risk Management Agency*

## Thank You to All Our Individual Donors

Since the Fall 2007, many individuals expressed their sincere support for MFA and our mission with generous contributions. We gratefully acknowledge their support.

- *Anonymous (2)*
- *Donna Anderson*
- *John Arnesen*
- *Thomas Arneson*
- *Dwight and Becky Ault*

- *Bruce Bacon*
- *Katherine Baird*
- *Keith and Cecilia Bentler*
- *Michele Bevis*
- *Robert and Helen Bystrom*
- *James and Phyllis Childs*
- *Nan Corliss*
- *Linda and Gail Dielman*
- *Annelisa Donlan*
- *Richard and Sharon Engdahl*

- *Carole Fisher*
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- *Helena Gates*
- *Donna Gorski*
- *Gretchen Gronberg*
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- *Cathy Holman*
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- *Dana Jackson*
- *Orell Jensen*
- *George and Marillyn Knuteson*
- *Douglas Krinke*

- *Helene Murray*
- *John and Paula Nania*
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- *Riley Kenneth Sharbonno*
- *Peter Shortridge*
- *Phyllis and Richard Sienko*
- *William and Lynn Stokke*
- *Wesley and Marcia Sundquist*
- *Kenneth Thorson*
- *Dan Tilsen*
- *Lyndon Torstenson*
- *James Wellman*
- *William Wilcke*



## Digest Update

The MFA Digest is mailed out to our friends and supporters three times a year. It is important to use to keep you informed about what MFA is doing towards building local food systems and that our newsletter continues to serve you in this regard. We will continue to send you the newsletter. If you wish to not receive the newsletter anymore, please call us, or email any of the staff. We love to hear from you! Please contact us with any questions, ideas, comments or information.

## Third Annual Minority and Immigrant Farming Conference

Recognizing the important and historical role that new immigrants and minorities play in the future of farming and bringing fresh food to our communities, MFA, together with the USDA Farm Service Agency and the Association for the Advancement of Hmong Women in MN, co-hosted the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Minority and Immigrant Farming Conference in St. Paul from March 7 – 8, 2008. The

majority of the over 150 people attending were farmers from the Hmong, Latino, Karen, Somali and other ethnic communities, as well as representatives from various government agencies and nonprofit organizations. Sessions included Marketing Your Produce, Calculating Your Real Production Costs, Organic and Sustainable Production, Soil Management, Federal Farmer Programs and Support, and more.



This year the conference nearly doubled in participation due to increased interest by farmers and the general public, together with the generous support from the National Immigrant Farming Initiative of Heifer

International and many other government and local nonprofit sponsors. Building on this success and our experience, we expect the 4<sup>th</sup> annual conference in early 2009 to be an even more significant support and networking resource for new immigrant farmers and the agencies that work with them.



**MFA DIGEST**  
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### Board of Directors

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## MFA Says Hello, Goodbye to Staff Members.

In December, 2007, **PAULA JUSTICH**, our part-time development director at MFA for 1 ½ years, has moved on to teach development full time at St. Mary's University. We thank Paula for her assistance in promoting MFA.

**PHANAT VANG** left MFA in January 2008 to accept the position of Director of Community Development for Asian Media Access. Phanat left a strong mark at MFA through his thoughtful connections to the Hmong community and excellent relationship building.

We want to thank **TERESA CUPERUS** for her significant impact in getting MFA's food distribution program off the ground and running well.

Teresa began in January 2007 to lead the new program, market it, find customers and train farmers to grow for wholesale markets.

Teresa's great contributions to MFA and the Twin Cities local food community have set a solid foundation on which to grow. She has accepted a marketing position with the Buy Fresh Wisconsin program of the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture and Trade, in Madison.

We are very happy to welcome **PETO CHANG** as the new Southeast Asian Outreach Coordinator. Coming from a traditional farming family, with a BA from Augsburg College, Peto has 10 years experience working in outreach with the Hmong community and 3 years experience working with community gardeners in the Metro Area. He continues to run his own farm of many years.

We also warmly welcome **REKHA BANERJEE** as the new Big River Farms Marketing and Distribution Manager. Rekha has over 10 years experience in sustainable agriculture, managing organic farms, selling produce through CSA's and wholesale and managing farmers markets. Her diverse background and strong interest in social issues add wealth and knowledge to MFA. We are very thrilled to have both of them in our Team.

MFA continues to have fabulous staff members, dedicated to MFA's mission and the farmers and communities we serve. We are always sad when someone moves on, but we are encouraged that they are pursu-



Mr. and Mrs. Vang sorting tomatoes for wholesale

ing their life and career goals; they continue to work for sustainability and a better society. We feel that we have not lost a colleague but that our network and partners have just expanded. And we are strengthened and inspired to find such well-qualified people who continue to move our programs forward in stronger ways.

### May Farm – continued from page 1

training in production, harvesting and the CSA model.

The Big River Farms integration represents whole farm and program management and brings a wealth of benefits to all. BRF and the CSA now share the two harvest shelters and coolers and consolidate the distribution. The farmer participants now have more diverse market options – selling through the CSA and/or the wholesale sales through BRF in addition to farmer's markets and other direct sales through their own means – and more income. They will receive greatly intensified training and mentoring throughout the complete farming process from detailed plot planning starting in December, seed selection, soil management, pest control, sustainable agriculture practices, learning new crops, through harvesting, post-harvest and packing. Josh continues to oversee the whole farm management and, together with our two interns, will continue to farm to produce a significant amount towards the CSA. He now also has a greater opportunity to share his deep knowledge of farming and the land with other farmers. The entire farm will be organic certified in 2008 which is good for the land, good for your health, and is the first instance of MN immigrant farmers transitioning to organic. For MFA, our Team strengthens as each of our roles feeds into and builds on the others. For our CSA members and contributors,

you now directly support up to 12 aspiring small farms towards becoming independent sustainable producers.

Your participation in building a more sustainable food system is amplified by supporting broader local economic development, outreach to low-income

community and justice areas and more. I am excited to be part of this movement. As MFA moves forward, we seek to build on the aspects where we may contribute. We are in the process, in partnership with many other colleagues, of developing sustainable linkages between lower income communities and local food and farming and trying to address larger issues in food justice. We believe that creating awareness and accessibility for the larger public is important.

Working on a farm with a wonderful group of exceptional farmers and staff has again inspired us to share. We are always delighted to have school children visit us on the farm and they always seem to feel the same. MFA and Midwest Food

Connection (who has already been working in elementary classrooms for many years) have partnered in bringing children to the farm for a few years now. We now plan to strengthen and deepen our work with children through developing a School-to-Farm Program that creates sustained enthusiasm in children from knowing their food and understanding and appreciating farming and farmers. We hope we can contribute in this area as we believe that our children's attitudes and habits developing now will carry on to become practices and policies in the future.

*Your ideas, comments and questions are most welcome. Please call Glen at: (651) 433-3676.*



Students meet the Cala brothers of Cala Farms

communities, building healthy communities, and farm-to-school experiences for our children.

### Future Directions

There is more we want to share with you. When we envision the future, we see more sustainable farms producing and distributing local foods as essential. We hope by training and supporting new farmers, we are contributing to this. Over this past year, I have been blessed with many fabulous opportunities to meet and work with a very wide range of people and organizations working hard to build a more sustainable food system from all aspects – production, awareness, distribution, policy, education, marketing,

## Two Immigrant Farming Participants Earn Grants from SARE (Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education)

MFA is again proud and humbled by the entrepreneurial spirit of the immigrant farmers in our program. The farmers work full time jobs, are engaged in significant farming enterprises and continue to expand their farming knowledge. The barriers for immigrant farmers are significant including access to reliable accurate information, understanding the various regulations, and limited access to labor, land, equipment and infrastructure.

In December 2007, Juan Carlos Cervantes, Latino Coordinator, and Phanat Vang, Southeast Asian Coordinator, met with our farmer participants about the SARE farmers grant program. Beth Nelson, Minnesota SARE Coordinator, provided background information and Dierdre Birmingham, Midwestern Coordinator at Michael Fields Agricultural Institute, provided support in the application process to the staff and farmers. Juan Carlos and Phanat

assisted in the writing and application process.

In pursuing their farming enterprise dreams, two farms wrote and received grants to produce in new hoop houses to be established at MFA's Big River Farms. Mhonpaj and May Lee of Mhonpaj's Gardens will build a hoop house to grow traditional Hmong herbs and vegetables including, mustard greens, lemon grass, and Hmong basil. While growing for market, they will also be researching and studying hoop house production compared to field production. The University of Minnesota will assist in the research methodology as well as the helping with planting and harvesting.

Margarito Ramos, Hugo Casosolas and Porfirio Perez of Santa Rosa Farm will grow Mexican herbs and jicama, which require a longer growing season, in a new hoop house. While again growing for market, they will research hoop house use in season extension and the potential for

double cropping for these specialty crops. Juan Carlos, Peto Chang and MFA will provide support throughout the season to both farms.

Santa Rosa Farm and Mhonpaj's Garden have already begun to build their hoop houses and are working hard to get their early crops in the ground. We are all excited for their future success.



## Meet Our New Board Members

We warmly welcome two more new Board Members – Dr. Bud Markhart and Dan Tilsen – who joined MFA in October 2007. Together, they add significant skill

sets and enhanced civic engagement to MFA's community. A professor in the Department of Horticultural Science at the University of Minnesota, Bud teaches environmental physiology, plant propagation, organic production, advises the Student Organic Farm and actively participates on the MDA Organic Advisory Task Force and the UMN Local Foods Task Force. Bud conducts field training sessions for farmers at MFA and his extensive engagement in numerous other community activities helps MFA build new relationships and partnerships. Dan brings 27 years of experience in civil engineering, land planning, and natural resource project design and construction that emphasize low impact, preservation, enhancement and development. Dan's technical expertise balances wonderfully with his love for nature, life and people,

especially children. He contributes down-to-earth approaches with creativity, imagination and professionalism.

### Gratitude to Our Exiting Board Members

We wish to express our sincere gratitude to Dr. Helene Murray and Pat Kerrigan for serving on the MFA Board for ten years. Their commendable commitment to MFA and our mission is a worthy model for us all. While they may have left their Board duties in 2007, they continue to actively contribute to and partner with MFA on many issues and activities.

### Interested in joining the MFA Board of Directors?

MFA is actively seeking additional Board members representing a variety of skill sets and a commitment to building a more sustainable food system. Please contact Glen Hill, Executive Director, for more information: (651) 433-3676 or: glenhill@mnfoodassociation.org



### Our Partners in Training Farmers

University of Minnesota Extension Services  
Risk Management Agency  
USDA—Farm Services Agency  
**RMA**  
Farm Service Agency