



The Market Corner

Newsletter of the Berkeley Farmers' Market

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Guru Ram Das Orchard: A Fruit Farm For All Seasons

Piled high with glowing citrus and stone fruits, Guru Ram Das Orchard's market stall has been a Berkeley Farmers' Market favorite since 1989. Its familiar proprietor, the tall, bearded Didar Singh Khalsa, has been in the orchard business for over twenty years, all of them as an organic farmer. And, he says, the Berkeley Market has been as important to the success of his farm as the farm has been to regular market-goers.

Once the owner of a vegetarian restaurant in Reno, Didar purchased the land for his orchard in 1980, with the intention of using it to supply his patrons without having to leave home. But the farm couldn't make it without his full-time involvement. A stint as a window-cleaner helped him scrape up the funds to relocate to Esparto in Yolo County. Now a full-time orchard farmer, Didar says he's grateful to market customers for seeing him through the lean first years—thirteen, to be precise!—of his experiment in organic fruit growing. "In Berkeley, everyone is excited about organics. They've been really good to us. It's not just a matter of making money. It's nice, all the friends and the support you feel from people here."

The rewards for such customer loyalty are sweet indeed. From his sixteen acre orchard in the Sacramento Valley, Didar harvests the flavorful fruits and nuts that hve been announcing the changing seasons to market-goers for fifteen years. By keeping a few productive trees for each variety, the orchard manages to supply shoppers year-round with fresh, organic produce that Didar says rarely fails to sell out.



Didar Singh Khalsa at the Tuesday market.

As spring takes hold, you'll find him behind crates of Valencia oranges, Lisbon lemons, kumquats, and white Marsa grapefruit, while summer turns the stall into a mountain of apricots, luscious figs, Santa Rosa plums, sweet old-time peaches, Flavorpod nectarines, and Thompson seedless red grapes. Almonds and pears cured in the waning days of August make their way to market in September, sitting alongside sugar plums, pomegranates, Hachiya persimmons, and Meyer lemons to sustain us through the fall. *(continued on next page)*

Market On Your Calendar!

Family Farm Day/Earth Day—Sat., April 19.

Hands-on farm displays, farm animals, farmer talks, wool spinning and more.

Bike Day—Sat., May 10: Sponsored by Bicycle Friendly Berkeley Coalition.

Strawberry Tastings—Sat., May 17 . Cooking demos by Jen Demerest, pastry chef at Downtown. Music by World Harmony Chorus.

Strawberry Tastings Also Tues., May 20.

Before we know it, winter is here again, and so is the Guru Ram Das stall's sunny display of tart clementine and Dancy mandarins, navel and blood oranges, star ruby grapefruits, kumquats, and Lisbon lemons, along with dried assortments of fruit from the passing year.

Didar says Esparto's early warm spring weather and heavy clay soils help his produce ripen earlier than just about anywhere in the state. Customers say they give the fruit a bigger size and better flavor to boot. For Didar, this kind of praise reflects not just a lucky accident of geography but a basic principle of chemical-free agriculture. "It just makes common sense to me that human beings evolved to eat fruits grown in live soil. We didn't figure out how to kill soil on a mass scale until about fifty years ago, when we started using large quantities of chemical fertilizers. Humans didn't evolve to eat that kind of food, and it seems to me that fruit grows better without it. It certainly seems like it tastes better. You're feeding the soil to feed your crop instead of feeding your crop with chemicals."

Along with a commitment to organic production, spirituality also plays a central role in Didar's life. He took the name Didar, meaning "grateful audience" after converting to the Sikh religion in 1973, and named his orchard after the 16th-century Indian saint and yogi Guru Ram Das. What does rising at dawn to practice yoga in the ancient tradition of sadhana, or daily spiritual practice, have to do with farming?

"The heart of the practice simply means to repeat God's name and to remember at all times that we're here to love God and to serve man," Didar explains as he hands hefty bags of grapefruit and lemons to waiting customers. "Serving good food is one way to do that, but you can do it in any way. It's just the thing that happens to thrill me."

Besides, he adds with a grin, "it's a good way to motivate myself to get off my ass and work."

Food and Farming Update

New Survey Challenges Public Support for Biotech

As farm-belt Republicans step up the campaign against the European Union's moratorium on genetically modified food, a new survey suggests that

many Americans do not trust agricultural biotechnology. Biotech industry supporters often use the American public's supposed enthusiasm for GM food to chastise Europeans for their 'continued restrictions on U.S. imports.

But in a new study of 819 individuals across the U.S., investigators found that nearly 92% wanted labels on GM products and almost half were uncertain about the safety of GM ingredients. More than half thought the government should support small, family owned farms rather than large corporations of the sort currently protesting European tariff and labeling laws to the World Trade Organization. Like their counterparts, Americans could be on their way to making biotech's confident belief in the public's complacency very costly indeed.

The full text of the study, entitled "*The Globalization of Food: How Americans Feel About Food Sources, Who They Trust, Food Security, Genetic Modification, Food Labeling and the Environment*" can be found at <http://sa.ncsu.edu/global-food>.

Organic Poultry Standards Almost Sidelined



The Organic Consumers Association is hailing the USDA's new organic program as "Grade B organic" for its failure to make the vitality of small farms a priority of sustainable farming policies. However, the OCA is closing ranks with the organic industry and sympathetic lawmakers to oppose a backroom deal that would allow poultry

farmers to feed their chickens conventionally grown grains while continuing to label their food "USDA-certified organic". Georgia Republican Nathan Deal attached the provision, called Section 771, to a general budget bill at the behest of Fiedale Farms, a

poultry operator and contributor to Deal's last election campaign. Section 77I calls upon the Organic Standards Board to certify poultry farmers who use feed containing pesticides, antibiotics, and genetically modified material, unless it can prove that organic alternatives are available at less than twice the cost.

While the dwindling ranks of supporters for the rider say its purpose is to help smaller operators transition into organic production, many opponents see it as opening the door to further erosion of an already controversial set of national guidelines.

Separate efforts are underway to lower outdoor access requirements for organically-raised poultry.

In the wake of these assaults, Senators Patrick Leahy (D-VT) and Olympia Snowe (R-ME) introduced an Organic Restoration Act to repeal the rider. The Senate has already passed the repeal. Leahy also announced the formation of a bipartisan caucus to monitor the USDA's so-far lukewarm enforcement of its own guidelines on production, handling, and third-party certifier accreditation. You can add your voice to the widespread support for the repeal at www.organicconsumers.org.



STRAWBERRY, WALNUT & GOAT CHEESE SALD WITH POMEGRANATE VINAIGRETTE

Serves 4

2 tbsp. grapeseed or canola oil,
2 tbsp. pomegranate molasses (available at Middle Eastern groceries),
1 1/2 -2 tsp. red wine vinegar,
salt to taste.

Whisk all ingredients together and set aside.

6 c. mesclun, watercress, or baby arugula,
1/4 c. walnuts, broken into pieces, toasted, and skins removed,
3 oz. soft goat cheese, such as Redwood Hill chevre, crumbled,
1 c. strawberries, hulled and thinly sliced.

Arrange greens into a mound on four separate plates. Top greens with berries, drizzle with dressing, and add walnuts and goat cheese. Season with a twist of freshly ground pepper. Serve immediately.