

## FARMER IN THE FIELD



## FENNEL, WHO KNEW?

By Bonnie Swank

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The inspiration for this month's article came from a photo my brother-in-law sent me. Bill is a professional photographer and every time he comes to visit he scours the farm for a potential photo op. He was here a couple of weeks ago and photographed fennel growing in the field. Wow, I thought to myself, these are the same fields I drive by everyday, how lucky am I? And I started to think, when did we start growing fennel and why? I always thought fennel tasted like licorice, but it doesn't. Was it requested by a chef that knew the secret, fennel is really good! And many of you out there think so too because it sells.

So what exactly is fennel? Well, it is a vegetable and an herb. It grows wild in the Mediterranean and was documented in Spanish agriculture dating A.D. 961. It is thought to have healing powers and has been used to chase off witchcraft, but **how does it taste?** It is crunchy and slightly sweet and I love it in salads. You can also cook it as a side dish or throw it in soups, the possibilities are endless. Last season I made a fennel slaw sans the cabbage, yum. But the plant can also be grown as a perennial harvesting the fronds and seeds. Dried, the seeds are used as a spice in Italian sausage and many Mediterranean dishes. Fresh, the fronds are used as an herb. So, if you've never invited fennel into your kitchen before now is the time to let it in, you may discover a new favorite.