

Ann Arbor, The Land Loom: Vegetable farming is as much an art as it is a science. We seed and plant into straight rows to make the space simpler to cultivate and harvest from, but also because it just looks pleasing that way. When mapping out next season's field I can't help but consider the colors and textures of the vegetables as they grow side by side; wide blocks of feathery fennel fronds next to tidy rows of speckled head lettuce. The act of hand weeding a bed of parsnips can meet a deep artist's need to reveal the pattern among the chaos of the nature. At the end of the day we measure much of our success by whether we have created something that is beautiful and delicious, and worthy of the artistry of the cooks and the pleasure of the eaters who choose our food.

During a hard season when the plants struggle to survive adverse conditions, my artist's heart breaks to be producing crops that are less succulent and eye catching and I am grateful for the winter's cold to wipe the slate clean and allow the space for revision. As I have shared many times, 2018 has been our most challenging season yet, a reality that we are still bearing with the failure of our winter spinach. The loss of this crop is substantial as it provides for our spinach club membership and has historically been one of our best selling crops, just below salad mix. But again I am calling upon my artist brain to devise an alternative plan for winter production and income and I am viewing this time as a moment of creative destruction from which new, more adaptive systems and enterprises can be developed. With the return of the sun in January, we will reseed our hoop house into spinach and salad greens, pushing back the offerings to our spinach club membership, and also pushing forward the start of our salad club membership. This will allow us to plant our hoop house tomatoes in mid April rather than June, which means earlier vine ripened tomatoes, which everyone can get behind.

I am taking this most prolonged winter break as an opportunity to learn to weave on an actual loom. More about that later.

#### East Lansing, MSU Student Organic Farm:

CSA update: after tallying up the share values for this round (August 23-December 6) the total value of our 16-week CSA share ending in December was \$665. This is a \$90 bonus value on top of membership payments. In our upcoming Annual Report we will be sharing a breakdown of the share in a few ways, but this was an exciting one to share in the newsletter. Hopefully we are able to put together some cool pie charts for the big report that I can share with CSA members in the future. We still have a few spots open for our Winter session, which begins January 3rd.

Farmer Field School: Fifteen farmers and advocates met to plan the Farmer Field School workshops for 2019 in the annual Farmer Brain Trust on December 11th. So far, we have been able to schedule the following Farmer Field School workshops:

- **Scaling up to Wholesale: Marketing & Production** - February 19, 2019, 9am - 4pm
- **Detroit Farm Tours** - June 3
- **Lansing Farm Tours** - July 22
- **Farmer Brain Trust** - December 10, 2019 10am - noon, FREE
- **Food Security Roundtable** - December 10, 2019 1 - 3pm, FREE
- **Expof Small Farm Innovation** - January 2020

We hope to add a workshop on forcing flowers for spring sales sometime early this year as well as a hands-on workshop on building a bubbler and greens dryer later in the fall. You can find more info and register for Farmer Field School workshops at our [website](#).

The same day, we hosted the Peak CSA Roundtable, a discussion about the marketing challenges that farmers face in trying to direct market their produce. We focused a lot of time on strategies that participants have used successfully to grow their CSA membership.

[Organic Farmer Training Program](#): We are still taking applications for the OFTP!

[Novi, MSU Tollgate Farm](#): The focus of this winter season has been on mechanical cultivation. After three seasons of hoes and hands, we are actively searching for a cultivating tractor and changing our systems over to accommodate one. It would have made sense to design around tractor cultivation from the get go, but it was hard to imagine that the humble 28 member CSA would balloon into the 150 member, 3 acre operation we anticipate next year.

In our cultivating quest we have found that there is a relative dearth of information on mechanical cultivation for small farms, particularly on the tractors themselves, what to look for when purchasing them, designing a system around them etc. It seems that much of the focus has been on the implements that engage with the ground.

We're interested to know if others who are contemplating mechanical cultivation, or those who have made the transition also feel this way? Feel free to reach out with the gaps you have struggled to get information on and we can look to create articles and events that address those gaps.

## **Events**

January 25 & 26 - [Northern Michigan Small Farm Conference](#). Traverse City.

February 2 – [Birth Management Clinic for Goats and Sheep](#). East Lansing.

February 9- [Michigan Family Farms Conference](#). Kalamazoo.

February 21- [Biological Pest Control Workshop](#). White Lake. Aphid, whitefly and thrip biological control strategy for protected growing. Registration coming soon.

## **Articles**

[Market Maker Web Tool: Part 1](#). A series on navigating Market Maker and its new app that helps create connections in the food system for producers.

[Tillage and Squash Bees](#). A brief video by MSU entomologist Zsofia Szendei on the importance of and how to promote squash bees in your fields.

## **Resources**

[MSU Extension Events Calendar](#)

[Crosshatch Events Calendar](#)

[MIFFS Event Calendar](#)

[MSU Student Organic Farm Farmer Field School Calendar](#)

[MIFMA Events](#)