

Michigan Small Farm Newsletter

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FIELD REPORTS

Bath, MI (Ten Hens Farm) - The first small fruits on the cherry tomatoes and cucumbers in our hoopouses are starting to grow and we have been busy clipping, pruning, and trellising those. The 'Mountain Fresh' tomatoes got their first string of basket weaving yesterday and their first flowers, along with the heirloom tomatoes flowers, are just starting to open. Peppers in the tunnels are growing but are not large enough to get their first basket weave string yet. The first shell peas flowers also opened up late last week. The first potato sprouts are starting to emerge from their hills (and so are the weeds!) so as soon as it dries out some we'll be able to hill those again.

We used the finger weeders on our onions, shallots, and leeks for the first time and couldn't be happier with how well it worked. We definitely took out some plants (operator error) but we are able to weed in row and between the rows in each of our 250-foot double row beds in about three minutes. It basically takes almost the same amount of time to turn around at the end of the rows and get the tractor and finger weeders lined up as it does to weed the row when we get going.

We are planning to transplant zucchini, summer squash, and some of the peppers into the field this week and direct seed spinach, carrots, and green and wax beans. Garlic is growing strong. We had green garlic at the market this week and are looking forward to filling our wholesale scape commitments starting in 3-4 weeks. The farmers market we sell at has been getting busier each of the last three weeks since moving outdoors as more people see it happening and we have more products available. Restaurant sales are also picking up and we are getting ready for the first week of two multi-farm CSA box programs we are a part of starting the third week of June.

We are trying to transplant beets for the first time this year and they are ready to go in in the next two or three days. We're excited to see how they do as transplants as we have some weedy fields that make it hard to direct seed them. Hopefully we can keep some of those weeds under control with the finger weeders and other cultivation equipment and will be able to get back to direct seeding in the future to save time and labor. In the meantime, we'll try transplanting and finger weeding. We are working with a design company to redesign/relaunch our logo (it's been 10 years since we started and a lot has changed in that time) and we were excited to have four people out to our farm to have a look around and talk about what we do before they get down to the design.

Lastly, we definitely had some challenges. We had some weedy spinach that had to be tilled in along with some major flea beetle damage on arugula and mizuna so they were tilled in as well. We also had a dosatron fertilizer injector break so we spent the better part of a few hours figuring out what was wrong and ordering parts to repair it. Looking

forward to some warmer, sunny weather later this week to really move crops along and to dry out the fields some so we can get in to transplant and weed.

Freeland, MI - The weather has really turned around, for the good. All package bees should be hived by now and should be brooding up well. The tree pollen in this area has been very good with the bees able to collect generous amounts. Overwintered bees have also been collecting the fresh pollen and unless beekeepers intervene by splitting, removing brood, or otherwise reducing brood nest congestion swarm preparations will be taking place. No beekeeper wants to lose 1/2 of the bees in a hive to a swarm.

Sweet corn is up a couple of inches with subsequent plantings going in each week. On tilled ground at least planting of cool weather crops is moving right along. Hoop houses for sensitive plants are making those move nicely with some tomatoes having fruit already.

After the cool spring held us back we are making up for lost time and hope to have most produce ready at near normal time.

Our strawberries are just now blooming well, a good two weeks behind normal. That may mean June berries will be later than in the past.

Marquette, MI (Seeds & Spores Family Farm) - It's finally warming up here and has even turned the corner to "quite dry."

We could use a little rain to get the pasture up and growing. We are still feeding hay on our winter lot to the cows. One big round bale a day starts to add up. We normally would have been on pasture about 2-3 weeks already. Calving is almost done with 11 healthy calves so far and 3-4 to go. It's always nice to find out the bull did his job. He was a clandestine bull, as we never did see breeding activity.

It's a beautiful time of year with freshly turned soil and rows of fresh transplants, and no weeds, yet. Their time is coming. We have transplanted lots of greens, onions, brassicas, and some flowers along with the first round of direct seeding. Potatoes and strawberries are next, followed by the squash and cukes. We use lots of row cover for insects and increased growth, but forever fight the wind and seem to never have enough sandbags. Nothing like seeing your nice new piece of row cover rip and fly across the field.

We hire quite a few folks each season and have lots of young new faces this year, just graduating from college as well as a few back for their 3rd, 4th, and 10th year in a row. Their energy and interest for farming and food is rejuvenating.

Dexter, MI - Our plants are well started and waiting for it to warm up to go outside, except for my hot peppers, which have refused to germinate. We were able to disc the garden. Potatoes will go into the ground later this week I hope! I'm trying 2 new ones: German Butter, and Blue Adirondack. Then I will also plant some Pontiac reds.

We've decided to forego meat birds this year, but the layers are laying well and we have 2-3 dozen extra every week. Calves are arriving and sows should be farrowing soon. The upcoming week will be in the 70s!

Ann Arbor, MI (The Land Loom) - In these weeks and days before the field crops size up and we spend more than half of our time harvesting or at market, and while the fields are still often too wet to work, weed, or plant, we are left with an eerily small list of tasks to be done on the farm. Mostly mowing. It has become clear, and in speaking with farmer friends, they have confirmed: this season is particularly late. I think this has more to do with consistent wetness than freezing temperatures. Our front field remains saturated and on the verge of flooding but we have been able to take advantage of the brief windows of each week when some of our higher and lighter soils have dried out enough to plant and cultivate. We are fairly on track with our transplanting schedule, but it seems this tediously wet weather may carry on for another week so we'll continue to work in fits and starts for a while.

A slow start like this can make it hard to know when to start going to market. When will we have anything besides the soon-to-be spent hoop house salad greens and cilantro? I'm hoping for the 1st Saturday in June.

Mason, WI (Great Oak Farm) - Hard to believe we had 2 feet of fresh snow on the ground just over a month ago. In general, over the last 6 weeks early spring crops went in a week late (hoop house transplants of cukes and tomatoes, onions in the field and first field planting of broccoli, peas/ first carrots) and late spring crops (sweet corn, green beans) went in a week early. Definitely getting dry and dusty as we haven't had much precipitation over the last several weeks. While that has been helpful in getting caught up with fields prep, we could use some rain here (but NOT SNOW...!), though spring cover crops are germinating nicely regardless with no additional irrigation. First CSA boxes head out Wed, May 30th - filled with hoop house crops like scallions, chard, radishes, spinach, etc. which have been thriving this last month with hot days and generally warm(ish) nights, many above freezing. Greenhouse is full still with multiple plantings of brassicas, as well as winter squash transplants. Last frost (maybe??) was May 20, strawberries just starting to flower now. The to-do list for the coming month: plowing up more ground for better cover cropping and rotation. Happy spring everyone!

Skandia, MI (Bean Pole Farm) - We recently purchased 40 acres of (mostly) hardwoods in Skandia, and have been growing vegetables and flowers on leased land in Chatham through MSU's incubator program. This is the farm's fourth year in existence.

We made syrup this year for the first time, mostly as an experiment. We tapped 24 trees and yielded 25.5 pints of syrup, finished on an outdoor homemade wood stove. We have plans to buy a real evaporator and really go for it next year.

We have one acre of field production, but I only intend to plant half this year. The other half will go into a cover crop. So far the onions, kale, chard, collards, kohlrabi, beets,

carrots, salad turnips, radish, and arugula have been seeded or transplanted outside, with many more veggies and flowers waiting their turn in the greenhouse. The greenhouse crops are looking great and growing strong; the okra planted in 2gal pots are two feet tall and I'm hopeful to get a real harvest off them this year. I also grow all my peppers, basil, and some eggplant out in pots in the greenhouse. I'd like to try my luck at growing potted Chinese noodle beans and cucumbers in the greenhouse this year as well, as soon as I figure out the right trellising system.

I have hundreds of plants ready to sell at the first farmer's market this coming Saturday, including some flower plants for the first time, and potted dwarf sunflowers. I've had a slow start this spring, due in part from working full time off-farm, so I'm trying to catch up now that the weather is genuinely nice and days are getting long. Cheers to the start of a new market season!

Novi, MI (MSU Tollgate Farm): A dry early spring has turned into a fairly wet late April-May. While the weather has been warm, routine showers have made fieldwork difficult even on our sandy loam soil. Second plantings of direct seeded crops are 2 weeks behind and still waiting for dry conditions. 65mph winds caused damage to a caterpillar tunnel, removing the plastic and bending the bows. Damage was likely due to a failure in the way the plastic was secured at the ends. A write up on the design and this experience will happen at some point!

Early results on our soil block study show that all six varieties of tomatoes planted in soil blocks performed better than their potted counterpart- they were larger with strong stems and did not seem to mind slightly delayed field planting as much. The study will continue in the field, with yields from both treatments being measured to compare.

Sprinkling granulated blood meal on transplants proved to be an effective way to provide fertility while they waited for adequate field planting conditions; plants responded with improved new growth in 5-6 days. Liquid organic fertilizers are prohibitively expensive on a per pound of nitrogen rate compared to solid fertilizers like blood meal, which has limited our use of them in the greenhouse. We would suggest sprinkling ~1/2oz of blood meal per cubic foot of potted medium before top watering to amend transplants waiting to enter the field.

Stockbridge, MI (Lake Divide Farm) If last month was cold, this month has been wet. It is difficult not to complain but I won't too much. I am almost sure the next email will say we haven't had rain in weeks. But for now... saturation. We use our rain gauge to track precipitation. Between May 4th and May 14th we received over 6" of rain. And then we got a few touches more. I am glad I know where the drier spots are now, but nothing qualifies as dry enough right now. We are still waiting to plant our potatoes. We usually have them planted by the end of April. I keep telling myself "at least we will miss the potato beetles!" I hope that it works out like that.

In other grim news, the brassica greens (arugula et al) that we were counting on for early harvest all flowered. This certainly isn't the first time this has happened over the

years. Anyway, we got away with one wimpy cutting, flower buds and all, cause hey, sell what you have, but it was a disappointment. We have a second succession that is coming in on its heels but we are seeing a lot of flea beetles on it, despite the Ag-19 covering it. We are also seeing a lot of flea beetles around in general. Even in the greenhouse on our eggplant. I asked around some other farms and they are also seeing quite a few. I wonder if it is related to how the winter went? The potato beetles are out and very interested in our tomatoes and eggplant. I have also seen cabbage whites, seed maggots, wireworms, some cutworm action (we think), and that nasty striped cucumber beetle on our hoophouse cukes and squash. I am considering beneficial nematodes for the cutworm, hand picking for the potato beetles, moving on for the seed maggots and wireworm, will use Bt for the cabbage worms, and thick mulch and kaolin clay for the cucumber beetles. Next time around I may choose only parthenocarpic cucurbits varieties for the hoophouse and leave them covered so they won't be a buffet for early risers.

The weeds are taking off and the trees leafed out and suddenly we are engulfed in greenery. Everything is ready to weed and much of the land is too wet to tractor cultivate so that leaves us with our hands and some hand tools. We are making do. We definitely have more ragweed and curly dock that we *planned* so I hope to get it before it gets away from us.

All is not lost among insects, soggy ground, and weeds. Some of the crimson clover and rye grass that we seeded to no avail last fall is coming up and blooming now. And the winter rye that we seeded when we thought the crimson clover and rye grass was kaput has made some nice stands and is holding the soil in place. We are getting it together to seed some cover for the summer. We have some pretty thistle heavy areas around the farm. We plan to mow the thistle just before it flowers and then seed buckwheat over it. Hopefully this takes it down a little. We love buckwheat and will also be seeding it into weedy areas from last season as well as areas that we plan on planting this summer. We are also planning on using sorghum sudan grass in areas that will have the winter squash and sweet potatoes of 2019. My hope is that, after it winterkills, we will be able to mow it and use it as a mulch for those crops. Additionally, in some less needy areas that we aren't planning on planting next year, we will seed annual ryegrass and medium red clover in hopes of getting a good stand of clover for 2019. I am by no means great at cover cropping. So far I have had success with buckwheat, winter rye, austrian winter peas and a little bit with sorghum sudan grass. Let us hope my lofty plans pan out this year. I will let you know of successes and failures.

Our hoophouse tomatoes that we interplanted with head lettuce are lovely. I couldn't be happier. Interplanting utilized the space well, the head lettuce looks great and is now coming in. We are interplanting head lettuce with our field tomatoes as well and I expect to have similarly joyous results.

We don't use plastic in the field but we do use ground cloth. We use 3' and 4' wide pieces as well as several 15' wide pieces and we burn holes in it to match needed spacing. As far as the 4' and 3' pieces go, in previous years we have rolled it out and affixed it with ground staples or "tire wreckers" as we like to say. When we collected it from the field this time around, rather than rolling it, we folded it accordion-style, which

was significantly faster and collected less detritus. We then dunked the folded fabric in the bleach solution and let them sit as long as we could wait in order to sanitize them and also to germinate weed seeds and reduce their transfer from field to field. We then pulled the fabric out in the field (incidentally also easier than unrolling), putting intermittent scoops of soil along the edges, and then used the farmall 140 with hilling discs to bury the edges. It still isn't as streamlined as a plastic layer but it works relatively easily. Last year I thought I was going to give up on ground cloth, this year, it is really climbing back out of the depths of my disapproval. I would still like to move away from it, hence the sorghum-sudan grass plan, but it is wonderful for soil warming, moisture retention, and the reduction of weed competition.

An ancient transplanter was passed down to us from another farm and it is really going the distance. It is a tractor drawn, single-row, two-seater, and has metal wheels with 1' markings, a water reservoir, and a furrower with wheels following to close the earth back up. We bought a draw bar with multiple holes (does this have an actual name?) and managed to coax the planter into 3 rows per bed (4' tops, 6' centers) without running anything over. It merited much celebration and we really can't wait to plant the rest of our potatoes with it (single row), followed by every other bare ground crop we can manage. I did not realize how wonderful transplanters are until this experience. It has really changed my take on our leave it perspective and I can't wait to have more improvements like this in my life.

We are going to all six markets and not making a lot but it is enough to cover payroll and then some. Those microgreens have been a real gap filler for us, along with some random green garlic swiped from what was missed when harvesting last year, the last of our storage potatoes, and various greens. We have also been gleaning CSA memberships along the way. The microgreens DTM is changing with the weather and we have to be careful not to over do it. There is a very fine line between profit and loss on those suckers and we are tiptoeing right along it. We don't think we will have time to keep up with them once all the summer crops come in so we are going to reduce the variety for the summer but keep them on the table so people continue to think of us when they want them.

The onions went in, along with two more rounds of head lettuce, another salad mix, beans, celery, celeriac, field cukes/squash/melon, sunflowers (destroyed by a rodent), scallions, and fennel 2. The first round of field tomatoes and peppers are in the field and the very first round of eggplant along with it. Meanwhile, the second round of eggplant languishes in the greenhouse along with the second round of cabbage and broccoli. It is going to dry up this week so at least they are ready to go!

We are definitely working more hours than at the time of the last newsletter. And next time, we will be working more still. 'Tis the season. Hope all is going well out there in our fellow farmer's worlds!

Chatham, MI (Mighty Soil Farm) – We've been in the field for the past three weeks, and things are going okay. We have about half of our beds planted. We have a lot of quackgrass pressure, so we're experimenting with a few different bed prep strategies to

hopefully fight it back a bit. We're tarping the beds that we have time to leave tarped for 4-6 weeks - when I peek under and see a sea of grass I'm a bit skeptical of how effective it will be, but I have to remind myself it's only been on for about two weeks. For the beds we need right away we're using a cultivating bar on the BCS like a chisel plow, which is fairly effective at bringing rhizomes to the surface. After that we rake up what we can, and then go along on our hands and knees and pull out whatever is at the surface that the rake didn't catch. It's tedious, it's taking at least an hour a bed, but we're hoping it means we won't have quite as much to contend with throughout the season. The beds that we first prepared, without realizing how bad the quackgrass was, are being consumed, so it seems like we should get out every bit that we can. The last thing we're doing on just a couple of beds is actually tilling it, multiple times, as that's what the owners of the last farm we apprenticed on do. I guess the idea is to sap its energy by constantly cutting it up and disturbing it. Clearly not no-till, but we're ready to try anything.

The transplants that were overgrown are doing just fine. We may have jumped the gun putting out brassicas and chard and beets as soon as we possibly could, as we had a bunch of really warm days with below freezing nights afterward - the brassicas are totally fine, but the chard and beets handled it slightly less well. All in all we're happy with where we're at and how things are going. It feels so, so good to be doing our own thing. We absolutely cannot wait to start market this weekend - our spring crops in our caterpillar tunnel look really good and it will be nice to meet customers and other vendors.

Chatham, MI (MSU North Farm) – As I write this, we are getting the first rain of the season. We transitioned from snow to dust pretty quickly, so we are happy to see some precipitation. This is hugely different from last spring, which was exceptionally wet. We had 8.12" of precipitation by this time last year, with only 1.32" this year, mostly taking place right as the snow was disappearing. We are sitting at 175 GDD (50 degree base), as compared to 103 this time last year. We recently passed the peak flight for overwintered cabbage root flies. This is a problematic pest for us throughout the whole season, but especially with early brassica plantings. Hopefully our later plantings can survive uncovered. We reached 86 degrees yesterday, which we rarely see, especially in May.

We are well on our way in terms of transplanting into the field, though we are a little behind on some of our early successions of greens and roots due to a slow melt and cold spring. All the summer hoophouse crops are now planted, though we have had to add a little supplemental heat to get us through some cold nights. We are using some of our tunnel space for seed crop production this year, which is a new venture for the farm. One of the challenges we have when it comes to seed production in the Upper Peninsula is excessive moisture in the fall. This can make it hard to get a reliable seed harvest, so we are utilizing protected space both for the cover, as well as the extended season.

I invested in some finger weeders this season after hearing of several other growers' successes. I've only had a chance to test them out on some garlic that we left unmulched over the winter and some early head lettuces. I'm working to build out the cultivation set up a bit more so it incorporates some A-blades between row. However, I was very

impressed with the first pass with just the fingers, so I am hoping that this will help us stay on top of our weed pressure this year.

Our workshops start on June 10th this year, beginning with a course on livestock for the small farm. We'll be talking sheep, beef, and pork, so if you are interested, there is a link to more info in the events section below.

ARTICLES

[Production of Cut Flowers and Vegetables in High Tunnels](#) – High tunnels can provide many benefits, from season extension to crop quality improvement. MSU Extension Specialist, Ron Goldy, discusses some of the pros and cons of high tunnel production.

[Fruitworm Control in Blueberries](#) – Using the appropriate tools to determine timing and populations of berry pests is critical in ensuring proper response. MSU Extension experts Rufus Isaacs and John Wise describe ways to monitor and control fruit worm pests.

[Irrigation Considerations for the Small Vegetable Farm](#) – With many areas of Michigan seeing drier conditions, it is important to understand irrigation needs and options. MSU Extension Educator, Collin Thompson, provides an overview of irrigation system components and calculations for understanding water application.

EVENTS

June 2 – [Upper Peninsula and Northern WI Veterans Assistance Fair](#). Iron Mountain, MI

June 10 – [MSU North Farm Short Course – Livestock on the Small Farm](#). Chatham, MI

June 26 - [Forests & Farms - Utilizing Your Natural Resources to Maximize On-Farm Profitability](#). Chatham, MI

[MSU Extension Events Calendar](#)

[Crosshatch Events Calendar](#)

[MIFFS Event Calendar](#)

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

[MIFMA Events](#)