

Michigan Small Farm Newsletter

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FIELD REPORTS

Freeland, MI - Strawberries are winding down in the Saginaw Valley with reports of good production despite the late warm up.

Lettuce, radishes, and other early crops are now available at Farm Markets with crops from hoop houses ripening.

Sweet corn is near waist high and pretty much on schedule, customers are looking for it already!

Honeybees are doing OK, but in some areas flying days have been limited. Even with that said some colonies are putting honey in the supers, mostly those that overwintered. The main flow should begin anytime now.

Rain has been here and there with some areas getting plenty but at our farm we could use a good day-long soaker.

Bath, MI (Ten Hens Farm) - Summer crops are moving along well and so are market, restaurant, and wholesale accounts. We are growing 'Socrates' cucumbers this year for the first time and couldn't be happier with them. Cucumber beetles are starting to show up and we are going to try a tank mix of pyganic and neem oil this year to control them. The third hoophouse planting of cucumbers is going in next week so we'll be watching them while they are small to keep the beetles away.

Garlic scapes have been harvested and we are looking forward to harvesting garlic in just over three weeks. It's always a fun time on the farm when we get to start selling the first garlic of the year and get them curing from the barn rafters. It's also nice to open up that field space and get it ready for the fall carrots.

The first zucchini and summer squash of the year will be ready next week and we started to harvest shelling peas this week. It's nice to have those as an addition to available products.

Two of the multi-farm CSAs we sell into got our first deliveries this week too. Potatoes are flowing and our tunnel tomatoes have great fruit set. The heirlooms and red slicers inside have a small amount of Botrytis on their leaves (which we have never had before). The cherry tomatoes have wonderful fruit set but the leaves are hit hard by Botrytis. We have pruned the infected leaves as much as we can to still leave some leaves on the plants and are spraying Oxidate daily for the next week on the current leaves and new growth to try to knock it down. That seems like it's going to be our big challenge this year but we are feeling better than we did two days ago. There's a lot of potential

revenue in those and a lot of money in labor spent already so losing them isn't an option.

Our crew has been working hard stirrup hoeing where we didn't get to with tractor cultivation and we are happy for all their hard work. Looking forward to tomatoes, peppers, and more summer crops starting to come in over the next month and getting some of the fall crops seeded and transplanted as we are already thinking about winter tunnel production timing.

Posen, MI (Presque Isle Farm) - As summer rolls in we are finally starting to settle into the season. Our tomato tunnel finally has only tomatoes in it and is being pruned and trellised weekly. We moved to a double row system this year, and the added space between plants has really made working with them much easier. The plants are loaded with fruit, and we hope to have tomatoes to market by July 4th. Our other two tunnels are filled with a constant rotation of our lettuce mix, romaine, spinach, carrots, radishes, turnips, and basil. We have had such success this spring with carrots, turnips, and radishes at our farmers market that these crops have earned what may be a permanent place in our tunnel rotations and successions. The speed of growth and health of the crops inside has been really impressive.

Aside from the fact that these crops thrive in spring, we are seeing a direct correlation between our transition to minimal/no-till in all of our tunnels and the health of our crops. We are no longer using our tractor in any of the tunnels and for the most part only stir-up hoeing, forking, and raking beds for preparation. The diminished weed pressure and overall health of the soil has completely transformed since we changed our practices last fall. The soil in our tunnels has now set the bar quite high for what we hope to work towards in the field.

As for the field, our potatoes, garlic, and onions are all being cultivated mechanically with a simple toolbar and sweeps on our tractor. The only issues we have had with this system is some in-row weed pressure in our garlic. In the future, a finger weeder addition to our toolbar may solve this problem. We will likely need to hand weed the garlic once. With the success of our minimal tillage practices in the tunnels, we are also transitioning some of our field production to a similar system of permanent beds. These beds will be used for all of our succession crops that we are planting and harvesting on a weekly schedule all season, mainly lettuces, beets, and spinach.

Carp Lake, MI (Ziibimijwang Farm) – It's been a busy time at Ziibimijwang Farm in Carp Lake, near Mackinaw City. Technically the farm is in its third year of production, although my partner and I just came on as Farm Managers mid-March this spring. The farm is owned by the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians, and we are fortunate to have an awesome group of folks on the Farm Board, who guide the major decisions of the farm.

We've been very busy building infrastructure & designing/implementing farm systems, while doubling capacity from last year's ~5 acres production, to 10-15 acres this year. We

have one FT employee.

Infrastructure so far this year has included getting a new power pole and well installed in the field, to run irrigation, hoophouse fans, lights, and backup propane heaters if needed this winter. Also, we built a tool shed to house the electric panel, plumbing, and a few field tools. We are putting up a 30x72' FarmTek hoophouse that will be used as the germination house next year, and also have a 30x192' and 30x96 hoophouse coming from Nifty Hoops/NRCS grants next month. There are two 20x70 (?) caterpillar tunnels housing the seedlings that are going out to the fields, and one that is planted with tomatoes and peppers.

We've also been busy incorporating new equipment into our systems: a reefer truck; a Tuff-Bilt tractor with finger-weeders, S-tine cultivator, and side-dresser; a Perfecta cultivator, flail mower, and spreader for the John Deere; as well as a plastic mulch-layer, water-wheel, and paper-pot planter. Pending a possible grant from the Shakopee Sioux Tribe, we may also be able to add vacuum seeders, a Jang seeder, Poly-planter, and a few Stand n' Planters to improve efficiency.

We've been installing our layflat/T-tape irrigation as we plant, and most of our crops are on raised plastic-covered beds, planted by water-wheel: lots of broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, onion, lettuce, along with some celery, celariac, kohlrabi, brussels sprouts, cukes, kale, squash, leeks, spinach, and herbs. We have a few direct-seeded crops in, such as carrots, radishes, beans and parsnips. We paper-potted peas, beets & rutabaga. Also have Bear Island Flint corn, Odawa pole bean, and Gete Osokomin squash in the 3 Sisters plot, which was planted after a pipe ceremony.

The mid-April blizzard dumped 16" of snow on our fields, & they didn't dry out enough to get equipment in there until mid-May. That, combined with all of the infrastructure happening around the farm, has put us a few weeks behind schedule on many things. Minor cabbage looper damage that we're hoping Diatomaceous Earth will handle, as the Remy didn't get installed on time and I was hesitant to use Bt on account of the bees. We may be pushing the envelope on timing this year with some of our crops, but everything's looking good so far, & we're hoping that the plastic mulch and possibly an "Indian Summer" will still gift us with abundant harvests. We hope everyone has a great season!

And, we're really excited to sleep this winter :)

Stockbridge, MI (Lake Divide Farm) – What the almost July?! Despite the onslaught of summer vegetables being just on the cusp, we are already preparing for fall. It always feels weird. First round of fall carrots and beets just got seeded. Preparing ground for fall and winter crops. Planting cover for next years spring crops. Brussels sprouts and fall kohlrabi are in. Next week our first round of fall cabbage goes in.

We are hoping to have an extra round of melon this year. In seasons past our second planting has been knocked out by downy mildew. This year we put our second planting

in a caterpillar tunnel in hopes that keeping the rain off will be enough. Our caterpillar tunnels are made from 3/4" electrical metal tubing (emt), 2' x 1/2" rebar, braided poly rope, and 6 mil plastic. The hoops are bent from the emt, the rebar is pounded into the ground 5' apart down the length of the house and on either side of the beds that will be under cover. We slide the hoops over the rebar, placing a hoop on a 45 degree angle at each end to help reduce wind problems. Between each hoop along the edge of the house, additional rebar is pounded into the ground at a 45 degree angle away from the centerline of the house. We roll the plastic out and pull it over, tighten it along the length of the house and fasten the ends with candy-cane shaped rebar hammered over the twisted ends. We then throw rope over the house tying to the 45 degree rebar to further affix the plastic. To vent we slide the plastic up and down along the edge of the hoops and attach it with spring clips. We plan to put up another one for fall cucumbers. We will be planting parthenocarpic varieties so they will produce despite reduced pollinator presence in the fall. Because the caterpillars are so easy to move, when the cucumbers and melon are completed, we hope to move the entire contraptions over our already established fall crops (kale/choi/chard/etc) to extend their season into the winter.

Final tomatoes went in two weeks ago, I'm pretty sure. It is hard to tell when anything happens this time of year. It all just blends together. Thank goodness for record keeping. The sweet potatoes are growing leaves. We are doing just under a quarter acre. We lost our direct seeded winter squash to vermin and had to purchase seed again and will be planting transplants in a few weeks. We hope it won't be too late. Small green peppers on the plants. Cucumbers and summer squash just starting to roll in. Also at market fennel, cabbage, kohlrabi, kale, chard, salad mix, radishes, carrots, peas, garlic scapes, radish seed pods (we call em Whippers!), micro greens, pea and sunflower shoots, and all manner of herbs. A few cherry tomatoes are ripening and getting the farmers first treatment.

Our weeds are out of control. Given the timing of the wet weather, we missed a few cultivation windows and are now laboriously hand weeding our onions among other things. They are looking good. We lost our spring beets to weeds but saved our spring carrots. We did mow our big Canada thistle patch (lovingly known as thistletown) right at flower set so hopefully that tones them down a little. Our buckwheat cover crop is knee high and about to really flower. Additionally, we learned how to tractor cultivate the aisles between our ground cloth beds and that is going to be a weed control game changer (although it will be in full effect next year.)

Something wonderful: All of the head lettuce we planted into the hoop house with our tomatoes was ready at the same time. Instead of letting it bolt, we harvested it all and it kept it in the cooler where it stored with success for three weeks.

Chatham, MI (MSU North Farm) – Summer is finally here, and the spring transplant rush came to an end earlier this month. We've had a huge flush of strawberries coming out of the fields since mid-June, and it looks like we will have plenty more for the next few weeks. Cucumbers, eggplants, and garlic scapes are finally ready to be harvested, so the biggest anticipation is the ripening of the hoophouse tomatoes. As we see many farms

downstate sharing their early tomatoes on social media, we are eager for the harvests ahead!

The weather has been very consistently in the mid-70's most days, although we've had some night temperatures drop into the 30's. It's been pretty dry for most of the month; we wouldn't refuse a little more frequent rainfall. Two weeks ago, a short-lived but aggressive hailstorm damaged a lot of our leafy greens and strawberries, which reduced the quantities we could offer to our buyers, but the crops seem to have outgrown the damage. It looks like temperatures will be in the 80's next week, with the forecast calling for some much needed rain.

The farm crew got to try their hand with the new finger weeder set up. We - and the beans - are pretty happy with the results. It is set up with tender hoes on either side of the row, cleaning up between row weeds, with the fingers doing a decent job of cleaning up in-row weeds. They aren't effective against grasses or established annuals, so proper bed preparation is key, as always. What really makes the setup shine is the spring loaded arms that we are trying from Tilmor. These allow each row to track the ground, meaning a rock or a bump in one row will not throw the other two rows off. Our Instagram feed ([msunorthfarm](#)) shows it in action if you want to check it out.

Our first short course of the year was a success. Dale Rozeboom from MSU Animal Science covered an abundance of valuable information in his presentation on pig production for the small-scale farmer, and offered lots of technical advice to those interested in raising pigs for meat. Ben and Denise Bartlett of Log Cabin Livestock did an excellent job engaging the audience as they offered their insights and expertise from over thirty years of sheep management. The group that came to the farm to learn were from all around the state, and we hope to see many of them – and more – at the next course. On July 15, we will be looking at the role of plastics on the farm, from season extension technology to weed management strategies using plastic. Taking into account the good and the bad, we hope to share our experiences with attendees and get you thinking about role plastic has on the vegetable farm. If you're interested in joining us, register online at <https://www.msunorthfarm.org/short-courses.html>.

ARTICLES

[What is Considered a Farm Under the FSMA Produce Safety Rule?](#) – Understanding exemptions of the Food Safety Modernization Act can be confusing. It is important to recognize how regulations do and don't affect your business or operation. This article will help you understand how the FDA defines a farm.

[New guide to organic management of spotted wing Drosophila released](#) – SWD is becoming a big problem for fruit producers, especially those using organic practices. This new guide provides resources for control and management of SWD for the organic producer.

[MSU Product Center serves a growing Michigan value-added agriculture](#) – The MSU

Product Center provides excellent resources for Michigan based food businesses. This article provides details on the center and how to access resources.

EVENTS

July 12 – [Basic Sustainability: Composting & Organic Gardening](#). Novi, MI

July 15 – [MSU North Farm Short Course - Plasticulture: Season Extension 201](#). Chatham, MI

[MSU Extension Events Calendar](#)

[Crosshatch Events Calendar](#)

[MIFFS Event Calendar](#)

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

[MIFMA Events](#)