

Michigan Small Farm Newsletter

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FIELD REPORTS

Stockbridge, MI (Lake Divide Farm) – Eight more weeks of insanity and then it slows down a bit again.

Weather: Dry. We haven't had appreciable rainfall for four weeks and there isn't really any in the forecast. Our soil crusts when it dries out this much making sprouting of germinating fall crops difficult. Irrigation is a full time job. We use a combination of drip and wobblers- overhead sprinklers. We are thankful that we are able to keep everything relatively watered.

Harvesting: Tomatoes are coming on. The first planting is bringing in a reasonable amount. Soon we will start our mega tomato sale at market. The second planting is ebbing in, and the third is trailing... Just as we planned! Eggplant and peppers are still coming into full force. We have already abandoned our first squash and cucumber plantings and moved on to our second squash. Our second cucumber planting goes in the ground this week, we hope. Potatoes are almost ready. Their late planting date set back their first harvest dates. All of our garlic is out of the field and curing and we are bringing fresh garlic to market. A variety of herbs. Carrots. Succession plantings of cabbage and kohlrabi going great. We should stay supplied for the foreseeable future. We are in between head lettuce and salad mix plantings, in big part to deer. Radish still going strong thanks to succession. Fennel looking good, some bolting. We will harvest it and hold it in the cooler.

Planting: Cover crops: We have a complex plan for the fields which involved a lot of plowing to begin getting ground ready. Most of them (fabaceae and nurse crops) go in in August. Varieties are chosen for the future of the field. If it works out, I will let you know. We are trying to get all of our fall vegetables in the ground. Our first round of fall carrots and beets are up and growing. The beets are doing considerably better than the carrots but with lots of continuous watering we are seeing continued germination in the carrots. Our first round of fall cabbage, Brussels, kohlrabi, broccoli, radishes are in and up and looking adapted to the dry world. This week we are hoping to get the next rounds of all this in plus fall kale, chard, choi, and some others.

While all this goes on we have been thwarted with equipment failure. All of this has happened in the last few weeks. Here is the quick list: broke plow on rock, bought new plow then broke clamp, welded clamp, broke clamp, found work around; Tie-rod on big tractor (Case 695) broke (fixing today- Tuesday); hydraulics on little tractor (Farmall 140) started dropping, jamming up cultivation plans and taking away mechanization for spreading cover crop seed. We have some ideas why and have it working again; hydraulic leak in disc lines resulting in line replacement; AC unit in walk-in cooler failing-

moved items into smaller cooler and ordered a new AC unit (we have coolbots); electric issue (loose wire) on our battery powered sprayer. All breaks are understood and en-route if not already repaired.

The tie-rod broke on the Case 695 just as I was discing in the cover crop that we manually spread. Our cover crop is now resting on top of the soil and a giant flock of black birds, which I normally love to see, is slowing eating away at it. Hopefully by tomorrow, it will be safely covered with soil and I can resume begging for rain from the powers that be. The other thing on the docket the day the Case broke was prepping ground for fall plantings so we are officially behind but expect that it will still be okay.

Lots of blossom end rot on peppers- more than ever before. In our situation, it was likely caused by uneven watering along with hot dry conditions. I learned that transpiration rate of the leaves being higher than that of the fruit causes more calcium to travel to the leaves than the fruit, leading to blossom end rot. We are trying to water more consistently to see if that helps.

Pests: Hornworm on tomatoes snuck up on us this year. Applied Bt and watched some birds take some out too. Deer pressure has been heavy on the head lettuce. Got an off-season permit and took one doe. Raccoons big time - wrecked a week's worth of sunflower and pea shoots in an evening. We have been trapping them and killing them. Some squash vine borer but not a wreckage of it. (Maybe pests in large groups should be called wreckages.)

Markets: All are going well and most are up from last year. It is nice to be rebuilding our monetary buffer. One of our new markets was a dud and we have replaced it. We start the new market this week and will see how it goes, but a preview suggests it will be a great addition to our line-up. We are now selling to chefs through a set-up at one of our markets and are huge fans of the process. There are linked spreadsheets that we fill out with availability so chefs can order and then pick up at market. It is streamlined and excellent.

Staff: Doing a great job and leveling up quickly. We are lucky to have such a solid crew this year. It makes all the off-schedule things happening considerably easier to deal with because they are able to step with minimal additional information.

We have our organic inspection coming up which is a little stressful because there is so much going on right now. Also, our records are a little disorganized and this is our first time being inspected past the initial inspection (our first, second-year inspection.)

Bath, MI (Ten Hens Farm) - Restaurant, CSA, and wholesale markets remain strong and our small farmers market has been a consistent winner each week this year as we bring more produce and new items each week. The height of the summer is almost here. We are harvesting heavy amount of cherry tomatoes and still dealing with Botrytis, but it doesn't seem to be impacting much of the fruit. We continue to spray Oxidate 2-3 times/week and although it is a big time commitment, it also is keeping a lot of the new growth healthy and new fruit setting. Red tomatoes are just starting to roll-in while heirlooms are hitting their stride.

We seeded our fall/winter storage carrots on July 23rd and are irrigating like mad to keep them wet. We had our first two days of rain in six weeks the past few days but it wasn't enough to wet any more than surface of the soil. Garlic is hung in the barn and the onions and shallots will be pulled and cured by the end of the month. Our potatoes struggled this year without any irrigation (our only crop that didn't have irrigation this year) so we are planning on harvesting out what we have in a week or two and cutting our losses so we can open up the field for a flush of weeds and then a fall cover crop. Peas and oats will most likely go there as we have some major weed issues that we would like to try and smother some. We always feel the pull towards winter this time of the year, even though the summer crops haven't peaked yet. While we are starting to get the first colored peppers of the year, eggplant is just around the corner, and late tomatoes are setting fruit.

We also seeded our first winter hoophouse transplants in the greenhouse. Parsley, collards, fennel, celery, and scallions are seeded and we are looking forward to getting them into the hoophouses in 4-8 weeks (depending on the crop).

Dexter, MI - We have finally gotten rain in our area. It was spotty, but our farm had just over an inch accumulated from multiple small rain events. The garden crops are continuing to come along slowly with a lot of sprinkler activity. We hope to be harvesting tomatoes, peas, zucchini, cucumbers, and beans soon. Cattle seem to be gaining well, pastures are struggling, but the rain should help. Hay harvest is going well and nearing an end. Training our recently weaned pigs to a hot wire so we can rotate them has been our biggest challenge.

Chatham, MI (Mighty Soil Farm) – Everything on our (not so) little half acre is going smoothly, and we're really happy with the season so far. We're doing three markets and a tiny bit of wholesaling, putting a lot of miles on the minivan for sure. Our crop plan for this year was largely guesswork as far as how much of everything we could sell. Some things we have way too much of, like scallions, while others are spot on. We've never been to markets where kohlrabi and chard are two of the most popular items, but here we are in the UP and everyone loves it.

Carrots, new potatoes, and peas just started rolling in, and our fresh onions are almost there. After starting the season off no-till, and then quickly realizing we were going to have to till, it's interesting now to see the difference between beds we prepped differently. Our first round of kale and chard are about to get cut out of no-till beds, and the quack grass has taken over those beds in the meantime. The onions, on the other hand, also in no-till beds, are mostly weed free as we were able to weed them every two weeks or so, and the grass seems to have exhausted itself by now. We may keep our three onion beds no-till next year.

After losing a huge amount of head lettuce, cabbage, kale, and beets to deer over the course of two weeks, we sprang for an electric deer fence. It's working perfectly so far, and has likely already paid for itself.

We're wheel-hoeing all of our pathways every couple of weeks, and have been wondering if having raised beds is really necessary considering how sandy our soil is. When grass builds up on the shoulders of our raised beds, hoeing it knocks the beds down to the level of the pathway, and once it's knocked down we can just wheel hoe right up to the edge of the crop, maintaining the boundary of the pathway by not walking on the edge of the bed, of course. If we re-make any beds next year, or take on more growing space, we may skip raising them to make weed control easier, and possibly keep the soil from draining as quickly as it does now.

We follow a lot of farms on Instagram, including Frith Farm in Maine, and they posted a video earlier in the summer of two people using a board the width of a bed with ropes attached to either side for hand holds as a human powered crimper (simple tool, hard to explain perfectly). On a small scale like ours it seems worth a try. We're thinking of planting rye and vetch on our new potato beds once we've dug them all out, and next year trying this crimping method and planting right through it. Hopefully it will slow down the movement of overwintering potato beetles.

It feels good to be in such a groove our first year, feel like we have everything under control, and be having great markets and getting good feedback from customers. It's amazing how quickly it's going by - almost August? How'd that happen? We're already looking ahead to next year, thinking of what we'd like to do differently now that we have some experience in this area.

[East Lansing, MI \(MSU Student Organic Farm\)](#) - We have posted the [application](#) for the 2019 MSU Organic Farmer Training Program! You can find out more about the 2019 OFTP by visiting our updated [website](#) or emailing msufarm@msu.edu. The OFTP will run from March 18th to November 11th every Monday from 9am to 5pm @ the MSU Student Organic Farm in East Lansing, MI Program fee is \$3,900 plus required books, but [scholarships](#) of \$500 to \$3500 are available.

With such a dry year, we are lucky to have few crop diseases and an easier time battling weeds. It has also pushed us to really work at dialing in our irrigation methods on the farm. Our Production Manager, Sarah Geurkink, has been doing non-stop improvements to our systems to work getting adequate pressure, duration, and output for all our crops. Methods of irrigation vary on our farm, including drip, simple low-rise sprinklers that we built on-farm and a new Kifco Water Reel traveler. Some crops, like lettuce or cilantro enjoy a cooling sprinkle in the middle of a hot day. Others are prone to disease when their leaves get wet, so we water tomatoes, cucurbits and beans on a drip system. We can also minimize weeds by providing water only for our crop, not the surrounding space where weed seeds are waiting for their opportunity to germinate.

[Chatham, MI \(MSU North Farm\)](#) – We have been fortunate this season to have dry enough conditions to allow for relatively successful mechanical cultivation, but frequent enough rains to supplement our irrigation. We have also been getting remarkably warm

temps – we have accumulated almost 300 growing degree days over this time last year. We are ahead of any year in the last five in total GDD, which is evident in the speed at which our warm season crops are growing.

Our storage crop harvest season has begun with this year's garlic. We have pulled of the five varieties so far. The first four were smaller plantings to start building seed stock, with the main crop variety coming out next week. It is also looking like the first onions (Walla Walla) will be ready for harvest in the coming week or two.

We have about an acre of storage carrots seeded and up, looking really nice. They were stale bedded for about two weeks using baskets and tines. Flame weeding was perfectly timed this year and we are seeing really positive results. I am looking forward to a nice harvest, assuming we are able to keep the deer out.

Strawberry season was pretty successful this year, with only a little loss due to some untimely rain and hail. We plant all of our strawberries on an annual plasticulture schedule, buying in plugs in the fall and harvesting in the spring. We pick for a single year and replace with fresh plants in the fall. This fits into our rotations really easily and also allows us to maintain better control of weeds. We averaged about 0.85# of berries per plant this year, which is acceptable for our purposes.

We have seen some losses due to wide temperature fluctuations, mainly in romaine and broccoli, which have struggled to adapt. Blue Wind broccoli and Calshot romaine seem to be suffering the most when it comes to temperature swings.

Generally speaking, this has been a good year. The extra heat and dry conditions are leading to healthy crops and heavy yields.

ARTICLES

[**2018 Beginning Farmer Webinar Series recordings now available online**](#) – The Beginning Farmer Webinar Series provides valuable information on a wide range of topics to help support beginning growers as they build or diversify their businesses. This season's webinar archives is now available for viewing.

[**Consider drought-motivated irrigation purchases carefully**](#) – As much of Michigan is experiencing dry conditions, growers are putting time, energy, and money into supplying water. Planning for drought conditions ahead of time and making strategic investments can not only save money, but also reduce anxiety during hot and dry months of the year.

[**Downy Mildew found in Michigan cucumbers in 2018**](#) – Conditions have allowed DM to emerge on some western Michigan cucumber farms. Growers may want to consider preventative treatments to avoid suffering losses.

EVENTS

- Aug 13 – [Presque Isle Farm Field Day](#). Posen, MI
- Aug 19 – [Flower Production](#). Chatham, MI
- Aug 21 – [Biological Control in Protected Culture](#). Kalamazoo, MI
- Sept 19 – [Organic Management Field Day](#). Kellogg Biological Station, Hickory Corners, MI
- Sept 28 – [Grazing School 2018](#). Hickory Corners or Lake City

[MSU Extension Events Calendar](#)

[Crosshatch Events Calendar](#)

[MIFFS Event Calendar](#)

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

[MIFMA Events](#)