

Michigan Small Farm Newsletter

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FIELD REPORTS

(Hearthstone Farm) - The Good: We saw consistent, significant rain events all month, which came as a major relief and took a lot of pressure off irrigation rounds and freed up time to focus on planting fall crops and harvesting. We also saw relatively mild temperatures, 80 degree days and 70 degree nights with a few exceptions here and there. Very nice conditions overall. Quick growth in all our seedlings. The sweet corn was great this month thanks to the rain and to our great surprise we've seen very little raccoon/deer damage thus far with exception to one small late planting of white corn. The bicolor super sweet plantings up to this point have all but been ignored.

Our tomato crop is in full production now and we're seeing some great bushels come out of the field. The heirlooms are resisting cracks moderately well and the slicers are holding up great. We are happy with most of our new varieties, though it's still a little too early to make any decisions for next season. Our broccoli continues to produce plentiful side shoots, but this month they finally started selling and none was wasted.

Sales were way up in the farm stand, and restaurant and grocery store sales were up from last month also. As far as sales are concerned, August saw us really firing on all cylinders. Many new customers this month, a fair number who are now regulars. Our most robust CSA boxes of the season went out this month and the feedback from our members has been stellar thus far. We will be transitioning into our late season crops gradually over the next 3 weeks and we're looking forward to our fall boxes.

The U-pick tomato patch got hit pretty hard by customers this month and from the looks of the bushels they are hauling out the quality is very nice considering how little attention the plants have received. We seem to have gotten our peppers under control and put an end to the widespread blossom end rot issues we saw earlier this season. Rain came at just the right times to keep the soil evenly moist and the problem more or less took care of itself.

The not so good: We had a fantastic melon crop this month, but unfortunately it's already come to an end. We planted only once, putting in early, mid and late varieties, but this didn't go as well as it has in years past and we are thinking we should consider going back to 2 plantings to extend our harvest a few more weeks.

We lost quite a bit of our cabbage to mold due to low demand and delayed harvest this month. It kills me to watch them melt in the field, but our customers just weren't buying what we had picked and dumping ridiculous amounts into our CSA shares each week isn't our style, so they sat and many were ultimately unharvestable. Cucumbers are now deciding to call it an early season, which we are unprepared for. Even our youngest

planting is refusing to produce now and are dying off. Would have liked to get a few more weeks out of them, but it's not looking possible at this point.

Mexican bean beetles continue to persist in the bean patch despite our best efforts at hand picking early and BT applications as things became more severe. At present they are completely taking over the oldest plants and steadily making their way to the younger rows.

Labor continues to be an issue for us. Employees constantly take days off without notice and inconsistent attendance has been a problem all year. We've talked with small farmers near us and they all say the same things. Finding good workers is rare.

Freeland, MI - Here in the Saginaw Valley we are like most other places with all the summer crops coming in by the truckloads. Have not heard of any large problems with the vegetable crops as the dry summer may have helped with blight issues. My first planting of zucchini is still producing, something very rare as it usually gets blight of some kind by now. There are abundant canning tomatoes and peppers available at reasonable prices.

The honey harvest is in full swing but too early to report on how the year will be in terms of pounds per colony. Beekeepers are striving to get the honey off and the mite medications on as soon as possible as the bees that are being raised now will be the bees that will need to get through the winter and they need to be healthy to make it. The multiple virus stains that the mites vector to the bees and the feeding on the specialized fat bodies, (not body fat), make for short lived bees. Short lived bees do not live to see spring. Come spring we will know if all the efforts have paid off or replacement bees will have to be procured.

Novi, MI (MSU Tollgate Center) - More regular rains have brought disease to the fields, the typically early blight and septoria leaf spot in tomatoes, powdery mildew in cucurbits and as of this week downy mildew in the cucumbers. We spray preventative applications of Serenade to reduce the incidence of these diseases, but when conditions are right it doesn't seem to do much but slow them. Interestingly we have seen the worst of these disease at the ends of beds where airflow is the best. Our caterpillar tunnel tomatoes, while suffering from significant leaf curl, have not suffered from disease in the same way that the field tomatoes adjacent to them have. As part of our ongoing soil block study (results to come in December) we are comparing yields of soil blocked and pot grown tomato transplants, with tomatoes being grown in the field and in a cat tunnel. I am interested in the soil blocking results but am equally interested to see what kind of ROI the tunnel gives us, which cost us \$1/ft². Later this winter design details will be shared along with harvest data.

Insect pressure has been at an incredible high this year. Our most significant invertebrate pest, flea beetles, have been voracious. We recently plowed under our spring brassicaceae to put in our fall crops, which we then covered with AG-15. However, the tillage radish that was put in for early carrots next year was not covered, and we can't

find but a few small radish stems sticking up as the crucifer flea beetles (*Phyllotreta cruciferae*) ravaged them. We have also seen the new-to-us eggplant flea beetle (*Epitrix fuscula*) cause significant damage to eggplant foliage and reduce our eggplant yields. We're looking at using trap crops for next season after the row covers come off two ensure continued harvests.

Vertebrate pests have also been quite high, with more woodchuck, field mice and raccoon damage and in new crops than we have seen before. For instance, we are seeing raccoon damage in tomatoes and field mice are eating the bottoms of peppers. We assume this is because there is less naturally available food due to the drought like conditions we had during the early and mid-summer. We have been trapping extensively to mitigate these pests.

Stockbridge, MI (Lake Divide Farm) – The farm in August- the end of August. THANK GOODNESS FOR THE END OF AUGUST. Finally got the disc fixed with a lesson in welding (not sure if this broke before or after the last update), adding some skills to the toolbox. A bolt in the hitch, hidden inside a knuckle wore so thin that it was able to pull through the steel that held it. It is kind of beautiful if I ignore the consequences. We had been checking the other bolts, but missed this one! Gotta check 'em all folks! The sudan grass came up in the strips that were disced before the break. Not sure if the birds ate the rest or it was poor soil contact, no rain, what. Perhaps when I disc it today, new strips of sudan grass will rise to the occasion.

Tomatoes are in full effect. Our first outdoor planting is looking pretty ragged but the new growth still looks healthy. Our second outdoor planting looks pretty good. Our hoop tomatoes are outgrowing their trellis big time and have leaf mold, which won't stop them from producing necessarily as it uncommonly affects the fruit and doesn't wipe all foliage out at once, but we have it pretty bad. Because it can survive for at least a year in the soil, it will be important that we remove all plant material - including weeds - from our hoophouse and disinfect it as much as possible. It would be a bad idea to plant our tomatoes in the same hoophouse next year.

With more consistent watering, blossom end rot is reduced on the peppers.

We never thinned our beets before. Or our watermelon radishes/daikon/turnip etc. We thinned our rutabaga last year to great effect and are going to do the same for those just mentioned. The hoarder in me really hates doing it. Hopefully we will be glad. Now we just have to find the time.

With any luck the last of our direct seeded outdoor plantings will be in the ground today. We still have hoop houses and caterpillars to plant - some from transplant and some from direct seed. Winter growing is still something that we are learning about and we expect to have variable results. Luckily, it looks like most of our storage crops will be in good shape if we can get to weeding them within the next two-three weeks (our cultivation tractor went down for the count) - carrots, kohlrabi, cabbage, radishes, turnips, beets, radicchio, fennel, celeriac (not so sure about this one's status...). Not to be weeded but to be counted, sweet potatoes - seem good but not sure. Really hoping. Our onions are small but delicious. We still have to get them out of the field. Now we

risk losing them and may have to choose between weeding fall crops and pulling tiny onions from the field. Potatoes present, not sure there are enough. It seems I am not really sure of anything right now. Not a time for thinking but a time for carrying out the plans of a person who could think (wintertime Lake Divider).

Always dreaming of how to make a better, more human friendly, more productive, more environmentally friendly farm. Farm on!

East Lansing, MI (MSU Student Organic Farm) - August is a busy time for diverse veggie growers! Here at SOF we are harvesting tomatoes without end from the field and hoop houses and are running low on bulb trays as a result. The watermelons are at their peak, with several bulk bins in the cooler. It was enjoyable to teach the Organic Farmer Training Program Participants the 4 things to look for in a ripe melon and then harvest a full bulk bin with them. Most growers would know to look for the dead tendril, the yellow spot on the bottom of the watermelon and to listen for the sound of a ripe melon when tapped. But my favorite sign that a melon is ripe is the flavor! I recommend to new melon harvesters that they should bring a knife into the field to sample melons if they are new to harvesting melons in general or if they are new to that variety.

We're also harvesting our pears, which is a nice change of pace on a vegetable farm. We pick them as soon as they are fully sized and before they get too yellow or else the interior will be over-ripe, mealy and sometimes brown. Even if they are still quite green, it is a good sign they are ready if the pears are easy to remove by tipping the fruit upward and letting the top of the stem gently snap from the fruiting spur. Then we put them all into the cooler to slow down the ripening process. We will remove the pears from the cooler as needed about 5 days before we need them for delivery to allow the exterior to ripen a bit more and catch up to the inside of the fruit.

Amidst this abundance, we are trying to rip summer plantings from our 9 hoop houses and prep them to re-seed or transplant to winter crops. We typically use the broadfork and tilther, but due to a minor breakdown yesterday, we had to revert to our old method of using 3-tine claws to break up chunks in the soil after broadforking.

Our fantastic group of 5 MSU students who worked full-time on the farm this summer are starting back to school today, so we will be adjusting to working with up to 8 or 10 students for shorter shifts.

Chatham, MI (MSU North Farm) – What has been a relatively dry year for us in the UP has led to some really great yields. As things start getting wet again as the summer wanes, we are seeing increased disease pressure and some challenges getting the harvests in. Overall, we have seen tremendous yields on our onions and shallots. We have had very consistent and large onions, across several varieties, and substantially less foliar disease pressure than previous years. Our shallots have, once again, performed wonderfully, with similar results to the onions in terms of uniformity and size.

We have started our transplants for fall and winter hoop house production, mainly consisting of lettuces, kales, and spinach, though we will direct seed some other crops as soon as the beds are ready for overwintering crops. The hoop house is still full of heavily

producing summer fruits. We had an early and strong tomato yield this year, due to uncommonly warm temperatures. We also saw less aphid pressure, which may be due to introduced lacewings, though I can't say for sure.

Our storage carrots are sizing up nicely, as are the storage beets. Our first four varieties of potatoes are about ready to be dug, though we might leave them in the ground a bit longer to give our cold cellar a chance to cool off a bit more. We typically dig them, store them in wooden macro bins, then put them directly into our cellar, which is around 45-50 degrees this time of year. The potatoes cool along with the cellar, which is a gentle cooling, allowing the potatoes to cure. This has worked well for us in the past, allowing us to hold potatoes until May or June, depending on how many we store.

We are looking a wet forecast coming up, which is a bit of a challenge for harvesting what needs to come out of the field, but we'll get through it and are excited to not have to be irrigating anymore.

ARTICLES

[**Avoiding food safety issues with frost-free hydrants –**](#) Frost free hydrants are an important part of many small farms' irrigation systems. What many growers don't realize is that there is potential for contaminating your water source if they are installed incorrectly or by using the wrong type of hydrant. Phil Tocco provides some insight on the best ways to use frost-free hydrants.

[**Organic grain crop enterprise budgets are available**](#) – As the demand for organic grain grows, farmers are looking at ways to incorporate them into their rotations. MSU Extension has been working on creating enterprise budgets for organic grain production to help growers develop profitable grain enterprises.

EVENTS

Sept 19 – [Organic Management Field Day](#). Kellogg Biological Station, Hickory Corners, MI

Sept 28 – [Grazing School 2018](#). Hickory Corners or Lake City

Oct 4 – [Fert, Dirt, and Squirt: Nutritional Monitoring of Floriculture Crops Workshop](#). Lansing, MI

[MSU Extension Events Calendar](#)

[Crosshatch Events Calendar](#)

[MIFMA Event Calendar](#)

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

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