

Michigan Small Farm Newsletter

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FIELD REPORTS

Freeland, MI - Fall is coming to the Saginaw Valley with some vegetables starting to drop in numbers available. Sweet corn is pretty much over, do not know of anyone close by who still has some.

Pumpkins seem to be everywhere with very good yields. One problem may be that the warm summer has nearly all the pumpkins ripe in mid September. Growers are hoping they will hold up till Halloween.

Cool weather crops are coming back with cabbage and broccoli quite abundant.

Late plantings of zucchini and pickles are producing now.

Most beekeepers have harvested their honey but some are still working at it. Still have not heard how the yield is this year, hopefully by next report will have some idea. Some commercial outfits are checking the hives to make sure they will be strong enough to ship to the almonds in California and if not making adjustments.

Black bears have moved into the Valley with reports of damage to hives and some completely destroyed. Looks like more bear fences will be put up in the future.

Fall tillage and soil testing are not far away, some of us are ready for the break from picking!

Stockbridge, MI (Lake Divide Farm) – Our cover crops are coming up which we are excited about given last winter's bald fields! Oats and peas for early ground, Austrian winter peas for late spring/early summer ground, and rye and medium clover for ground not to be planted in 2019. We planted the winter peas at a high rate and are considering rolling them and some strip tillage for the spring/ early summer cucurbit and solanaceous plantings. If we don't get a good thick stand, I may wimp out. I may wimp out anyway. We are also considering using tarps to kill the cover and planting into the resulting mat. If all else fails, there is always the turn it under method as fall back. Either way, lots of organic matter will be added.

We are preparing to do our annual soil test. This is our third one and I am excited to see what direction values are going. This year our NRCS agent is going to look it over with us and help us make a nutrient management plan. It will be nice to have the plan so early leaving all winter to source materials etc.

Our sweet potatoes are coming in. They are decently sized. They are deep in the ground making it harder to dig them, but I think this is the reason I am seeing the least small

mammal damage I have ever seen on ours. I don't know why they are so deep though, so it would be hard to recreate. It is so funny curing them in these cooler conditions when they prefer 90 degrees. We are going to put them into bulb crates and stack those under a tarp in the shipping container with a heater. This should help them callus and start to sweeten. We will then move them into the basement for winter storage. I don't really know of a better way to cure them this time of year, but I wish I did! Moving piles.

Only a few more rounds of planting left- the hoop houses will be planted by the beginning of next week. Additionally, we are using three caterpillars 15' x 150' in the field and those will be planted by the end of next week. I am hoping that the plantings in the field will carry us through until the plantings in the hoops are ready for harvest.

Hard to believe there are only a few more weeks until frost. There is a lot to do before that: covering crops, field clean up and cover crop seeding (just a bit more rye really), getting the sweet potatoes in, moving onions and garlic into climate control areas, and finishing the winter plantings. At least, to compliment the increase in winter related fall activity, the tomatoes are slowing down. I am not sad to see them go. We are harvesting green ones and both selling them and letting them ripen in the shipping container. It involves sorting but sometimes I prefer that to harvesting anyway.

We are also looking for an additional crew member now because one of ours has a back injury which demands reduced hours to heal. Even so late in the season there is still a lot of heavy lifting to do and it is worth the effort to find supplemental help. If you know anyone in the Jackson-Ann Arbor area, send them our way!

What is big right now? Of course, in the final weeks the peppers and eggplant are making a big show. Then there is cabbage, radish, cut and bunched greens, broccoli, and brassica roots.

We are still stomaching our bigger crops losses of the year: ginger, wintersquash, reduced potato and onion yield. But that is paired with increased yields of other crops. It seems to shake out every year. Onward and farmward, towards the frost!

Spring Arbor, MI (Hearthstone Farm) - The Good: Our trellised field tomatoes held up well this year. Despite their ugly appearance we still put up some acceptable harvest figures going into the third week of September, though this is really the end of the end and there isn't much left on the vine at this point.

The peppers continue to hang on and we've had enough to satisfy all our bushel orders as well as the farm stand sales and our 2 off-site markets. This is expected to continue right up to frost. It was a great year for our peppers after recovery from some early blossom end rot issues.

Our pumpkin crop is the best in many years. Spoilage due to mold is minimal and deer damage has been concentrated in a very small sector of the field, leaving the vast majority untouched. We are very happy with the varieties we experimented with this year and our return varieties as well.

Winter squash is looking alright, though I'm not blown away. A few varieties seem to have accepted mold much more readily than others, namely the spaghetti and delicata. All others look fine up to this point and there is a lot left to haul yet.

The sweet corn is still as delicious as ever. Although the worms have moved into the fields, they tend to remain on the terminal end of the ears and cause minimal kernel damage. We explain to our customers that we do not spray pesticides and that this is a natural consequence of that decision. Most are understanding and still buy, but sales of corn always slow in the late season.

Our off site market sales numbers have held strong all through September, which is atypical, so we will be attending a few weeks longer than usual this year to see how it goes.

The Not So Good: September sales at the farm stand dropped pretty sharply as they typically do. The sweet corn hype runs a bit dry for us this time of year and a lot of regulars stop appearing for their ears.

The final zucchini planting was a flop and only produced well for about 2 weeks before slowing to a stand still. 1-2 bushel/day turned into 2 bushels/week in no time. I see no blight and no major pest populations. There are plenty of new blossoms, but growth is slow. They're in a low spot and I suspect have cold, wet feet.

Cabbage moths are insane this year and nothing seems to stop them. At any given time you can see hundreds hovering over the fields searching for food. I've covered all my brassica crops with insect netting and still I am finding damage. The white species are underneath the net every morning and new worms emerge shortly after. An application of Neem Oil was used after an application of BT proved ineffective, but still they persist. Our late kohlrabi crop has been hit hard, but the kale is the worst off. I have a very hard time putting together damage free bunches, even after all the prevention and treatment effort.

Chatham, MI (MSU North Farm) – Fall is definitely in full swing in the UP. We have had some light frosts, which have toasted the winter squash leaves, but left other crops undamaged. Because of this, we hauled in our butternut, which is the only winter squash we grew this year. We trialed eight different varieties this year to determine which would produce best in our short climate (butternut can be a little tricky up here). Avalon was the clear winner in terms of yield, though its shape is a bit blockier and less consistent, which could be problematic for wholesaling. I was most impressed by Metro PMR, which is a smaller-fruited butternut (1-3 lbs.) with heavy fruit set. By total harvested weight, it was right behind Avalon, which puts on much larger fruit. I think this variety would be a great market/CSA variety because of its manageable size in the kitchen.

We have dug a few of our storage carrots, though they could stay in the field a bit longer. Beets are sizing up beautifully for fall harvest, too. The seeding rate was a little lighter this year, which is leading to larger individual beets. We used monogerm seed for our red beets and pelleted seed for the Chioggia, which seemed to make seeding a little

more predictable. There are still some kinks to work out with seeding rates, but this year's production will be better than last year's by quite a bit.

Hoophouse summer fruits have been replaced by winter crops, which everyone was pretty happy about. While tomatoes and peppers are great, they start to get tiresome this time of year and it felt good to cut out the jungle and plant some greens. We are hoping to have a mix of winter harvested crops, as well as a healthy amount of overwintered greens for early spring production.

This fall has felt pretty mild, which is great because there is still a lot of product in the field. Let's hope it holds so we have time to get it all out!

ARTICLES

[Why Soil Test in the Fall](#) – It's that time of year again when we start to think more seriously about planning for next season, which all starts with understanding our soils. MSUE Educator George Silva describes why the fall is a great time to gather samples.

[Michigan Floriculture: Cultivating Beauty](#) – Floriculture is a big industry in Michigan, and many small farms are realizing that ornamentals can be a profitable venture. This article and video highlights the floriculture industry in Michigan, which many growers will find fascinating.

EVENTS

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

Oct 9-Dec 6 – [2018 Fall Grower Produce Safety Certification Course](#).

[MSU Extension Events Calendar](#)

[Crosshatch Events Calendar](#)

[MIFFS Event Calendar](#)

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

[MIFMA Events](#)