

## **Field Reports**

Ann Arbor, The Land Loom: Mid October is a time of great transition for The Land Loom. The last week of Fall Salad Club coincides with our last regular Saturday market, and usually the first damaging frost hits around this time, moving us to tie up, batten down, and rogue harvest the remainder of the sensitive crops before the killing cold draws the field season to a close. We are coming into our longest lull in production of the year, a moment of pause to survey the aftermath of a season.

It's no secret that this has been a very challenging year for The Land Loom and really for farmers in general. Instability on a national scale can be just as crippling to the psyche as anxiety brought on by flooding, water scarcity, or prolonged heat at the farm level. Now that we have come to this point, and we have managed to grow and sell more produce than I could have ever imagined under such unfavorable conditions, I have truly been awestruck by the resiliency of plants and the giving nature of the land. I have also been greatly moved by our community of eaters, farmers, and friends who have rushed in to support us by buying our vegetables, sharing their stories of hard seasons past, and providing moments of distraction from the work with shared meals and celebrations, without which, we would not have made it through the season. Farming is a vocation like no other, and it's easy to feel isolated in the realities of such a calling, so I thank you all from the bottom of my heart, for stepping in to feed the soul of a farmer.

Chatham, MSU North Farm: October has really thrown us for a loop this year. Within the first two weeks, Chatham received over 5 inches of rain, and we have continued to have precipitation in some form (some snow, mostly rain) at least 2-3 times a week this whole month. This has proven to be a challenge, given the majority of our storage crops require tractors in the field. We have been able to make do so far, and have been busy filling the root cellar. About half of our carrots are out, with more consistency in size and quality so far this year (though the deer have figured out where they are at, so there's some competition for the best ones). Cabbage is out entirely, with overall smaller sizing than last year's crop. Beets are almost all out, and we are rushing to finish potatoes, as we have had several hard frosts so far. The potatoes we dug last week (Purple Peruvian, fingerling) looked great however, and we are planning on finishing that up this week. With those hard frosts, we have lost some of our final broccoli and cauliflower successions.

We are prepped and ready for a drier day to plant our garlic this week. This year we will be planting 5 varieties again, 4 of which are new to us as of this current harvest season. We have had Uncle Hank's as our primary variety, and last fall we added on Elephant, Inchelium Red, German Extra Hardy, and Musik. Most of the harvested crop from the latter 4 is going back into the ground this year. We are planting into black plastic mulch beds, and then will cover with a healthy layer of straw. After grading the garlic for seed, Inchelium Red and Musik seemed to have the overall highest qualities in terms of head size.

With a slightly smaller crew than normal this time of year, we are feeling a little rushed to finish out the season. Our excellent summer weather has given us quite the bumper crop this year, and we are looking forward to a long winter of washing and selling our storage crops.

East Lansing, MSU Student Organic Farm: Last week we worked hard on harvesting all of our root and tuber crops still in the field. Beets, turnips, carrots, potatoes. The constant rain we had in mid-October made this task rather difficult. We use an undercutter bar for the carrots and a PTO-driven potato digger, but with the level of moisture in our heavy soils, the tractor could barely drive through the fields, let alone pull the digging tool through the heavy, wet soil. In our soil, (officially a Marlette sandy loam, but clay loam just 9" down), we would see negative impacts like hardpan, rocky clods similar to pottery and drainage issues if we use a tractor carelessly in wet weather. Fortunately, in the last week or so, it dried up enough for us to harvest potatoes and carrots.

By some amazing feats of hard work by our staff, undergraduate crew, Organic Farmer Training Program students and volunteers, we have finished most of these crops and after all our hard, muddy work, we have a gorgeous carrot harvest of straight, large carrots! The carrots are now washed in 50 lb. bags for wholesale, washed in bulk bins with liner bags for short-term storage (~2 months) and dirty in bulk bins with liners for long-term storage until we have carrots again in early summer. There are many other bulk bins of beets, cabbage (so many cabbage!), giant kohlrabi and celeriac in our cool, humid cooler set to 34F with high humidity. Also, the cold cooler is packed with a great harvest of onions in bulb crates as well as turnips, daikon, storage radish and many other crops. By Wednesday, with CSA and Farmstand harvest, it gets hard to maneuver in the cold cooler. Potatoes in bulb crates will soon be added to the mix, but we had some issues with storage last year and recommendations from the Pathology lab here at MSU were to store the taters at room temperature for a bit before putting them into cold storage, to allow any damage to the skin to dry and heal over first.

Our winter squash is in the warm, dry cooler at 50F with 65% humidity maintained by a simple dehumidifier. We switched to harvesting directly into bulk bins this year and it was much more efficient than using bulb crates. We would harvest and set the squash in rows wide enough to allow us to drive through the field with the tractor to pick it all up. We are hoping that it will allow for as long term storage as the bulb crates (til June for butternut last year!), but we shall see.

We had a first frost followed immediately with a hard frost of 28F just this week! That meant we bulk-harvested lettuce, celery, peppers, etc to add to that cold cooler. We still need to get the garlic in, but we weren't sure where to put it! We are redesigning our crop rotation to separate wet fields from less wet fields. The wet fields crop rotation will include garlic, alliums, winter squash, late brassicas, tomatoes/peppers/eggplant, celery, beans and a higher proportion of cover crops (4 of the 9 half-acre fields will be in full-season cover crops). The less wet rotation will include root crops, early brassicas, melons/summer squash, potatoes and a lower proportion of cover crops (1 of the 5 half-acre fields in full-season cover crops). So those less wet fields may require more compost, whereas the wet fields will get additions of organic matter and N from cover crops almost every other year. We also have the hoophouse rotation and some fields devoted mostly to salad crops, all of which are in areas of our best soil and drainage.

Saginaw Valley: Hard frost, actually a hard freeze has covered the Saginaw Valley so unless sensitive crops were covered it is over for them till next year. Some of the cole crops are still being harvested.

Pumpkin production appears to be very good as long as insect pollination was present. Have heard of some growers who did not have bees or other pollinators present having very poor crops.

Beekeepers have finished their harvest and are getting the bees as prepared for winter as possible. Winter losses have been very high the last few years so many large beekeepers are making plans to move their bees south for the winter and avoid the losses many have with overwintering here in Michigan.

Work has begun on repairing/replacing greenhouses and high tunnels before winter sets in, and to be ready for spring.

Novi, MSU Tollgate Farm: A wet fall hindered bed prep and seeding of our last round of rye/vetch. We broadcasted on top of the remaining beds and have decent germination, but will be interested to see how the smaller, less established seedlings survive the winter.

We are trialing a 6 week fall CSA this year and it has been an excellent addition. With the number of storage crops we were able to stash, harvest is light and we have been able to keep on top of the field work with our reduced crew. It has been very popular with our existing CSA members. We plan on ending right before Thanksgiving, which is a great venue for members to use the squash, sweet potatoes etc. At some point an article will be available on the various things we learned about this experience.

With the fall CSA we have also started working with our colleague, Jae Gerhart and the Farm at St. Joe's and the aggregated CSA they run to bolster our own CSA. The aggregated CSA purchases produce from area farms and distributes it to patients at the hospital. For the farmers this is an additional market they wouldn't normally have access to and they set their own prices. For the CSA members, this gives them access to a wider range of produce at wholesale prices. By purchasing from the existing aggregate, we are able to add to our crop selection and focus on crops that we do best, while helping to support local farms!

We have analyzed the data from our study on soil blocks. We grew six tomato varieties in both a high tunnel and field conditions and compared between tomatoes grown in pots versus tomatoes blocked in a stand up 6 square blocker. We found that there was no significant difference in yield between the two, with pots yielding just 40 pounds more over the 288 plants in the study. As many have reported, the soil block transplants seemed more robust at planting, generally considerably taller, however this did not translate to yield gains. Soil blocking took only slightly longer than did filling pots, but pots require disinfection later on. Soil blocks also allowed us to use a capillary mat watering system, which required less watering time and more even watering. We are in the process of submitting reports to various publications and will post those here for you to dive into the details!

## **Events**

November 8<sup>th</sup>- [Making It In Michigan Conference](#), Lansing Center. Learn about incorporating a value added enterprise to your business!

November 13<sup>th</sup>- [Farmer Field School, DIY Greens Dryer and Bubbler Build](#), Tillian Farm Development Center, Ann Arbor

December 1<sup>st</sup>- February 28<sup>th</sup> – [Biological Control for Winter Greenhouse Growers Online Course](#)

## **Articles**

[Safety For Your Agritourism Business](#) – Agritourism plays a central role for many small farm businesses. If you are considering adding or expanding agritourism on your farm, this article by MSUE Educator Julie Darnton discusses how to mitigate risks to visitors on your farm and limit your exposure to liability.

[Flint Fresh Food Hub is Open For Business!](#) – MSUE Educator Terry McLean celebrates the landmark opening of a new venture to increase local food access in Flint.

[Preparing Chestnut Orchards for Winter](#) – While specifically targeted at chestnut growers, anyone who incorporates trees into their production will find this article by MSUE Educator Erin Lizotte a useful primer or reminder.

## **Resources**

[MSU Extension Events Calendar](#)

[Crosshatch Events Calendar](#)

[MIFFS Event Calendar](#)

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

[MIFMA Events](#)