

Field Reports

Stockbridge, Lake Divide Farm: It was the beginning of the month and while at market, I mentioned to a fellow farmer (or two) "it sure is mild!" That being said, I fully accept that this deep cold is my fault. I apologize. In the first week of November, we let two of our full season people go and the next day the forecast turned brutal, with low dips into the mid twenties, snow, and an eventual 48 hour freeze. This is tough because we planned to harvest from the field through November and we want that vegetable money! As much as you can trust a 10-day forecast to be true, we did, and Lizz, Jim and I mobilized hard to get everything out of the field that we could and cover the rest. There was a lot of survival. Brassica greens, kale, broccoli under ag-30. uncovered deadon cabbage, some uncovered kale. It will all result in good data, if it doesn't kill me from the stress. We are currently in a three day freeze. It will be interesting to see how crops survive. Still in the field and harvestable before this most recent dip: kale, broccoli, arugula, tatsoi, tokyo bekana, tatsoi, mizuna, boc choy, brussel sprouts. We will see on Friday when the temperatures crawl out of the ice.

Last year we had a 48 hour freeze, surrounded by much milder temperatures, around November 17th. I had some records of what survived both uncovered and covered. Not super clear but present. It offered me comfort going into the cold. Additionally, I reference [this](#) (Pam Dawling's record of winter-kill temperatures) frequently to help make decisions about what to leave in the field and what to pull. This year we decided to preharvest 2.5 weeks worth of greens, and all of anything that was unlikely to accumulate growth (roots and heads). It was absolutely worth it since finding a few hours above freezing to harvest leafy greens has been a challenge. We have kale, arugula and bok choy, harvested around 11/8 that is still in good shape in the cooler.

We still have potatoes in the field but this year's crop was so poor, the harvest barely pays for the labor to harvest and a decision has to be made- what work should be done to keep something on the table, if there is no profit? How much profit is required to make it worth it? Is it worth it to do the work just to keep your table full, if it doesn't make money? Loss-leader. I don't think so for us. That is why the potatoes are still in the ground, although we did harvest them in the snow for the Thanksgiving markets. Potatoes are not usually like this for us.

In conclusion: deep freeze in November is to be expected, according to my huge data set of 2 years. I spent some time asking the long term farmers at markets if this felt normal to them and they said it did. Farming by feel. So, next year, caterpillars for the fall greens too. And earlier seeding of all storage crops. Better to get them in early than to not have them sized up in time. No more shoveling snow off of row cover! No more terror of loss (or at least decreased terror).

In the midst of the weather, we also added Eastern Market to our line up, another big big one for Saturday. That makes three on Saturday- new for us and with 2 vehicles. The addition of the market was inspired by the fact that three of our markets ended with October, leaving us with an abundance of greens in the field. We now have 4 farmers markets through the end of December. Two will end and two will continue year round. The markets have slowed down but are still worth attending. It is also nice that we have added another heavy hitter farmers' market to our line-up for next year. That could make the difference between sustainable and not for us. And with all this chaos we are moving into the season of planning. We are considering purchasing a new or newer tractor on a payment plan. We will be placing supply and seed orders.

We are cleaning up after ourselves. We are making hiring ads. We are adapting systems for functionality.

It begins to feel like winter growing is intruding into the rest period. The long long days of summer are supposed to be countered by the shorter days of winter, at least that was the idea that I had. But here we are, working August length days through November and still having to make trade-offs. Still not able to finish our lists. We are trying not to burn out but sometimes, it doesn't seem like there is space to rest. That is the funny thing about carving a business out of a living system. We have some control over how we make it, the priorities we put on it, but while the business is growing to support its own weight, we are carrying it. We are starting to feel that now. Hopefully the rest has begun we just can't see it because we are still so tired. Not to sound too dismal, though. This is likely just another system to optimize.

Into the cold!

Saginaw Valley: Like most of Michigan winter has come with a rush in the Saginaw Valley. Farm Markets and road side stands are mostly closed but a few have indoor facilities and remain open.

Field work has pretty much come to a standstill with us plowing snow instead of soil now. Unless something very unusual happens it will be spring before the tractors are once more called upon to till the soil.

Seed catalogs have begun to arrive, with new varieties always tempting. We try to plant one or two new ones each year to see how they might fit our system.

The bees are tucked away for winter with hopes they have plenty of honey for the cold months ahead. It has become the custom for larger beekeepers, those with 400+ hives to move south for now and then on to California for the almond bloom. Seems the almond farmers keep planting more trees that require more bees for pollination. It has become a major source of income for many beekeepers with rental fees now approaching \$200/hive.

Those that leave their bees in Michigan hope their preparations have been adequate and they will have live bees in the hives come March. Those bees really help the strawberries develop nice large fruit so we all are hoping to have good numbers available.

Merry Christmas and may 2019 be a good year for all of you.

East Lansing, MSU Student Organic Farm: This month we held a wonderful graduation ceremony for an even more wonderful group of people – our 2018 Organic Farmer Training Program students. They've been here on the farm with us once a week since March learning to hone their farming skills through hands on experience, classroom lectures, and farm tours all over Michigan. It's sad to see them leave us, but also exciting to see where they will go in the food and farming world.

Back on the farm, it's been cold and snowy. We took our final harvest out of the field (brussels sprouts) just in time for our Thanksgiving CSA distribution. Final season repairs have been made on hoopouses to make sure they're all buttoned up and cozy for the winter. With the

help of newly designed internal covers, our spinach, pac choi, radishes, and salad greens will be kept happy through the winter despite sub-freezing temperatures outside.

Novi, MSU Tollgate Farm: Our first stab at a 6 week fall CSA concluded the day before Thanksgiving. It was an excellent program for us, both in terms of profit as well as member interest. Members loved the diversity of storage crops and greens they received, and we loved the short harvest days and simply pulling most everything from storage. We were able to keep some of our staff on later in the season as a result of the increased sales. We distribute from 4-6:30, which by that time of year meant it was getting dark and cold- lighting is a must and a protected structure is a big benefit. If we had left the greens outside for much longer they would have started to freeze.

For the fall CSA we also worked with Washtenaw county farms and the Farm at St. Joe's to bring in produce from their existing aggregated CSA. This allowed us to narrow our crop selection but still give members variety. It also allowed the other farmers to unload excess produce in bulk. At some point a publication on the details of how this CSA functions will come out. The organizers of the CSA grow some produce for it, but mostly rely on area farms. Farms contact the organizers weekly with their produce availability and the price, and then the organizers put together a CSA share. This is a great model that seems to work well for everyone involved. For a co-operative model, check out the SARE publication below- any farm can host an aggregated CSA!

Events

December 11- [Farm Roundtable: Peak CSA](#), MSU Student Organic Farm, Holt. Discussion on CSA and farm marketing.

December 13- [SE Michigan Small Farm Focus Group](#), MSU Extension wants to talk to you to learn about your needs and how we develop programming- for you!

January 9- [2019 Winter Grower Produce Safety Certification Course](#), Adrian. Other locations and dates listed. FSMA training.

January 9- [UP 2019 Nutrient Management Program](#), Rudyard. Multiple locations and dates.

Articles

[Local Harvest: A Multifarm CSA Handbook](#): A cooperative model for developing a multifarm CSA, with details on how to specifically organize and navigate the venture.

[Our Farms, Our Future Podcast](#): A sustainable agriculture podcast by SARE. Good fodder for the washpack or ride to market!

Resources

[MSU Extension Events Calendar](#)

[Crosshatch Events Calendar](#)

[MIFFS Event Calendar](#)

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

[MIFMA Events](#)