

Fair Fields News

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On the Farm

Fall weather has finally set in at the farm. The late hot weather meant that the hot crops, which came on late, continued to produce for longer than expected. I was reluctant to switch over to fall crops when great tomatoes and peppers were coming out of the field, but as a result we were a little lighter on the quantity of early fall produce than in previous seasons.

Now we are finally getting those cooler temperatures, which for me always adds to the feeling of putting the farm to rest. We have also put away the irrigation system, pulled the tomato trellising, collected all the black plastic mulch from our nightshade and cucurbit areas and have been doing a final weeding of next years strawberries (we are keeping our finger crossed for these!). Still to be done are planting next years garlic, moving the cucumber and tomato hoop house, the final harvest of root vegetables from the field and perhaps transplanting rhubarb

if weather conditions permit.

Many of these root vegetables will be for the pumpkin pickup, which will happen on Wednesday, October 21st in Guelph and the following day at the farm.

As the CSA winds down we are starting to look towards our winter plans. I will return to carpentry work full time and will first be working on finishing up the tiny house many of you have seen beside our house. Nicole will be finishing her massage therapy program and hopefully helping with the occasional Fair Fields' web post. Lilly is still at daycare, though we hope to get her working soon... and Lewis, well he's still planning on being a rascal of a dog!

Kassia will be leaving mid-October to visit her family in White Rock, BC, before some R&R and winter work. We feel very grateful to have had her help and company this season and wish her well for the rest of the year. We are discussing options for her to work here next season in

some capacity and would feel lucky to have her back.

Thanks to all the members who made the CSA happen this year. Specifically, thanks to Kurt and Natalie, who kindly hosted the Guelph pickup this year. Many of the members there had a chance to meet them this season. The rest of you will likely have the chance next year, as we hope to again have the Guelph pick up at their place.

On the farm, we have had a lot of help from member and friend Vanessa. She has always come with energy and cheer to throw into everything from thinning and weeding to harvesting. We hope to have her help and company next year.

A deep well of gratitude has to go to Nicole and my families. They provided much needed help with farm work, home work and child care this season. Nicole and I have both had very busy schedules and with Lilly being almost 2 years old

we feel very lucky to have the family support we do. Thanks to Adam, Christian, Christine, Donald, Jennifer, Jim, Jutta, Kevin, Lynn, Phili, Nora, Tyler and Wayne.

Thanks to friends Christophe, Mike and Ryan, who all spent several days here working with us in the fields.

Finally, many thanks to Doug Cider and David Bocking, both of whom purchased shares to donate directly to the Walkerton Food Bank and Hospice Wellington, respectively, as a way to support local food security!



From left to right: Kevin and Jennifer with the bees, Jutta weeding raspberries, Mike and Kassia washing beets and Christian and Tyler draft-proofing the greenhouse.



Things to look forward to

As we finish up this season we are already thinking about preparations, changes and work to be done next season.

In 2016 we will try to start one week later than 2015 and go one week later. We felt that the timing this year was such that we had too many greens in the early part of the season and too few fall vegetables in the end. Ending a week later would also mean ending the week of Thanksgiving, which seems fitting.

We hope that the U-pick berries are more successful next year. Many of the problems we experienced with the strawberries were unexpected and out of our control. We do have some ideas of how to try to mitigate these problems for next year, with greater frost protection and a pathway of dwarf white clover, which will hopefully better attract pollinators. We have yet to decide whether to mulch, great for frost protection, drought prevention and weed suppression, but also a potential habitat for insect pests...

For the raspberries we were very happy with the berry quality and simply want to improve our yield. We hope that earlier and more regular thinning of rows will improve fruit set and decrease the likely hood of tall leggy canes blowing over during high winds.



We are thinking of more seriously exploring one new crop next year, sweet potatoes. We planted a few sweet potatoes in the greenhouse this season. We were late in producing our cuttings/slips and didn't plant that many, so our yield this year was small. However, we hope that with early and more prolific plantings next spring we might be able to produce enough for one pickup next season. Sweet potatoes are supposed to be good at removing salts from the soil. Salts can be a problem in greenhouses, especially those irrigated with well water, so we hope the plants will not only produce a nice crop but also help desalinate our greenhouse.

There are a few crops we have decided not to grow. Brussel sprouts are delicious, but are hard to produce reliably and are best later in the season, after several hard frosts. Our CSA is now starting and ending earlier, too early for Brussels. Instead we hope to grow more broccoli, especially early in the season, as that crop was very successful this year.

Our luck with fava beans has also been mixed and we feel they are a crop that is hard to provide enough of efficiently on a small scale. It also has not been the most popular item...

One crop we are very sad to give up on is honey dew melon. It is one of my personal favorites, we are just a little far north for it to be produced reliably during most years.

We are again expanding, from this year's 58 members to a goal of 75 members for 2016. We are thinking of eventually trying to expand into the Kitchener/Waterloo market, but for next season we will stick with pickups in Guelph and at the Farm. In January, we will email you with details about next years CSA with registration information, however, please feel

free to pass on word of our expansion to anyone you think might be interested for next year. We are always happy to answer questions by phone, email or in person.

At first we thought we would expand more this coming year, but this will have to wait till we are able to more fully mechanize row cultivation, i.e. weeding. In pursuit of this we will finally be making some tangible preparations for horses. I worked with draft horses at Orchard Hill Farm, for almost three years, and have been waiting impatiently to do so again, while I build the business, the soil and start a family. It is time to start preparations, maybe as early as this fall with renovations to the driveshed. We will be building a structure with tie stalls and mangers, a hitching area, covered pens for manure (and pigs) and throughways. We will also be creating space in the main building for hay and straw storage. In spring we will start purchasing and installing some of the outdoor infrastructure, like permanent fencing around pasture areas and a paddock for putting out the horses during the winter and between work. Finally we will try to take some time to go to auctions and harness and equipment suppliers to start to acquire all of the necessary gear for the following year. We hope to be horse powered by 2017.



Ken Laing row cultivating with team at Orchard Hill Farm

We are also contemplating beginning to offer free-range eggs this coming season, though that will depend a bit on time and money this spring for growing that operation. Our six hens that we picked up in early September are doing well and starting to lay. If all goes well we would look at getting another 6-10 pullets, hens that are just starting to lay, next spring.



Our hens, feeding in the coup and talking a morning stroll