Fair Fields News

Volume 6, Issue 4. July 18, 2017

On the Farm

We are into our seventh week of CSA pickups and the produce is ramping up. Our offerings will peak in late August to early September, when our hot crops will still be producing and our fall root and leaf crops starting to come. After this week there will be 12 weeks of pickups left, meaning our last week will be October 10-14 (the week after Thanksgiving).

The heat has been a little more consistent these days, and we are looking forward to getting a lot more this week! The hot crops are starting to respond to this change. Our green house tomatoes are just showing the first signs of colour and the field cucumbers and zucchinis are making a run for it. We hope to get a few more good weeks of heat to help the peppers, squash and melons thrive.

This week we will start plowing the field for next year's garden. It is always an exciting time, as it stokes our anticipation of and enthusiasm for the year to come. There is also something very pleasing about turning the soil, seeing the healthy roots and soil life from our red clover cover crop and smelling the rich earth that holds the promise of our food for the coming growing season.

Our buckwheat cover crop is starting to flower. We are always happy for this as it provides a wonderful food source for our honey bees and other wild pollinators. Between the buckwheat and our white clover pathways we feel we are providing a sanctuary for the bees and pollinators, from the monolithic corn, soy and wheat fields that surround our farm and dominate the southern Ontario landscape. We are less excited about the abundance of flowering weeds in our fields, however, they too help provide food for pollinators, a silver lining of sorts...

Next week sometime we will start harvesting our garlic. We mulch our garlic, as it reduces weed pressure, protects it from frost heaving and helps with moisture retention. This year we hope that the mulch has not held in too much moisture. We also hope that nematodes have not become a problem again. Nematodes are microscopic round worms that inhabit every ecosystem on the planet and not all of them are problems. The nematodes that feed on our garlic plants can be a very big problem, destroying over half of our crop last year. We suspect they came in with seed we purchased from a local supplier. Nematodes can persist in the soil for over five years so despite planting this year's garlic in a new location, we worry that it may still be affected. The bulbs we have pulled so far have been beautiful so we are feeling optimistic!

Harvesting

- **Baby Beets**
- **Baby Carrots**
- **Bunch Onions**
- **Cabbage**
- **Cauliflower**
- **Chard**
- **Cucumber**
- **Fresh Garlic**
- **Head Lettuce**
- **Herbs**
- **Kale**
- **Peas**
- **Salad Mix**
- **Zucchini**

Fresh vs. Cured Garlic & Onions

Our main garlic harvest is at least a week off and our main onion harvest will not take place for another month and a half, however, we will be harvesting some of both and giving them fresh in the next few weeks.

Until they are properly cured, both garlic and onions should be stored in the fridge, just like other fresh vegetables.

When cured properly, garlic and onions are both good storage vegetables, which can last 8-10 months in proper conditions. Garlic bulbs are somewhat more delicate and easily bruised than onions. Onions need their stems bent over and a little more field drying. Other than that the curing process for both is fairly similar. They are dug or pulled out of the ground. Loose soil is brushed off and the plants left in the field to dry a little. They are then gathered and laid out or hung in the shade, in a warm place with good air circulation. In our case we dry them in our driveshed/barn on mesh tables, with a very large fan circulating air around them. After about 10-20 days, the outer skin, or "wrappers, dry out, as does the stem. At this point the stem and roots are trimmed and they are stored in a cool dark place with low humidity.

Recipe Ideas

Beet, Cucumber and Sweet Onion Salad with Dijon-Honey Dressing

Here is a great idea for a salad with beets and cucumber. It should feed about 4 people. The sweet beets balance nicely with the spicy tang of the onion and the cucumber.

Ingredients

- 4 medium beets trimmed
- 1 cucumber, cut into 1/4 inch thick rounds
- 1 small or 1/2 large sweet onion, sliced
- 3 tsp. honey
- 3 tsp. apple cider vinegar
- 1-1.5 tsp. Dijon mustard
- 1/4 cup mild tasting oil

Method

Preheat oven to 400° F. Cover beets and roast till tender, about 1-1.5 hours. Cool beets, still covered, and then slice into 1/8 - 1/4 inch thick slices.

Wisk together honey, cider vinegar, Dijon and oil, and set aside.

Either arrange the beets, cucumber and onion on a platter and drizzle dressing over top, or toss ingredients together along with dressing.

This salad would also be good with feta, chevre, ricotta or another fresh soft cheese.

Enjoy!

Head Rot in our Broccoli & Cauliflower

Head rot is a common ailment that affects broccoli grown in Ontario. Rot can be caused by a number of different bacteria and fungi, however, in Ontario the condition is often believed to be caused by the bacterium, Pseudomonas marginalis, a soil borne pathogen that splashes onto the leaves with rain or irrigation (OMAFRA).

With consistently high levels of moisture, whether from heavy dews, frequent rain and/or excessive irrigation, the conditions for this bacterium to grow become optimal. High moisture can cause plants to grow very quickly, at which point they can suffer from calcium and boron deficiencies, as the plant struggles to absorb enough of these nutrients to keep up with the growth rate. Our fields already have low calcium and boron levels, so this can be a particular problem for us. The nutrient deficiencies make plants more susceptible to disease, compounding other problems already caused by excessive moisture.

There are several things we are going to try, to avoid this problem in the future. We are slowly amending the fertility in our fields, including bringing up calcium and boron levels. Calcium additions are done through applying mineral fertilizers and this tends to be a slow process, both because it is expensive and because you don't want to overshoot the mark and end up with nutrient levels that are too high! We will get there, but it may take several more years.

Good air flow and well drained fields are also key. We tend not to have problems with either of these, however, this year we grew a rye cover crop just west of the broccoli. This may have impeded the prevailing wind from providing as much airflow as possible. In future years we will try to mow rye cover crops earlier near our broccoli plantings.

Finally, we are going to try using different varieties, or 'cultivars', of broccoli that are more resilient and less prone to disease. We have favoured the variety "Blue wind," as it grows very fast and has produced good broccoli for us in the past, however, it does seem to be more susceptible to disease, in part because of its quick growth rate. Next year we would like to try "Green magic" as local organic growers have had great success with it, even in wet years.

We are starting to experience some of the same issues with our cauliflower. Keep your fingers crossed that they don't succumb to the same fate!

Fair Fields CSA Potluck

This years CSA Potluck will be **Saturday August 12z**, from **2—7 pm**.

We will be throwing some food on the **BBQ** during that time and enjoying it with some **salads** and **homemade beer**.

We are welcoming members, friends and family and encourage you to bring yours as well and enjoy a **tour of the farm** and some food and beverages with us. There will also be some games set up on the lawn.

Please **RSVP** if you think you will come so we can get a sense of numbers.

Hope to see you there!