

Fair Fields News

Volume 7, Issue 3. July 17, 2018

On the Farm

As I write this newsletter, I am looking out the window at grey skies and rain falling. It fills me with relief and a contented joy... Hopefully we will receive enough rain that we can slow down on irrigation. When using the sprinkler system we have, it is more efficient, in terms of water use, to use it during the evening through mid-morning. When using sprinklers during the day, it is often too hot, dry, sunny and windy. This causes the water to evaporate quickly off the surface of the soil and much can be lost before it even falls on the soil! As a result I have been working late and starting early. No rest for the wicked or dry...

First cut hay is now over and so we are catching up on other farm tasks. The weeds are under control, most of our seeding and transplanting is done, and we have done most of the initial mulching and trel-lising work of the season. By the end of this week, I anticipate we will be working on the perennial herb beds, forgotten dur-

ing the push to plant, pick strawberries and make hay.

We will plant a cover crop in the raspberries this week. The cover crop will be spring barley, which should stand up to some mowing and traffic and will die over winter, so we can weed the patch again next spring. With my love of homebrewing, I have a soft spot for barley. I am hoping it does well in the raspberries and can be used as a regular part of our cover cropping routine in future years.

We hope members will take full advantage of the flowers this season. Pick as many flowers as you like from our u-pick flower gardens for yourselves or as gifts. We have started cutting sunflowers and dahlias, and gladiolas are not too far off. As with everything else, the flowers are early this summer and we are happy for a little bright and early beauty, to counter the parched look much of the farm is starting to get.

We have my mother, Jennifer, to thank for the flowers... and the honey! Born in Milton, ON, Jennifer always wanted to have a

farm when I was growing up. For a brief time her and my father, Donald, even started looking at farmland closer to Hamilton. When I decided to get into farming, both of my parents were very supportive and have helped out on the farm lots, especially Jennifer. She brings her inquisitive research oriented perfectionism to both flower gardening and bee-keeping and is happy to talk with you about either! Please ask her advice cutting flowers and arranging them as it has become a passion of hers.



Harvesting

- Beans
- Beets
- Cabbage
- Carrots
- Chard
- Cucumber
- Flowers
- Garlic
- Green Peppers
- Head Lettuce
- Herbs
- Kale
- Onions
- Potatoes
- Salad Mix
- Zucchini

Fair Fields Open House and Potluck

We will be hosting an open house and potluck for Fair Fields on **Saturday August 4th**, from **2–7 pm**.

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

We are welcoming CSA 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!

Growing Organic Sweet Corn

Our corn is looking really healthy and has started cobbing already. We picked a really good year to start growing corn, as it loves the heat we have been getting this summer. At this rate, we anticipate having corn by then end of July or beginning of August.

This is a big relief, as organic sweet corn can be very hard to grow. Sweet corn seed needs the soil to be very warm for germination. If the soil is too cold during planting, germination will fail and the high sugar content of the seed will cause it to quickly rot away. In my years working on other farms I saw this first hand, as our eagerly planted rows of corn simply did not to emerge well and either underproduced or failed to produce good cobs at all. This is very demoralizing, especially as corn takes so much space and fertility.

In conventional production, the seed is coated with fungicides (and often other pesticides) that help the corn seed from rotting. What this means is the corn can be planted early and left in the soil to germinate when it the temperature finally rises to the right level. This makes it much easier for conventional growers to get a crop in early and make the most of our

short northern growing season. It also means that conventional sweet corn, in addition to being sprayed with pesticides during the growing season, starts out with a toxic coating that affects soil life, pollinators, water ways receiving agricultural run-off and, of course, human health.

There are specific varieties that have been bred for organic production, they are shorter season and tolerate cold soils better. We are growing two varieties, Xtra Tender and Allure. Next year we will try to grow some popcorn and if successful, will incorporate it into the CSA.

To get around the challenge of planting early, our earliest corn was started in the greenhouse in trays and then transplanted out to the field. This corn is far ahead of the other corn that we seeded directly and the stand is more uniform and thick as well. In addition to planting two successions, the two varieties we are growing have different days to maturity. We hope all of this will translate into a

good 4 weeks of corn. Keep your fingers crossed!

Another challenge with growing organic sweet corn is the fertility. Corn in general requires very high fertility, a lot more than the large majority of other crops we grow. In organic systems we try not to add too much fertility to the soil, especially short term. This is because many of the nutrients will be wasted if not used and can run off into local waterways, causing serious contamination and damage to aquatic ecosystems. To get around this, we did a single spray of

molasses and fish emulsion just as the corn was starting to shoot up in height. Our hope is that most of this fertility will be quickly absorbed by the corn and not have a chance to run-off. The complete lack of rain has helped with this...

With the planting, irrigating, fertilizing and weeding mostly done, all we have to do now is wait and keep our fingers crossed, that this will not only be our first time growing corn here at Fair Fields, but also one of the better crops of sweet corn we have ever seen!



Still Looking for Members

We are still looking for members for the 2018 season. As in past years we are not quite at our membership goals and would be happy to take on prorated members. If we can keep getting a couple of members per week we will reach our membership goals by mid-July.

For new members starting partway through the season,

we offer prorated shares roughly proportional to the number of weeks left of pickups. Shares are usually weighted a little heavier towards the end of the season as the overall value of produce rises throughout the summer peaking in late August or early September. This year, however, we have started with a bang, so the

value should be fairly constant throughout the season.

If you think of anyone who may be interested let them know. Also, if you feel comfortable, posting on social media or to any distribution lists you are a part of, please pass our information along. We did a little more marketing this year, however, our member's enthusiasm

through word of mouth continues to be our best form of advertising.

Thanks again for your continued support. Without you this would not be possible and it would also be a lot less fun!

Devan