

Fair Fields News

Volume 7, Issue 8. September 25, 2018

On the Farm

By the end of this week, we will have planted the garlic and seeded most of our covercrops for winter. The only major field tasks left after that will be to mulch the garlic and strawberries. The latter cannot be done till late November or so, when the plants go into dormancy. At this point, most of our energy will go toward construction, mostly the barn extension.

We are very pleased with our squash harvest this season. Last year was a challenge because of all of the cool wet weather. The plants were affected by disease early and the fruits were often immature and of inconsistent size. This year we had lot's of heat, which they love, and the difference is amazing. The plants were vigorous and healthy, the yield is high and the quality looks good. We had a bit of a scare over the weekend, with an unexpected frost, however, the fruits seem undamaged. They are now curing in driveshed, where they will continue to cure over the next few weeks.

We hope this difference will come through in their flavour as well... can't wait!

Also looking good are the cabbage, parsnips, kale and daikon radish. Now we just need a couple of frosts to sweeten them and all the other remaining vegetables, up a bit.

We are in the last weeks of raspberries. With the cooler and wet weather, we will likely stop picking them this month. We do welcome members to continue to pick their own as supplies last.

One crop that is not looking so good is our lettuce. In anticipation of cooler temperatures we plant cold tolerant varieties for this time of year. The intense summer heat we received this month does not sit well with those lettuce varieties, many of which have started to bolt (flower). Much of the rest of our late summer lettuce has come ready all at once. As a result, this week was heavy on lettuce, but we will not be giving as much next week and none the week after that. Don't worry, we

will still have kale, chard, cabbage and spinach to fill your greens needs.

Last week, my mother Jennifer and fellow beekeeper and farm volunteer Chris Gore, did a large honey harvest. They were both shocked by the amount of honey the bees had produced and were only able to harvest half of what was there! They will continue the harvest next week. We will therefore have a lot of honey for sale. It will be available at the CSA pickups till the end of the season, so if you would like to stock up for the winter, don't hold back! If any of you are looking to buy larger quantities, let me know and I will put you in touch with my mother directly.

Chris Gore is a family friend who has been keeping bees at our farm for the past few years. Born in Oakville and growing up in Burlington, Chris now lives with his family in Toronto. Chris' interest in agriculture and agricultural issues grew while attending Guelph University, where he took courses in soil science, agrometeorology and land stewardship. He now works as an associate professor of Politics at Ryerson University and focuses his work on climate change, energy, environment and food security.

Chris enjoys working with and learning about bees and beekeeping, as he feels they give him an opportunity to observe and reflect on many of the bigger issues he thinks about in his work. To him, "bees exemplify the wonder and complexity and concerns about nature and the environment." He also

Harvesting

- **Beets**
- **Broccoli**
- **Cabbage**
- **Celeriac**
- **Carrots**
- **Daikon**
- **Garlic**
- **Kholrabi**
- **Head Lettuce**
- **Herbs**
- **Kale**
- **Onions**
- **Parsnips**
- **Peppers**
- **Potatoes**
- **Pumpkin**
- **Salad Mix**
- **Spinach**
- **Squash**

feels grounded, physically, emotionally, spiritually and professionally, by working with the bees and on other tasks at a farm committed to ecological agriculture.

We appreciate his help as a volunteer, very much enjoy his company and love his cookies!

Chris and Pamela and their daughters Ruby and Hillary



Some Thoughts on Agricultural Labour

It is good we are through most of our field work as this is Jessey's last week with us. He has been a wonderful help this year and will be sorely missed. Him and his fiancé, Michelle, are planning on staying around for the winter and potentially into next season, so we may see more of him yet.

Jessey has been our first fully paid fulltime employee. In past years we have taken on interns instead of hiring for fulltime fully paid positions. In part this is because there are not many young people who are already skilled at sustainable agriculture. Formal educational programs in sustainable agriculture are few and farm between. The push in Canadian Colleges and Universities is towards greater and greater industrialization in agriculture, especially as many public private partnerships have allowed larger corporations to influence curriculum and programing. Many young people are also discouraged from working in agriculture altogether, as many see it as an undesirable or economically unfeasible career.

As there are so few opportunities, providing internships is not just important for training our staff, but also for training the next generation of sustainable farmers.

Agricultural labour does not pay very highly. Skilled works operat-

ing field equipment, employment in the dairy sector, and many careers associated with agriculture, like veterinary care, all pay decently. Most horticulture (market gardening) labour is hard and does not pay much more than minimum wage, which is one of the reasons many labourers in Ontario horticulture are migrants. Most Canadians have given up on this type of work.

Despite the low wages, which are the standard in horticulture, we have taken on interns in the past as we felt financially unable to pay even minimum wage. This has become more challenging with the rise in minimum wage. We agree completely, without reservation, with the increase in minimum wage in this province and feel sad the Progressive Conservatives have decided to not raise it to \$15/hr. Low wages affect agricultural workers, who are often low paid and they also limit the spending power of the working class, who in turn have less to spend on food. These are some of the biggest problems with our food system, that good food is unaffordable to the poor and that agricultural labour is underpaid. Together they contribute to food insecurity. None the less, higher wages are challenging for us...

Our experience this year has changed our thinking around internships versus fulltime paid la-

bour. We still feel it is important to provide learning opportunities and so are still open to having interns in the future. Paying full wages is also still a challenge. On the other hand, we felt much more productive this year with a fully paid and skilled employee. Jessey has years of experience with farm equipment and a variety of crops, needed less instruction and could jump right into a task. It was also easier for me not to have to juggle training, educational planning and task management.

We were able to afford to keep Jessey working this season, in part, because my uncle Jim has volunteered so much (Thanks Jim!). Hopefully our switch from CSA to a mix of CSA, u-pick and wholesale income, will allow us to move away from relying on volunteer labour to pay non volunteer labour, and eventually toward being able to pay all of our staff full wages, interns and myself included!

Our hope is that in future years we will be able to hire two full time staff, a regular paid employee with some good agricultural experience, and an intern who is newer to agriculture. We will also likely need part time pickers during our busy season. And there will always be space and need for volunteers, family, friends and the other people who help this farm work.

Pumpkins

We have a great crop of pumpkins this year, made up of four pumpkin varieties. Three of the varieties are pie pumpkins and they are:

Winter Luxury: A new-England style pie pumpkin that is very sweet. Winter Luxury is great for cooking with and also has the more classic jack-o'-lantern shape, for those who wish to use them as decoration or to light up the night on Halloween.

Long Pie: This is my favourite pie pumpkin to cook with. It is shaped more like a fat zucchini, has a thin skin, thick flesh and few seeds, making it very easy to work

with. The flavour is good too, though not as sweet as winter luxury.

Rouge Vif D'ETampe: A French pastry pumpkin and the most decorative pie pumpkin we grow, this pumpkin looks a lot like the carriage in Cinderella, giving it the nickname Cinderella pumpkin.

We will be giving pie pumpkins the week before thanksgiving and again at the last pickup, if there are any remaining.

Our jack-o'-lantern pumpkin this year is **Howden**. We have grown this classic variety before, but it has never grown quite so large. Some of them are massive!



Jack-o'-lanterns will be given at the last pickup.