



Saugeen River CSA

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Newsletter

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Hello everyone,

Well it's the start of a new year and a new growing season. I apologize for not writing a newsletter earlier. I have always called it a "periodical" that comes out periodically. Not writing a newsletter does not mean nothing is happening on the farm. But I have to say it has taken a while to recover from this past season.

The 2017 season will go down as one of the hardest growing seasons in many farmer's memory. One fellow farmer expressed it as this past year felt like it took twice the effort for half the result of other years. Although the reality wasn't that bad, the feeling was noticeable. The incredible regularity of the rains made many things much more challenging. Many tasks had to be done multiple times to get the same or below average results. Soil preparation was one. Killing weeds is one of the purposes of working the soil, but if it is raining every other day, working the ground does not kill the weeds, it just sets them back a bit. So where in some years one or two passes with the harrow would do the trick, this year four or five didn't even do it. Hay was the other main challenge for all animal farmers. The three days of dry weather in a row you need to bale out hay was very hard to come by this

year... it nearly didn't happen. I only had one field I was able to bale without the hay getting rained on. So even though I got a barn full of hay in the fall, much of it is not high enough in nutrition to sustain, particularly the horses. In the fall I was not sure if I would be able to keep the horses, since finding good hay was going to be a challenge, but luckily I was able to find some, and the horses have been able to stay... although I will be paying over \$1,000 in hay to keep them here.

But, not to harp on only the negative... in the end, the season for vegetables turned out pretty well. Of course not all the crops did the best ever, but some crops did and others were acceptable. As the new normal seems to be extremes in weather, the sustainable agriculture strategy of working with diversity is more and more clear. Diversity of crops makes sure we have food to eat, since different crops can withstand different extremes.

Diversity can also extend into the plant varieties themselves. I try to work with varieties that are used to growing in organic soil. Many varieties have been bred to do well in conditions dependent on chemical inputs. But the genetic diversity that can lie in open pollinated crops gives them an edge in extreme conditions. But this diversity does not stop with the crops, a very important part of diversity is in the soil itself. Within a gram of healthy soil there can be millions of living organisms. Humus development in the soil, a key in organic

and Biodynamic agriculture, nurtures the diversity of organisms which can respond intelligently to different situations. Particularly in Biodynamics, animal manures used in composting can help develop this intelligence. So our success in growing food is always a group effort in cooperation with the animals, the plants and the soil... a real partnership.

I've had a few folks ask what's happening on the farm, so I thought it might be good to share what winter looks like at the Saugeen River CSA. When the main season CSA distribution ends in November, there is still a great deal to do on the farm to prepare for winter. It can take about a month or more to put tools away, clean up hoses, and various things to prepare greenhouses for spring. Since the winter can be so variable, and we sometimes have 4 feet of snow in March when I have to start seeding, I have to be generally ready in December, before the snow really comes.

Then, towards the end of December, as the seed catalogues start arriving, I am spending some time getting the seed order ready. I place my seed order early in January before some of the varieties I like are sold out. The general garden plan is figured out the August of the year before, as that is when I have to get the cover crops seeded based on crop rotation. With over 200 varieties of vegetables, herbs and flowers that are grown here, I wait until doing to seed order to figure out the specifics of the garden plan.

Also, in winter I have to do the financial overview from the previous year, which also involves getting ready for tax returns. I will have a financial report ready for the next newsletter.

The first seedings start in the greenhouse in mid March. Depending on the weather, keeping the greenhouse warm enough with the woodstove is pretty involved. It is always therapeutic to experience spring early... and I will call on folks to come out and help seed.



Of course there is the Winter CSA distribution, which is only a day of work really every other week, so not so involved. However, every day, 7 days a week there are the animal chores. Feeding cows, chickens and horses, as well as cleaning out horse stalls and getting the horses in and out takes about 3 hours every day. Although the winter is much slower than the spring, summer and fall, the farm still needs to be carried. I need this break to balance the intensity of work during the main season, as well to pursue the teaching that I do in the winter and other interests.

In doing the garden seed order and planning, I'm always tweaking previous year's crops. Some of the tweaks for the coming season: I am trying a couple different eggplant varieties since it seems the variety that did well for many years is not doing so well now... I don't know the reason, but eggplant is something of the 'Cinderella' of vegetables. It doesn't like it

too hot, or too cold, or too wet, or too dry... it likes it 'just right.' It would probably do best in the greenhouse, but it is not a favorite of many people, so dedicating the limited greenhouse space to eggplant doesn't make sense when tomatoes and peppers also like it in there.

And speaking of peppers, I am also trying a red sweet pepper variety that I am hoping will be more productive. The fruit will be smaller, but there should be more of them which will work better again for the limited space we have.

I'm also going to try to spread the cucumber harvest out. It often happens that we have an abundance of cucumbers all at once and then nothing. This will involve growing some in the greenhouse, but also more smaller plantings outside. In order to do this I had to drop something, and I decided what made the most sense to drop was melons.

I know we all love melons, but for the amount that we get and the space they take it is questionable whether it makes sense. I think people would like a more regular supply of cucumbers than a couple of melons in September. I'm also trying to supply carrots for as much of the season as possible. Our soil has a great balance of clay and silt and organic matter that carrots usually do really well and taste great. But space and labor is always an issue, so I will be growing some of the culinary herbs closer to the house, giving garden space up to carrots... Many more tweaks will happen, but those are a few.

Happy increased light!

Cory

