

6-1-2008

Hi Groundswell CSA supporter and member!

We are feeling more confident about your vegetables with the warm moist weather today and in the forecast- we planted all the peppers and tomatoes in the past two days as well as beans and squash- 3000+ feet of plant ground covered. We hope to get the eggplants and basil in tomorrow if the ground is dry enough.

Here are the logistics for the coming week.

First please take a moment to join the google group so you can get messages throughout the season.

Next Tuesday and Wednesday (June 3 & 4) in Holland and Grand Rapids respectively, mark our first pick-up days of the season.

Check our website for maps to locations- www.groundswellfarm.org.

You can pick up between 4:30 and 6pm. **If you do not show up- or send someone in your place you will not receive the vegetables. This is true for every week of the spring/summer/fall.**

We do not split shares for you- we only sell whole shares, many if not most of you are splitting shares and you will need to arrange with your friends how you will split it- **we wish to remain uninvolved** - unless you are splitting with a low income family we can help you then.

Your balance for the share is due on the first pick-up we will be checking you off and taking the balance as you come or go from the pick-up that day- unless you have made other arrangements with us.

Another important change from last year is that **we will not be bringing plastic bags to pick-ups** That is why we are giving each share two bags- one small and one large -

This first week's veggie forecast is (per share):

Two bags

Two plants (tomato or pepper plant and another choice) - **if you want plants please bring containers or a bag for them!!!**

A choice of two types of seed from our storage for your garden.

Sorrel (lemon flavored green)

Lettuce

Radishes

Sage or chives

perhaps another green- we will see how the spinach looks!

June- the salad month! It is a little slim this first pick-up as the weather has slowed the growth of everything.

Thank you very much! We look forward to meeting you!! |

Groundswell Farmers

5-2-2008

With an extremely cold night in the teens now behind us, we are transplanting every moment. There shall be many onions for all if the season goes well, all the bulb onions are planted and Anna may be planting leeks as I type. The first spinach, carrots, beets, salad greens, radishes and turnips are in the ground and were followed by a good rain today. They should germinate nicely with this weather and make for early crops as we had last year. Next up is planting some cabbage-family plants and lettuces into the field. Also, with sorrel, sage and chives in their second season, we will have herbs much earlier--there will be sorrell the first week when June arrives.

Our time in the field thus far has been so so pleasant. The weather is just perfect, not too hot or cold, the soil is warm and dark and exactly like chocolate cake as we tuck in the plants. Even my shoulders feel less sore than years past, though pressing thousands of plants into dirt works some muscles that have rested all winter. We're outside in it all day, basking in the dirt.

When you visit this year, you will see two new farm members--pigs Babbette and Sweetpea. They love attention and are really just kidlike, playing hide & seek behind their abode, chasing each other in glee, wrestling around for fun. Mostly they root through the soil with their noses, eating roots and whatever they take a liking to. They never tire of this, except for their many naps in the shade. For a little excitement, once they eluded their fence and wandered the farm for 15 minutes before I barricaded them in a building that's under construction. My heart almost stopped when a pig walked non-chalantly past me in the driveway. I didn't chase them, I just called Anna for back-up, offered food and water and waited for them to go where I could sequester them. Fortunately, they were in their pen before dark and no damage done. When the fields are planted it could be more of a risk--pigs in the carrot patch would force me to chase them and I am not a swift runner.

4-10-2008

Welcome to Groundswell CSA!

Today we just got our final membership in the mail, making us an 80 member CSA. This is a special year and your support is very encouraging as it is the third and final year before we apply for organic certification. I also thank you for sending kind and thoughtful words our way. We are loving this year! There are a few logistical items below.....

Pick-up- first days

Our first pick-up days are the first Tuesday and Wednesday in June, the 3rd and 4th respectively for

Holland and Grand Rapids. (The website is not updated- don't trust dates there yet!) We will send plenty of reminder e-mails/ mail or phone calls about time and place.

Payment

We expect to have received your full payment of \$400 on or before June 3rd or 4th- whichever pick-up day applies to you unless you have made special arrangements with us.

Vegetables- whatcha got?

This year we are growing a few additional items that are not listed on the website, sweet potatoes, okra, and brussle sprouts. For monthly baskets go to <http://www.groundswellfarm.org> and go from there to the Join the Farm link, scroll down to the middle of the page and click on Sample baskets- there are monthly baskets there of what we have generally. There is usually even more variety- we are growing a lot of hot peppers this year and dill and sage will come occasionally- we also have the occasional leek and parsnip choice in the fall.

3 Hours of Work

As far as the three hours of work- we are flexible about this generally with regards to what you do to contribute, think about what your strengths are if they do not include weeding or getting dirty (MUCH funner than it sounds). If you want to help write addresses on envelopes for an event or lead a children's activity at a potluck on the farm, or maybe you are part of a band and can provide music for a farm festival one time. There are lots of ways. Also, if life is just too hectic this year, we won't be knocking on your door demanding your time in October.

Spring work day

We will be thinking about a work day this spring to allow those who can't come in the summer months. We will let you know probably no more than a week in advance- spring is very touchy and we do our work as the weather dictates. The fall is a time where we will have to harvest large amounts of potatoes and winter squash.

Googlegroups

Finally, we will be sending an invitation out to become a part of our online googlegroup. (some of you are already in it). This will be the way you get our weekly updates throughout the seasons- so keep an eye out for that. The group will allow you to keep in touch how you want to, with us, other members, to answer each others' questions and share recipes, etc.

Thanks for reading and we will be in touch soon.

Anna

4-9-2008

The last few years, our list of projects in April seemed insurmountable, necessarily immediate, foreboding. We are either less intimidated or we are actually getting the hang of buying equipment, building things and making the dozens of phone calls that start a season on the farm.

The seeds and the fields, this time of year, are less an infinite task. Spend a beautiful Saturday afternoon poking the soil with round and wrinkly peas, shaking straw into a thick mulch. Or a morning in the greenhouse and you've squeezed a field full of peppers into a square foot of 'acreage' on a heated

germinating table. These are given. We know that the field will call us to plant it, that the greenhouse schedule will be filled with the dates and amounts needed to plant, our easy-to-follow recipe for 3 acres.

In 2006, building a greenhouse, getting a water-well, buying a truck and finding the hundreds of tools you need to buy, build or borrow left many lists unfinished. Even last year seemed not entirely certain, yet we crossed off buying a tractor, building the walk-in cooler and countless small essentials. At least now we could be certain that the crops would grow, the CSA members would enjoy the veggies we've grown.

This year's new projects: Buying a specialty tractor for weeding, building a comfortable home for two pigs, getting health insurance. Two of these are projects we had planned for year 1 and year 2, but now are nearly done. We are researching building a second greenhouse and a pole barn or other structure for winter tractor storage, probably in 2009. And soon we will own our land, a cause for celebration that you will hear more about when the papers are signed.

None of these things seems impossible (this morning!) None are so urgent that the farm will implode. None requires Anna or I to learn a new skilled trade, so common in the first season when plumbing, construction, electrical wiring, marketing and small business accounting & tax preparation were new, unknown and absolutely necessary to the success of the farm.

It will all happen. The crops will grow with only a few disappointments. The season will find us trying to harvest it all.

1-21-2008

Happy New Year- 2008!

The seed orders have been sent with many exciting additions- there are a few ones added that are not usually high on the veggie lover list- like Brussels sprouts and okra- but eating them fresh is like eating a completely different vegetable.

We will also be trying a white sweet potato along with the orange. We also added a few different herbs and tomatoes of course!

Hopefully this inspires you to confirm your membership for Groundswell CSA 2008-- 22 weeks of vegetables, June- October!

You may send your deposit of \$100, the rest is due on the first pick-up date, or the total amount. Please print and sign the membership form and send it in with your check.

The form is found at our website- www.groundswellfarm.org follow the Join the Farm link. Thank you and hope you are all staying warm through the winter storms-- dreaming of fresh green salads and sweet crunchy carrots.

Send your form and check to: Groundswell Farm

6527 Quincy Ave.

Zeeland, MI 49464

Also we have plenty of openings for new members so if your neighbors or friends are interested let them know or send this message along!

See you in the Spring!

Anna Hoekstra

(616) 635-7978- for any questions!

If you sent your deposit in already or paid in full- please ignore this message! You can call me to confirm that we got it if you wish.-- Thanks

11-06-2007

Hi!

Thanks for everyone's help Saturday!! WE got it all done. Thanks to

Mandy as well for your help on Thursday!

If you took pictures during your time on the farm this season, and would like some on the webpage, send them to us as some kind of downloadable file! We will be getting ready for a webpage update!

Also does anyone have space for a tractor in their garage or know of someone who might? Thanks for the tips so far we are still considering/looking into them.

Thanks! Anna

10-31-2007

We had the most beautiful garlic planting day that Anna or I can remember. This usually ends up happening on a cold, windy day with bare hands freezing in cold, wet soil. This year, the soil was actually warm from a full day of sun. The wind blew as always, but I had to take my coat off for the warmth and sun. We've planted two full beds of garlic, or 600 row feet, which is two or three times what we grew this year. I hope this planting grows as well as the giant bulbs we had this year.

Actually, I hope that everything grows as well next season as it did this year. It's been abundant and exhausting as summers and autumns should be. Only one or two failed crops, the usual pests and diseases, the drought came late enough that all the transplants thrived and the seeds germinated. The walk-in cooler built, a tractor bought, it was truly an eventful second year of farming.

Anna and I harvested today for the final CSA pickup (which is TOMORROW, Thursday, at Well House,

to avoid Halloween conflicts) There was no dew in the morning, which is very odd this time of year, to have the ankles of my pant legs dry helps to stave off the morning chill. The sun shone for a while as we harvested. After lunch, the wind blew and the sky darkened just enough to remind that it is Halloween and the day should be a bit more drear.

We hope you've all enjoyed the season and are as worn out from chopping veggies as we are from harvesting them . . . hopefully you've a bit left in the freezer or in canning jars to enjoy the harvest this winter. If not, there is always next year. Enjoy your winter and we'll see you next spring, June 3 & 4, with nothing but a few salad greens and perhaps some radishes for those first few salad weeks of the harvest.

10-24-2007

We will be bringing extra squash for sale next week, 75 cents a pound (cheaper than Meijer conventional!) So if you want a few extra bring dollars and cents. Also if you would like a large quantity call us and come out to pick some out yourself from the greenhouse. Give us a call this week or next to set up a time. Thanks!

10-10-2007

With the memory of working up a sweat while carving a pumpkin fresh in my mind- it is difficult to believe I am turning up the heat full blast and pressing my frozen hands to the vents- we are off to the library and harvest health on "important" errands.

Harvesting as fast as we could this morning I couldn't decide what was more miserable crouched in the celery patch in the wind and rain or washing vegetables in the icy water. This is what I wanted I remind myself- some truly seasonable weather- a sign that global warming has not made everything backwards. Perhaps an iceberg is melting a little slower today.

I think about what has yet to be done before I can really start getting ready for that trip to LA or Mexico I am planning in my dreams.

You ask what you can do to help to contribute your three hours and although there is plenty my mind is not there yet - the relief of not having to pick some things has just not really hit me, since we are still picking some of them- Thinking ahead and getting ready for cooler- tear down work is not on my mind as much as it should be. We anticipate a frost Friday morning, so work on Thursday is welcomed and several of you plan on coming out. If you want to arrange an early evening Thursday we can do that-- that is tomorrow though so understandable if this is too late notice. Other work will include taking out the strings on the tomatoes and pulling out each stake so we can put them all up again next year in a different spot.

Grand Rapids folks- would you like an arranged working day at Wellhouse? Let me know if you are interested and I will get in touch with them.

Thanks and the Harvest Fest was great although last year folks stayed home because it was too cold- this year many stayed home because it was too hot!!

10-04-2007

one more chance

to get it all finished and right

sun sets in October eve its probably 75 degrees

like the earth has slowed its seasonal turning for me to enjoy another summer while the farm slows

bugs play in the low southwesterly light

detour on main street makes me notice the stark beauty of the muffler shop

its giant plate glass display window with twisted mufflers like an installation piece reassembled with artistic extravagance

there is some kind of festival with children turning the steering wheel of a fire truck

at this festival there are complicated displays of non-scary scarecrows filling downtown Zeeland

some with screen printed pillow faces and others with blank white pillow faces

they are getting married or hiding in an outhouse; more often you can't tell what the assemblages are doing

they look like they are just chatting after church or something else unassuming and uncontroversial

an extra chance at summer, strange and real

for no reason but to make the harvesting more pleasant

or the end of a farming season less real

look up from typing, kids' artworks line every spare space in the library, a quilt show in the lobby

better live right

be real and kind and not have a blank pillow face

10-01-2007

October awakens me with a rainy 5AM. The trees are changing colors now and we've had a second frost. We have just a month of CSA left and we're thinking about winter and next year. Rainy days slow us down a bit and allow for a little reflection on where we want this farm to go and how to get there.

I just bought cover crop seed to keep down weeds and erosion this winter and we are trying some new ones--winter wheat will be in areas where we won't plant until early summer and hairy vetch will have an entire year to grow in the field where there will be potatoes in 2009. Oats we've grown before and we'll plant them in about half of the "Early Spring" field; the other half we will leave as is. The risk is that we may have more weeds in the "do-nothing" field and more cutworms where we planted the oats. Then we can see what we like better for that back area of the field in future years.

As part of buying cover crop seed, I had to write a crop rotation for next year. We've switched over to a "two-step" rotation. In many crop rotations, next year's crops end up adjacent to where they grew last year. You can just watch the Colorado Potato Beetles spread from east to west, migrating along with the potato crop. And whenever I toss a diseased pepper to the west out of the pepper patch to protect this year's peppers, I think of the disease that I'm throwing into next year's pepper patch. I want to try to slow down or foil some of these pests and diseases. So, we'll give it a try to move two plots over, hoping that the Colorado Potato Beetles and the diseases will be slowed down by the 100 foot of another crop between their wimpy red larvae or helpless disease spores and their host plants. Some farms accomplish the same thing by having a cover crop every other year in their rotation, but we've only about 5 acres and we'll soon need every bit of it.

Anna and I have been making plans for expanding the CSA for 2008, probably to about 80 members. Winter has a way of making us more ambitious, so we will see. This would fill part of the front section of the field, so that our crops would be growing all the way up to Quincy Street.

At home this Sunday, I was thinking about what I'll eat this winter. I canned tomatillo sauce, froze peppers, strung up hanging bouquets of cayenne peppers and made some sauerkraut. And my boyfriend boiled down sauce tomatoes for about 6 hours and will add spices to make ketchup later this week. Canning tomatillos was new and I could not find a recipe for canning just tomatillos. Everything had onions and spices and sugar and then they had to add vinegar to lower the pH. Fortunately, a roommate had pH strips so I could test my tomatillo sauce to see if it was below 4.6pH. It turned out to be plenty acidic, so I could can the tomatillo sauce without a pressure cooker and without adding vinegar or lime juice. The ketchup and cayenne were also new adventures and we joked that if we kept trying all these new things, then we'll use up all the possibilities in the world. With the way food preserving seems to go, though, we'll just add each of these to the annual to-do list and figure that we can't live through the winter with them. What if we have to buy salsa verde or ketchup or cayenne powder in the store?

9-23-2007

PASTURE RAISED, ORGANIC FED POULTRY FOR SALE

COST: \$3.50/lb (weight range - 4-5 lbs each)

AVAILABILITY: 130 chickens

PICK UP DATE: Saturday October 6th from Noon - 5pm

WHERE: Lubbers Farm 862 Luce St. SW Grand Rapids

DIRECTIONS: Take Lake Michigan Dr.(M-45) west of Wilson to 8th Ave and take 8th avenue south, dead ends at Luce, take a right and their drive is immediately on the left.

Our birds are raised on pasture for 9 weeks from chicks obtained from Townline Hatchery in Zeeland and Freedom Rangers in Dekora, Iowa. The pens are put on fresh pasture each day. After 6 weeks, the chickens are free to roam each day as they like, foraging for insects and other foods. The chickens will be processed humanely on site at Lubbers Farm on October 6th and will be ready for pick up at Noon. We request they be picked up the day of processing.

Please contact Tom Cary at byrontc@gmail.com or 616-336-9427 to order or with questions.

9-23-2007

A frost in mid-September is early, but only two weeks sooner than we expect in this low-lying frost pocket. This time, not only did the cold air sink downward into our little valley of muck, the heat was drifting high into a cloudless sky. Grand Rapids and Holland each had a blanket of clouds to warm the land in those important moments just before the dawn. I could see clouds to the east and the west, but I only had a moment to notice the sweet smell of basil rotting in the field--we had a truck to load for market. The thermometer read 30.9.

We returned from our biggest market day of the year and I went in my trailer to cook, eat and rest. I thought that Anna had left, but no, she was in the field harvesting peppers in preparation for an expected frost the following morning. Peppers, hot peppers and then for the real work. Winter squash is heavy and our quarter acre could fill the entire tables and floor of the greenhouse.

We harvested to near exhaustion and then at 6:30 I was off to the symphony--a friend at farmers' market had given me two tickets. Just as unseasonal as a supermarket, the symphony had planned "Rites of Spring" by Stravinsky. It's a crazy bit of dissonance that had 1913 audiences yelling advice as to how to proceed with the music. I imagine, "Try making a melody that runs through the whole piece . . ." or "Down with this blasphemous cacophony!" I feel like hollering something more along the lines, "Don't you know autumn from spring?!"

The music was pretty and I could drift half-asleep-dreaming that next week would not have us going to bed with work left undone. The tomatoes had become absurd; that Monday we had sorted and harvested them from about 8AM until 6PM. There had been no dew in the morning, which meant an early start and rain finally fell just when Anna hoped for intervention from the universe to end this endless task.

We were saved from another gigantic tomato harvest just after the frost by Second Harvest Gleaners. We feared that all our plans of what to have them harvest were shattered by the frost, but it turned out to be perfect timing--they took about 1200 pounds of tomatoes, peppers, green onions and collard greens to add to 1500 pounds of food about a month ago.

The tomatoes are still OK, but they've slowed down a good bit . . . the manic harvest slows.

9-09-2007

This email is late. I know. I've been sick and I have a mysterious rash on my arm and I'm about to get a cold sore. My immune system has demanded (rather rudely) that I take a break and pay attention to my health. Drink water, rest, read. All these things are really inconvenient in a time of the year when the plants are producing phenomenal bounties of all types of food.

While I spent last week working short little one or two hour shifts interrupted by many breaks, Anna was harvesting your food from dawn to dusk. Fortunately, dusk arrives a bit sooner now that September has arrived, or our hero may have collapsed. Not only did Anna make sure that everyone got their weekly bunch of carrots and such, but she has amassed a truly unbelievably huge amount of tomatoes. There were six stacks of tomato trays, each taller than myself when we returned from market on Saturday. For the second time this year, we'll have to buy a truckload of black trays or else start stacking the abundance in bread trays and whatnot. (PLEASE let us know if we can sell you a bushel or two of mixed heirlooms for canning (\$18) or if you would would like to take some #2 tomatoes for canning or any other use.)

Not only did Anna save the tomatoes from near certain splitting and destruction, she was really cool all week. Never once did she say, "Aren't you better yet" or "Your immune system be damned, we need to finish harvesting for market" or any of the number of things that certainly crossed my mind. She wanted, kindly, to know how I was doing or to tell me about a dream she had or to ask where I had left off in the broccoli patch.

A lot of people asked how it was to start a farm with someone you weren't married to. It's maybe a "family farm" thing, or maybe it's because women are new to farming, so one would expect to find a husband hiding somewhere or at least driving the tractor. But our boyfriends are off being journalists and chicken farmer/environmental activists, so Anna and I get to run things. There are only a few things that both of us aren't perfectly ready to do: I don't do plumbing or answer tough questions about the lettuce. Anna doesn't do electrical work. In other ways, I think we both know that we may do things differently, but that the other will always find a good way. Don't get me wrong, Anna and I disagree on some things and get tired from overwork and get tired from making decisions, et cetera. Fortunately, I think that we'll be able to keep farming and laughing together.

Feel free to stop by the farm for tomatoes or call either of us for canning tomatoes! We often don't have our phones on us in the field, but we do return messages . . .

Katie-616.885.7776

Anna-616.635-7978

8-30-2007

It seems the wrong time of year to write an ode to parsley. Tomatoes, watermelon, carrots and all the other wonders of late August steal the sunlight from this plant. Yet, it is full of flavor and nutrition and grows like mad in August and September. Last week I lived on nothing but Tabouli. I had taken literally ten bunches of parsley and sat still for a long time, just tearing away leaves from their stringy stems. I mixed these with bulger after it cooled and poured in a dressing of lemon juice, oil and salt. I added a few cucumbers to the mix, but the tomatoes I would add at table for a fresh taste every time and a variety of flavors and colors. Kalie, who works for us part time, said it was delicious. Just yesterday, Anna made a batch of her quinoa tabouli. Also delicious. And today, I made a stir fry of onions, carrots, red cabbage, red pepper and parsley with couscous and black beans. Soups can also be filled with volumes of parsley, for flavor and nutrition and I rarely make a lentil soup without it.

I've gone to farmer's market with several veggie farms and at one we told everyone that parsley was the most nutritious thing on the table. (At another farm, kale won hands down . . .) Now is too deep in the height of summer to find a moment to do the research to verify this, but it does make me feel well when I eat it. Also, the plants are growing to mammoth proportions, each of the bunches is about half a plant. In the depths of winter when I live on frozen and canned veggies, I splurge with fresh parsley from the store more than any other vegetable.

Ideas for those with a month and a half of parsley in the fridge . . . and for those who zip past the parsley basket without grabbing a bunch at CSA . . . maybe even for those who love it as I do . .

8-24-2007

Hope to see many of you tomorrow! Also children who planted in the children's garden can u-pick corn and beans tomorrow or any time they come out! Try to limit one ear per child as some youngster's corn may not have come up and some corn stalks have more than one. I don't want any one left out. If they

are all gone there is corn growing in the flower garden for your child to pick. We can even have some for lunch tomorrow if kids want to.

Clarification: If you are not able to make it tomorrow you will still get potatoes. The group will be harvesting for everyone and we will bring the potatoes to pick up in the coming weeks. Thank you.

Here we go!

Tomatoes

Peppers

Eggplant

Cucumbers

Zucchini/Summer Squash

Something green: lettuce, parsley, basil, salad mixes, kale, chard, collards or all of the above

Hot peppers

Onions

Cabbage

rutabaga

Carrots

Beets

Maybe some of the following:

Potatoes

Leeks

Broccoli

Parsnips

Maybe something else! Take care

Anna

8-22-2007

There are few reasons to be thankful for a drought, but a field that can withstand five inches of rain without flooding is probably best. Our soil soaked in this entire, record-setting deluge due to its capacity for absorbing water, where a one inch rain will saturate only the top 2-3 inches of soil. It is also highly permeable; water will soak downward through saturated soil at 6 - 20 inches per hour, as long as there is somewhere to go. With our very shallow water table about 2 - 3 feet below the surface, this is the key. Once the space is filled, it doesn't matter how fast water can move, we will flood. Fortunately, this very heavy rainfall wasn't spread out over the watershed upstream of us along the Macatawa River, which is another risk with the river just 20 or so feet from the corner of our field.

A flooded field would seriously limit, or more likely completely wash out the harvest for the farm. Our neighbor tells of a year that his entire field of Chinese cabbage was filled to the center with mud, not native muck from his own field, but clay from upriver or uphill of this land. When the waters recede, some things would be fine, others merely edible and many others simply destroyed.

There were a few minor casualties from the rain and wind. A few sections of tomatoes have tipped over, snapping the wood stakes and bending or uprooting our new metal stakes that we added this year to make sure that none would fall. And we had to put off our Monday tomato harvest until Wednesday, as there was no dry time, except when we were gone at CSA distribution on Tuesday. Many tomatoes split, because the plant took in water faster than the skins of the fruit could grow. Also, the onions had to be moved into the greenhouse when the onion hut proved to be a little leaky. We haven't had a chance to till so that we can transplant the last of the lettuce for the year, as tilling the wet soil causes soil compaction and can make a hardpan of impenetrable soil where the rototiller tines actually beat into the soil.

Conversely, everything is growing like mad. Cabbages have tripled in size, carrots are huge, lettuces are all ripening at the same moment. And recently-planted seeds and transplants look great and have germinated well. We needed the rain and the lightning and the rainbows. We needed a slow Monday shivering in the greenhouse and cutting off onion tops. Just don't let there be another heavy rain!

8-20-2007

Potato Dig!!

The moment we have all been waiting for-- The Groundswell Potato

Digging Festival!

We are excited to announce that this coming Saturday - August 25, 2007

at 10 am in the morning we will be having a potato dig here at the

farm. If the weather is rainy it will be held on the following

Saturday.

We hope you can come out and enjoy this activity. The potato dig will

be followed by a potluck starting around 12 or 12:30 depending on how

long the potatoes take to dig up, of course! Bring water and gloves,

we have gloves too if you forget.

Cookbook!

If you or the person you are sharing your veggies with did not receive a cookbook you may get one this week as we will be bringing them for those who did not receive them. If your share has one already but you would like one too you can buy one from us for \$7 or go to our webpage www.groundswellfarm.org and download and print your own.

Thanks and see you later this week!

Your GSC Farmers

8-19-2007

August is a mania, too much of all things each asking to be harvested, washed, sold, brought to CSA, canned, frozen, donated or composted. Then each of these are to be harvested again. Some plants need to be picked three times a week, mainly summer squash and zucchini; Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Others need to be picked twice a week; tomatoes, eggplant, cucumbers, broccoli and others-- these are usually Mondays and Thursdays. And once a week, all the ripe watermelons, beans, salad mixes and other crops need to be pulled or cut from the plants. Others we harvest almost daily, for freshness and to keep up with the plants, lettuce and many other crops are harvested four days a week, whenever we have somewhere to deliver them.

If you don't harvest any part of the field, the plants will grow too comfortable in the understanding that their seeds will ripen, their work is done. Let things go a bit too long and you can watch the broccoli get ugly, the tomatoes crack and mold and stink, the beans become tough and unpleasant, the basil will go to flower. A week or so later, you will have a poor harvest of broccoli smalls, your cherry tomatoes may slow down to almost nothing, your beans will need to be harvested and tossed to the ground and still may not recover, the basil will need to have the flowers removed or the patch abandoned. Only peppers seem to get better with time, these will ripen to a delicious ripe, red pepper. Even then, many more will be lost to disease as things like anthracnose, blossom end rot and sun scald take a growing toll on the ripening fruit.

Even packing things into boxes and crates is too much. With all of our harvest bins full of watermelon in the cooler, we keep having to buy more of these. We harvested too many tomatoes last week to fit in to the tulip bulb trays that we use to hold them. There were four stacks taller than me. Likewise, the waxed boxes are growing tired, with weak bottoms that fall out spilling broccoli or cabbage. We've bought a truckload (literally) of the tomato trays and are now on the schedule at Harvest Health to get their extra waxed boxes.

These are the petty complaints of a good season! Enjoy the harvest, let us know if you want a large quantity of anything for canning or freezing, we've more than we know what to do with . . .

8-16-2007

Here's a Glimpse of what to Expect Next week!

Tomatoes

Peppers

Eggplants

Summer Squash

Onions

Beets

Carrots

Lettuce

Greens

Rutabaga

Cucumber

green onions

Maybe melon

cabbage

Hot peppers

Basil

Sorrel- hoping we remember

U-remember- U-pick:

Cherry Tomatoes (2-3 large handfuls)

Beans (one pound)

One handful of flowers (not the butterfly bush, though!) compliments of my mom, Laura!

Have a great one, Hope I didn't miss anything.

8-09-2007

The youngest visitors to the farm bring a whole new perspective to the beauties of the fields. Every three-and-a-half-year-old enchanted by our enormous collection of cabbage white butterflies fluttering in the broccoli makes me glad and turns my eyes away from the holes that these beautiful creatures chew in the collards. To the child and the butterfly that all was a lifetime ago, before the hungry green caterpillar grew its wings. Or even there is complete innocence of these connections, the plant is not known to be a collard green, a collard green is not dinner for a family, nor is the collard worth \$1.25, and for the youngest the butterfly is not a caterpillar. There is value in seeing these connections, but it is freeing to just see a pretty butterfly again.

We have a lot of young visitors to the farm. I've heard from many parents, "we hope we actually get more done than we are a distraction" and I can't really say how nice it is to throw basil flowers in the air like confetti rather than just tossing them to the ground. It's not a real response, but that's usually along my lines of thought. I usually just say that Anna and I really enjoy having kids out at the farm. We're not a school or a park and there is much work to be done, but the thing is that kids often want a chance to help and pulling carrots can be fun for someone, young or old. It's really nice to hear, "the kids learned how broccoli grows," which honestly rates somewhere along hearing someone say the melon was delicious or that the fields look beautiful and well-tended. We grow food for many reasons, but one is the sense of community and that just seems to appear wherever there are children.

So thanks to the kids for showing us karate moves as counted out by a younger brother, for thinking the tractor is the coolest thing in the world, for harvesting green onions and spraying off beets, for listening to my stories of a tiny bird attacking a snake et cetera.

8-06-2007

We are looking for a farm worker to start next week if possible, please mention this to young people or others that you know who may be interested. Tracy will be done for the season on August 9, and we could hire someone until about Oct. 1, depending on when we get a frost and what works best for the person we hire. In this part of the season, we are mainly harvesting, but there may be other work such as weeding, going to farmer's market, a little bit of transplanting, trellising tomatoes, etc. Pay is \$7 per hour and the position is part-time, 3 days per week and perhaps more as needed and as fits the worker's schedule. For more info on Groundswell Farm, visit www.groundswellfarm.org or find our listing at www.localharvest.org If interested please contact us by phone.

-Katie Brandt (616) 885-7776

-Anna Hoekstra (616) 635-7978

Also, Laura has made the generous offer of approximately 1 lb./week of u-pick flowers for all CSA members. The flowers are next to the greenhouse and are blooming in beauty and profusion, feel free to grab a pair of pruners from the wash station or out of the garden carts as long as you put them back. Since cherry tomatoes are also ready, that means you can pick beans, cherry tomatoes and flowers. That may help to make the drive to the farm very worthwhile . . .

-Katie

8-02-2007

It's unbearably hot by about 1:30 every day and many times it's sunny and sweaty by 10 in the morning. We are doing almost nothing in the field except for harvesting. And so we spend our afternoons in the onion hut, clipping the tops off garlic, onions and the other alliums and peeling away a layer of dirt and papery husks. It is the ultimate in lazy farm work; we're sitting in the shade with a fan blowing, talking and working on a job that is not pressing or difficult. There is even a yellow watermelon to slice if we

need a break.

The onion hut is usually the relatively unassuming tractor tent, but this time of year we redecorate--I back the tractor out of its parking spot and we stack up the bread trays full of onions and such. Turn on a fan and hot, dry weather and you've a spot to cure onions. This can be a tough thing without an old, drafty, red barn, where you simply lay out the onions in a single layer. One farmer I used to work for would dry them with great success under the shade of tables in his greenhouse, but his greenhouse is shaded by a forest in the afternoon. We fear that onions in our greenhouse would bake. Temperatures of 110 aren't uncommon when it is 95 outside. The solar shower I had set in there was off the charts, its little temperature gauge stops at 118 and the water was almost too hot to touch.

And onions that don't cure well can be tricky. Once a woman at farmer's market told me of a farmer who sold her a rotten onion, it looked fine on the outside but a few layers inside were brown and soft and smelled horrible. She thought this was a rather mean trick, but I was just then trying to figure out a good system for curing onions, so I saved the farmer's reputation and explained that onions were really touchy and it was a feat to cure them without losing a few. Since some of those rot on the inside, how would the farmer have known?

The garlic was a beautiful surprise this year, large perfect heads. We have saved the best to plant this fall. I don't know if it is our soil, if the rains just fell at the right time, but these are truly some of the nicest garlic I've had the pleasure of harvesting. Part of it is that we cut off the scapes, which saves the plant all the energy reserve of growing a flower and transfers it into the bulbs. This is supposed to make bulbs 1/3 larger, and now that we've cooked with the delicious garlic scapes I'm sure we'll always cut them in the future.

The onions were also better than expected. Last year the onions suffered insults and injury from the start, growing under lights in a basement, suffering in the transition to the greenhouse and finally being set back by a frost in late May. And since the whole field had grown onions the summer before, there was no chance for the soil to prepare for onions through a crop rotation. This year, however, the onions are big, like you would find in a store. There are more than we have bread trays to dry, so some are still waiting in the field. According to one of our seed catalogs you can also dry onions in the field, so it shouldn't be a problem since there is no rain in the forecast.

7-26-2007

The fields look beautiful this year. I just want to say most things are growing well before retelling the litany of missed chances, outright mistakes and good farming practices gone awry in the potato patch.

I love potatoes and last year's crop was truly amazing. Giant tubers without a speck of disease grew in a field where we broke all the rules. We planted shallowly and never hilled soil onto the potatoes to keep them from going green with mildly poisonous solanin. We never watered. Weeds filled the patch early, while the rototiller was broken and we merely mowed them back a little with a weed-wacker. The potatoes ignored all these transgressions and were really productive and delicious.

This year we planted in some unbelievable May heat, mid-eighties would be my guess. We had bought a potato trencher-hiller, which sounds fancy, but is simply a double-sided plow that cuts a V into the soil so you can drop in the potatoes. Then you drop the potatoes into the trench and fertilize. Lastly, you move the parts around a little on the trencher, making it into a hiller and it covers up the potatoes. We could finally hill our potatoes, as everyone does and as all the books advise. We had also put together a drip irrigation system and we put these 'drip tapes' down in the trenches before we filled them in. We couldn't water right away, as I didn't have all the parts connected and the mail-order company sent the wrong parts, but no problem, right?

It was hot and dry after the potatoes were planted and what rain there was seemed to drain away from the potatoes, because of the hills. When the plants seemed slow to emerge, I dug up some potatoes that were mummified, they had literally dried up and died. But most did sprout and the plants looked good. When it started to get weedy, I rototilled, which was difficult and unstable work in between the hills. We also hoed the rows that had emerged well, but waited on about a third of the rows, because almost no plants had sprouted. Waiting became never hoeing when the weeds got to tall to hoe. Finally, I realized it was past the time to hill up the potatoes, to throw more soil on the plants to control weeds and cover the forming tubers. This made quite a difference, visually, but had really just tipped over the weeds--their tops now emerged right in the potato row, even if their roots were in the middle of the walkway. These weeds were now impossible to pull without disturbing the hills and the potato plants themselves. And it was a hugely intimidating quarter acre of busywork of dubious benefit at a time when we need to plant and weed everything else, too.

By now we could finally turn on the water. We gave them a lot that first week, a little the second week, missed a week. Then I gave them a ton, but it didn't seem to moisten the soil at all. The next week was the same thing. A few days later, I discovered the problem; I had mowed the main line to the irrigation and all the water had poured out without building up enough pressure to 'drip'.

No problem, I would water when the plants flower, as that is the time of the greatest need. But only a few plants produced any flowers at all and I was waiting for a profusion like we had last year. Another missed opportunity.

Today, the potatoes are a refuge of weedy lamb's quarters, completely unaffected by two rounds of the weed-wacker. Some of the plants are dying back and there is a harvest comparable or maybe double what we planted as seed in May. We could have just distributed the seed potatoes and saved ourselves some work. But some plants yielded better than that. We'll not really know the true gravity or lack of consequence of this pile of errors until we harvest.

Next year, we are planting earlier in the spring. We'll plant a few rows without the hiller to compare. I'll get to hilling up sooner and we'll hoe all the potato rows, even if some don't emerge well. I'll ask other farmers this winter, also. In dry years, it seems potatoes suffer particularly severely in muck soils; maybe another muck farmer somewhere has a seamless potato method.

7-26-2007

The season is heating up and the vegetables pile up in the field- on tables in boxes and bags and your refrigerator - leaves and crumbs of muck soil on counters and in sinks.

Mine too- I have a sin full of basil from last week's market waiting to be processed and frozen.

Next weeks veggie forecast:

Lettuce

Kale/chard/collards

Salad Mixes and greens

Parsley

Basil

Carrots

Beets

Kohlrabi

Bok Choy

NO RADISHES- some relief here

Broccoli

Zucchini/ Summer Squash

Green Onions

Maybe the following: tomatoes, cucumber, peppers, hot peppers, eggplant

Maybe regular onions and cauliflower

Can't think of anything else right now!

We might surprise you though!

We are keeping a close eye on the Melons.

See you next week! We will be at the Fulton Farmer's market in Grand Rapids Friday 8 am. to 1 pm.

Saturday we will be at the Sweetwater Market in South Muskegon from 9am -1pm. Come out and visit!

7-19-2007

Last winter, I sewed my first quilt; a sign for farmer's market that I had daydreamed about while working at the stalls of other vegetable farms. On Saturday, we finally had a chance to hang it at our market stall, after weeks of delays to buy a wooden dowel and figure out how to hang a quilt.

One of the markets where I started to daydream was the Otsego Farmers' Market. I was mainly childcare for the couples' two kids and their summertime-Saturday friends, the children of the other farmers. It was a great place to entertain kids--hiking trails, a playground, and quarts of peaches, all you could ask for.

It was at Turtle Island Farm that I started to go to the Fulton St. Farmer's Market in Grand Rapids. It was huge and fast-paced; moving through the crowds to buy some fruit or eggs was a mix of hurry and people-watching in between our sales with four stalls of veggies. Here I was at the greens end of the table and would trade customers to the pepper or watermelon experts with a simple, "she's at \$8.75"

This stall was also fun because friends and former farm workers would come to visit and volunteer for an hour or so, one friend would even make us gourmet lunch as a cooking demonstration.

I wanted a chance to work at a CSA farm, too, and so I just walked through the crowd to talk to Michael at Trillium Haven Farm. This stall was just as busy as Turtle Island, but was squeezed into two booths. Here, we had recipes and even a little break room between a tower of empty veggie trays and the trailer. The pace was still somewhere between mania and laughter, I really had a ton of fun and learned all about cooking from listening to Anja describe roasted beet-feta salads and other treats in a fast-paced poetry of cooking ideas.

When we started Groundswell, we began by going to the Holland Farmer's Market. We got to know four other organic vegetable farmers and enjoyed the market in many ways, but were somewhat frustrated at not having a "seasonal" stall. We were bouncing around the market randomly and trying to set up in 15 minutes or so, due to the vagaries of a long and complicated lottery.

This year, we've been going to the Sweetwater Local Foods Market. We like the atmosphere, because there are sustainable farmers of all types, from meat, cheese and eggs to baked goods, fertilizers and organic fruit. This makes for great conversation, let's me and Anna buy delicious, sustainably-raised foods and brings a variety of people who really love good food. We even get to go inside if it's raining, as it did last week. We love Sweetwater, but struggled to find the right midweek market.

We are on the verge of starting to go the Fulton St. Farmer's Market on Fridays. I just can't wait to chat with everyone down there again, be they farmers, friends or longtime market regulars. This will give Tracy a chance to enjoy some time at market and will also help us to sell the bounty. We plan to start next Friday, the 27th.

Hope to see you at market!

Visit localharvest.org for times and locations of our two farmer's markets!

7-12-2007

The year has not yet fully engulfed us with harvesting and so there is still time to pull and eat and curse back the weeds. This day began with rototilling the paths between the crops in the field as I waited for the cool dew to lift off the morning. Then I hitched the mower to the tractor and mowed the rows of crops that have bolted (grown tall and bitter, often with flowers) including all of the spinach, some lettuce, greens and kohlrabi. I also mowed all of the areas that have not been planted to cover crops and vowed that next year I will have cover crops on my planting schedule; I will have the seed ordered way ahead of time; and I will plant them in the time of year when it actually rains. Then I will not be out mowing to try to keep a quarter acre of weeds from growing and dropping millions (billions?) of weed seeds. After that I pulled out our weed-wacker to clear out a section of broccoli that was ransacked by cut-worms and so wasn't a priority for hoeing and weeding.

After all the noise and more than my usual share of CO2 emissions, I decided to hand weed until lunchtime. Several CSA members and Tracy and Anna had spent much of the morning weeding the parsley and the pea patch.

In our garden we harvest the purslane for sale at farmer's market and some was even mailed to a friend of Anna's in Florida. These juicy little leaves are high in Omega-3 fatty acid and have an easily assimilated form of calcium. I tried steaming them recently and the lemony flavor of the stems was a real treat. The lamb's quarters are also highly nutritious and taste delicious. I lived on lamb's quarters

one summer. It was my first year of gardening on my own and I didn't plant many greens, so I relied on wild-harvesting these.

I think that the fields are a little cleaner this year. Tracy has been working miracles out there, hoeing and hand weeding areas before we even have a chance to ask her to. We've also just stayed a little more ahead of the game, with having all our transplants in a little earlier and with weeding, buying yourself a few days can save you hours and hours: Get them while they're small! The onions are a constant battle and the potatoes could be better. And of course there are some 4 foot monster pigweed and carpets of purslane everywhere. But no veggies have been lost to the weeds and many places look almost tidy and even beautiful.

7-3-2007

There is a watermelon the size of a newborn baby's head. I reroute my trips through the field to peek at the melons. This morning the bees were an audible hum, working their way through the melon patch. This is in direct opposition of how they act in the zucchini flowers, where they laze about in drunken silence in the huge comfortable flowers, apparently for hours at a time with none of the typical worker-bee, worker-ethic.

And. Green tomatoes in trusses of 4 and 5 fruit per bunch, piled up like giant shiny grapes. If I reroute my *steps* to watch the watermelon, my entire being is rerouted this time of year toward the tomatoes. We have pounded over 250 eight-foot stakes and pulled about 12,000 feet of string up and down the rows to keep the plants clean of dirt, easy to pick and generally out of trouble. This is just the three bottom rows of string in a series that will eventually be a series of 18 six foot walls of tomato leaves gone mad. We will probably have 6 or 7 rows of string by the time we hit the tops of the stakes and give up on containing the mania. If we don't trim them back, they may form a "roof" at the top of all those walls . . . we may be crawling hands-and-knees in a quarter acre tangle of modern art . . .

And. Weeds as tall as a child. Weeds that are bearing hundreds of thousands of seeds each. We are fighting them with our bare hands and with garden hoes and the 5-foot-wide tractor-pulled mower. I even had to disk a section again in order to not have our newly turned beds full of purslane, chopped up and multiplying like the brooms in Fantasia. Some of the walkways look a mess as the rototiller is on the fritz, though I hope to fix it this afternoon. We are pretty well on top of the weeds though, and I don't feel buried (yet!).

More importantly perhaps is that all this growth somehow finds a way to make delicious food. Last year at this time we had merely a ton of salad supplies and cooking greens and the first heads of broccoli. It is a precocious season, this 2007, to have zucchinis and carrots and green onions and such. Part of the earliness is that we had a greenhouse all built and were on schedule with the seedlings. But a large part is the sky, be it a changing global warming sky that brings droughts and melting a glaciers and hurricanes. There are even a very few ripe hot peppers, serranos and Hungarian hots. That seems a record. I could have picked them in June even, when I noticed them last week, but the rest of the salsa ingredients are waiting to ripen.

6-28-2007

It started as drawing in a notebook filled with to-do-lists, phone numbers and the start of a farm journal that trailed off sometime in June of 2006. And then for a while it seemed a perfect dance floor. Soon there was a pile of four walls stacked neatly next to this dance floor. And then, quickly, the four walls were raised, connected and pulled to square.

Next came a wild goose chase in search of an air conditioner that I could set on a timer with an engine block heater on the coils to keep the thing from freezing up at temperatures well below what air conditioners were designed to do. I had found the design on a USDA website and had worked at a farm with a similar cooler. When I called for a small piece of advice about their cooler, they said that theirs was such a terrible pain, if I could possibly afford it, then by all means buy a real walk-in cooler.

So I looked for used coolers off of refrigerated trucks or from restaurants gone bankrupt. No luck. I called around and it looked like it would cost me about \$5000. A little steep, after already spending on the lumber for the building. But one estimate came back much lower--under \$3000 and we wouldn't need to hire any professionals because it was an all-in-one unit. So we bought it, but it took a few weeks to arrive. By then the tomatoes were ripe and it was all Anna and I could do just to harvest everything.

The cooler sat on the ground next to the empty building. How would we get it onto the roof? Would I be able to wire it myself if it runs on 240 volt electric? Would it sweat like a soda can in the hot summer sun? Is the water going to rise another foot in this spring flood and destroy it?

This spring, Anna's father, Jay, agreed to cut a hole in the roof and build a support to keep the cooler perfectly level. He had beautiful engineering diagrams and made everything with a precision rarely seen on our farm. Zeeland Lumber Company sent a truck out to lift the cooler unit onto the roof of the building. It fit. After that, everything else has slowly fit into place and this morning we finished insulating the roof with 4 inches of Styrofoam.

After all the worries and stumbles, our walk-in cooler is running and seems to be working well. Now we can harvest for Saturday market on Friday morning and keep the veggies crisp and fresh, rather than working late into the sleepy sunset. We can harvest on Monday for CSA and bring extra produce from Holland CSA to the Grand Rapids distribution. We can harvest beans before a rain and keep them fresh, rather than have them mold in the field or dry out waiting for market. We don't have to watch cabbages split in the field--now we could store them in perfect condition for well over a week.

Nest week's veggies:

More of everything from last week, plus . . .

Green onions

Perhaps we'll have baby carrots

More broccoli and summer squash

A small chance of cabbage

6-23-2007

I can't follow a recipe. Even if what is described sounds absolutely delicious, I will add sunflower seeds or grated carrots where they're not called for. Or I will realize that I'm out of half of the ingredients when the onions are half-sautéed. I replace ingredients with entirely different flavors and textures, with little regard. Wouldn't it be good with kohlrabi instead of winter squash? That was the experiment

last night, the delicious Thai coconut-milk squash soup, reinvented with kohlrabi, parsley and a good-sized handful of basil. I thickened the broth by putting about 1/3 of the soup through the food processor just before I added the coconut milk. It seems that with fresh ingredients, it's hard to go wrong. Not impossible--I've definitely made my share of mediocre and a few downright terrible meals. And Anna declared this soup "different" at lunch. But overall, the vegetables seem to hold their own. If it's bland, I'll add salt or some balsamic or lime juice. If it's too spicy, then I'll shred some cheese on top or add some more ingredients to tone it down.

Don't get me wrong, I like recipes and cookbooks, but I flip through them once or twice and what I don't remember, I suppose I won't try. I don't know what it says about my personality, but Anna was joking with someone at CSA distribution in Grand Rapids yesterday, that there are those who cook by the book and others who just don't. She replied that she was a 'Rebel Without a Cookbook'. But I know that many people in the world are actually capable of following a recipe. So we're putting together a cookbook, organized by season, with all the recipes from last year and quite a few others. We plan to have it ready in the next few weeks, but want to add more recipes from members in future years, so forward them to us or post them on our website at www.groundswellfarm.org/recipes.htm Just click on "Submit a recipe" at the top of the page.

Also, someone mentioned that we should label the veggies at CSA pickup. We made very nice, descriptive little tags for farmer's market, so I think that we will just print out a version of them without prices for CSA folks. Let us know if there is anything else we can do to help you use your produce. If it's something simple, we'll probably try it. If it might take a lot of time we will probably just keep on weeding the field and harvesting, etc. and put off your great suggestions till who knows when maybe sometime in December. But seriously, if you're not sure how to cook or store or peel or chop something, feel free to ask us. We'll say something like, "Peel the kohlrabi, first. If you're cooking with it, make sure to eat some of it raw. If it's not gone, add it to soups, grate it on salads, or fry it like potatoes." If you haven't tried this one yet, don't be intimidated by it's UFO appearance. My mom and dad used to have a big veggie garden, and they say kohlrabi is the only "weird vegetable" that they actually like.

Next week's veggies:

Kohlrabi and a chance of broccoli

A possibility of summer squash

Bok choy or turnips

Radishes

All the salad mixes

Lettuce

Spinach

Basil, Parsley
U-pick peas might begin

6-14-2007

It's hot and dry. Today there are not even the eternal breezes or gale-force winds that are such a part of Groundswell Farm, or Wind Tunnel Farm as some call it. Anna and I are running about the farm with the sprinklers she built, ever watering new transplants and other dry areas. We also had the water drenching patches of recently weeded carrots that would droop in the sun dramatically, if their tender roots were disturbed as we pulled out a weed in the powdery dust that is dry muck soils. We also recently had the drip irrigation running in the potatoes, it seems to work well, but it is mysterious as the drip lines are buried. It's not like the sprinklers, where you can see that one is clogged and go out to fix it with a nail, and get drenched and pleasantly cooled off in the process.

Honestly, almost everything could use water, but we are putting it where we need it most. Last on the list are tomatoes, melons and other deep rooted plants that will reach into our shallow groundwater table about 2 or 3 feet down. My father predicts a hot, droughty summer. All hopes that he's wrong on this one, but we'll see. Our well only gives us about 12 gallons per minute, so we can only use one 100 foot line of sprinklers, which almost covers two beds. This is 2 to 6 rows of crops, depending on how closely they are spaced. I'm not sure the capacity of the drip yet, although 12 rows of potatoes seems to have adequate water pressure. Overall, that allows us the ability to prevent major damage or losses, but not to even try to water the majority of the crops.

In a way, these limits are refreshing in their stark absolutism. There is no guilt for each drop of water for fear we are using too much, as anyone feels nowadays when driving a car or taking a long, hot shower in the winter. With those things, global warming, exploitation and wars for the resources that we use and all the other uncounted damages are real, but have yet to click off our ignitions or empty our gas pipelines. But our water well has real, tenable limits. We'll water what we can. The rest of the field will wait for rain.

Next week's veggies:

Lettuce

Spicy mix, arugula, mizuna, and/or asian salad mix

Kale and perhaps a little chard

Radishes

Kohlrabi

Parsley and basil

6-7-2007

I'm in a constant state of disbelief; the leaves on the trees look like midsummer, the crops in the field are growing into themselves. Little things surprise me, that rain actually falls that the intern we hired is really knowledgeable and great to work with, that Tuesday night was about 36 degrees at the farm and even left a little damage in the basil. But big things are also afoot, all of the major spring plantings of heat sensitive crops are in the field, cucumbers, winter squash, tomatoes, beans; you name it, it's planted. And much of the field has now either been weeded, hoed or isn't quite ready to sprout its future onslaught of weeds. The realities of summer are too many, too intricate and seem to arrive in such a rambunctious crowd that each June startles me. I like to be surprised, of course, farming being a weather-gamble; waiting on rains and wishing away frosts.

One piece of magic that we participate in is the planting of carrots. These tiny, sweet-smelling bundles of growth are a mystery. They sit in the soil considering the options for 10-14 days before germinating, even in good conditions. Members from last year will remember running out of carrots a little early when our third and final planting of carrots decided to never sprout in a 3-week mini-drought last July. This year is very different and as everything else it defies my belief. The carrots have germinated so fully from our recent planting. I'd never seen them emerge so soon after planting, but in the warmth and with two steady, warm rains the carrots seemingly all poked up on a single day about a week after planting, all the same shade of pale yellow-green from living without sunlight. Because they usually take so long, the weeds are usually everywhere before your straight rows of carrots poke up, with their typical 3 foot blank sections and stragglers that germinate 2 weeks late. Not so this year, I haven't had a chance to weed them yet because the beds are so clean. We had some tough times with seedings of spinach in the 90 degree heat, but the carrots are liking the combination of heat and rain, usually rare but now maybe Michigan's new forecast amidst climate change.

I've begun to lose some of my surprise that the tomatoes have moved on from their unglorious first job of sending down roots and are now growing. About 20 were lost to cut worms, but Anna especially, the intern Tracy and myself have all dug up these green caterpillars below a plant cut and tipped over by a cut worm. It seems we've killed off most of the problem in the tomatoes, but they are everywhere it seems. A bad year for these creatures and other farmers are out spraying for them. We'll keep digging.

Next week, the same as this week except we'll have "regular" bok choy and a slight chance of kolrabi.

5-29-2007

Hi all,

With June 1 still a few days off, the fields are filling up with vegetables. We had the tomatoes out last Friday and Saturday, as the weather forecast looked completely safe for these very frost-sensitive plants. Expecting rain, I had gone out to prep the tomato beds for the next day on Thursday and Friday evening. The sun was meeting the hill to our west and spreading the blue and red end of the color spectrum onto the cows grazing in profile to the setting sun. The ridiculous heat of the day was mellowing and it was really nice work. This also seemed to be less deadly for the earthworms. After buying the rotavator, we are happy with it in every way, except for the sad dried up worms. We noticed very few in the plots that I went over in the evening. I think that the environment is less hostile for them with the cool of night, so that those who are only stunned or slightly injured have a better chance. This may seem far-fetched, but I was surprised to find that today when I set a thermometer on the ground, it was 92 degrees, about 8 degrees warmer than the ambient temperature and only two degrees less than our very hot greenhouse.

There are so many big blocks of new crops in the field that the greenhouse seems odd and empty. Monday had peppers and eggplant in the field and today was tomatillos, beans, summer squash and

about half of the winter squash. The winter squash was the whole reason for my experiment with the thermometer this morning; we wanted the soil an inch down to be at least 70 to keep the seeds from rotting. The buried thermometer came up at a toasty 82, so we went ahead and planted. Basil, watermelon, celeriac and a few odds and ends are sitting outside the greenhouse and hardening off-- they will go in the field in the next few days.

The rain on Friday was enchanted, cool and foggy after all the heat. The crops loved it and we'll have nice sized lettuces and radishes, as well as cut greens for all, your choice of mizuna, spicy salad mix, arugula or a mix of those. We'll also have potted plants, your choice of a sage or nasturtium. Depending on space in the truck we may also bring tomato plants, for anyone who has at least 6 hours of sunlight where tomatoes can thrive. I was hoping to harvest wild onions from Van Zoeren Park about 2 miles from the farm, but I went on Saturday and with the leaves died back it made it tougher to find them, though not impossible. We'll see. For those who were members last year, the first week may seem to be missing a lot of the weedy greens--purslane, lamb's quarters, etc. I'm not sure if the season is behind or if Anna and I are ahead and have just kept things weeded better.

Remember 1st CSA day is

Holland: Tuesday June 5th, from 4:30 - 6PM at Leaf & Bean, 451 Columbia

Grand Rapids: Wednesday the 6th, from 4:30 to 6PM at Well House, 601 Cass SE

5-22-2007

Ken Knap owns a farm across the street and a little to the west of us. We didn't know it when we leased our 7 acres, but Ken has turned out to be hugely important to our farm. I could try to list all the big and little favors that he has done for us, but it's just been so helpful to have someone who drops by regularly with good sound advice, a bolt, a story . .

Last year when Anna asked a local lettuce grower if he could plow or disc our field, he said he was far too busy, but to ask Ken. We did and he plowed our acre and a half plot at the back of the field. He returned many times, to disk and rotavate the front four acres in a black fallow to let weeds germinate, then kill them. And then he planted a cover crop of clover and oats, the oats died over the winter as planned but the clover is doing quite nicely, which he just pointed out yesterday.

Early in May of this year, Ken saved the day by showing me a different way to hitch a PTO. I had gone to Tractor Supply to no avail, then to Burnips Equipment which had the spring-loaded part I needed, even though they are no longer manufactured. Under all the force and torque when I first turned the PTO on, this part slipped out of place and the PTO fell spinning to the ground until the mower had used up its momentum. Scary indeed, especially considering that you can easily lose an arm or even your life if a bit of clothing, hair or a shoelace gets caught in the PTO. Our season was waiting on this mower, so that I could disk the back field and plant. Ken arrived and after a little tinkering, pointed out that you can just run a bolt through the center of it, which solved my problem and let us begin planting.

Now Ken has started trapping woodchucks. I have to admit to an appreciation for woodchuck's zen-like, peaceful lives. They live on a farm, enjoy the veggies, dig in the rich garden soil and seem to be quite fat and happy, without any of the work that us humans put into that farm. And that sums up the conflict, Anna and I can't work 10 hour days in the sun to feed woodchucks. We had a Hav-A-Heart trap out last year, but only caught a possum. Ken has already trapped 3 woodchucks, at least one of which I had seen grazing in the field.

NOTE: The woodchuck traps are "death traps" as Anna calls them, which you wouldn't want to stick your

hand in. I will try to point out their locations along the ditches near the back of the field to all new visitors. Feel free to ask if Anna or I if we forget to show you.

5-8-2007

We've a tractor on the farm this year and we're transplanting to the sound of birds rather than the hours-long noise of the walk-behind rototiller. It frees up quite a bit of time to go out and till all the beds in a half hour. And though there was some nostalgia in using a string to make our somewhat straight rows, dragging a garden hoe down the row three times seems to twist the back something terrible. So, I added three simple little brackets to draw three equidistant lines. These are only as straight as I can drive the tractor, so I stare out to the distance to find a point to focus on, usually a clump of weeds or a tree across the field. If the rows are straight, it will make weeding with a tractor-pulled cultivator much easier this summer.

Buying the tractor was confusion, a fear and a missed opportunity for so long that when I found one, I almost couldn't believe it. This machine was far more than we had expected and cost exactly the amount we had budgeted. It has three or four very handy features that are pretty unique to tractors. First, the PTO or Power Take-Off, spins to power implements with moving parts like our mower and our rotavator, which is like a 5-foot-wide rototiller. Secondly, the three-point hitch allows you to raise and lower things, again like the mower and rotavator. It has a simple drawbar for pulling. We didn't think we would be able to afford a fourth feature, but this tractor also has hydraulic lines, which means that we bought a disk that is raised a lowered hydraulically. Thus, if the disk dips into a wet or low spot in the field it won't jerk me out of the tractor seat.

This tractor was more horsepower than we thought we could afford 50 horsepower. Considering that 30 horsepower is the minimum for a small vegetable farm, we have plenty of power. Also, it is a 1983 model. This would be very old indeed for a car or a toaster, but tractors are made to last and this was one of the newer ones in our price range. Tractors from the 50s, 60s and 70s are very common and work decently, but Anna and I have limited experience in mechanical repairs so opted for a somewhat newer one. Also, the tractor is a diesel, so we are using biodeisels and perhaps eventually switch it over to French fry grease. Lastly, it has 4000 hours of use, and shouldn't need a major overhaul until 8000 hours, which should take quite a few years.

The man who sold the tractor to us, had trouble starting it in the winter and needed to spread horse manure once a week, so began to rely on a gasoline tractor, which is easier to start cold. I was concerned at first, as we bought it back in chilly March and had a hard time with it, too. Now it starts and runs like a charm.

So, all this to say that the first planting of broccoli, kohlrabi, cabbage, kale and almost all the onions are in the ground. Anna also direct-seeded carrots, beets and a second patch of peas. This is in addition to the scallions, lettuces, Chinese cabbage, greens and radishes that were already in the field. With nothing but good weather in the forecast, we hope to plant leeks, shallots, more lettuce, bok choy and parsley this week.

We hope for a good rain . . . but I'm going to figure out an irrigation system with a farming friend sometime this week . . .

Nonetheless, a good rain would be great . . .

--Katie and Anna

4-30-2007

Hi all,

Last year we used the back part of the field with the idea that the might be too wet. The field looks flat as a tabletop, but really it is slanted just a bit the the south. We could see it when two warm days melted all that deep snow from our month-long deep-frozen winter. There was a 15 foot wide puddle gathered at the edge of the road. The back 1/3 of the fields across the street looked flooded, either from snow melt or the Macatawa River rising over its banks.

I had planned on forgoing the fields we grew in last year to grow cover crops and fight all the weed seeds that accumulated, but only one 100 foot wide strip is dry enough to plant now and onions and broccoli-family plants could go in the field, but not where I had put them on my crop rotation plan. So this morning, tired from a little planting on my day off yesterday, I sat down and rewrote the crop rotation. Spring crops will always go in the back of the field where it is drier and summer and fall crops can be planted up front.

Planning a crop rotation is a puzzle. I start with onions and slow-germinating roots like carrots; because weeds are our biggest concern and so these crops should always follow something that smothers out weeds, like winter squash. So the onions and spring roots are slated for last years squash field. We'll put potatoes before the squash and a fallow of cover crop before the potatoes, as they like plenty of nutrients and well-rested soil. Before the cover crop will be broccoli-family plants because few crops do well after the brassicas, for some reason. And greens will round out the rotation. That is just our spring rotation. Don't worry, tomatoes and melons and all the warm-season crops have spots in the field as well!

Parts of these changes are trying to stay alert to the nuances of our field and soil. Part is watching the tractor tires spin pulling our beautiful new 10 foot disc in a just-dry-enough portion of the field, only to then have rain and a field too soggy to even let ourselves use a walk-behind rototiller.

But everyone is still learning, just as Anna and I. Neighbors across the street had a giant spray rig stuck to the axle--about 5 foot deep. Big, new 120 horsepower tractors couldn't budge it, a tow truck snapped his cable and they finally got it out by pulling up on a big tow strap tied to the bucket on a front end loader.

Of course, this soil is worth the wait, however impatient spring may feel. This rich, wonderful soil is ~25 foot deep and grows some of the most delicious food on oversized, healthy plants. It is easy to dig, has no stones and offers a kind of 3 foot deep groundwater irrigation for tomatoes and other deep-rooted crops.

And anyway, spinach, radishes and salad mixes are now in the field! A few days sooner than last year . . .

Enjoy your spring!

-Katie

4-20-2007

Welcome to those who have joined the CSA most recently! Here I have included a list of events for the coming year. For those who are going to be working share members we will have a sign-up calendar for work times, where you can sign up for those times best suited for your schedule. This will be available at the June 9 potluck and for several vegetable pick up dates following.

Event List

June 5: First CSA distribution in Holland

June 6: First CSA distribution in Grand Rapids

June 9: Working Share Info and Member Potluck

August TBA: Potato Dig and Potluck

October 7: Harvest Festival and Potluck

October 30: Last CSA distribution in Holland

Halloween or Thursday, November 1: Last CSA distribution in Grand Rapids

Also found at www.groundswellfarm.org

What's new at the farm? The greenhouse is nearly at capacity. Pea planting is scheduled for this weekend now that we are having some warm days. The tractor is now under its new tent covering. The outhouse has a door and the tools are in the new tool shed. A bird has made a nest on our wash table. Katie heads to an auction tomorrow to purchase a few implements for the tractor if they go for the right price!!

We are excited to see all the new growth- each day in the green house, especially of new things we haven't grown before, like sage!

Hope all is well with you. Let us know if you are wondering anything,