

Monroe Family Organics

CSA Newsletter

DECEMBER 13, 2011

Hello and merry Christmas! Things are a lot less busy on the farm now, and some of the low temperatures last week finally put most of the fields out of production for the rest of the season. This week we will not be offering produce for sale as some of our salad greens in the coldframes need some time to grow a little more. Most likely we will be able to offer our veggies again next week.

Farm Update

At this time of the year we are still harvesting, which surprises many people since most people have forgotten about their gardens months ago. We still have cold-hardy crops in our coldframes and low tunnels, just a lot less than we used to. Next fall we want to do more season extension than we did this year. We have found that even our uncovered field production lasts longer than we expected (it didn't really end until late last week), mostly due to healthy plants and good protection from freezing fall winds. A few weeks ago we also planted our garlic, which we obtained from another small farm in the area. So that is something new to look forward to next season in your shares.

Last week Fred went to the Great Lakes vegetable growers' conference to look at new

ideas for saving on production costs and to network with other growers. This winter Fred will be trying to develop a small salad mix harvester that we and other small scale growers can use. We are hoping it will speed up harvesting and make us and other small growers more competitive against the mass produced salad mix from California.

Well, the pigs have finally gone to rest and are now called things like bacon and ham. For anyone who reserved a half or whole pig, we will have the pickup time on Tuesday, December 20 at the farm from 5:00-5:30pm. If this does not work for you just contact Michele and we will make other arrangements.



Right now, most of the field is planted with a cover crop to put nutrients back into the soil for next year.

Have questions or comments? Email us at mfororganics@yahoo.com or call Michele at

517-896-6884.

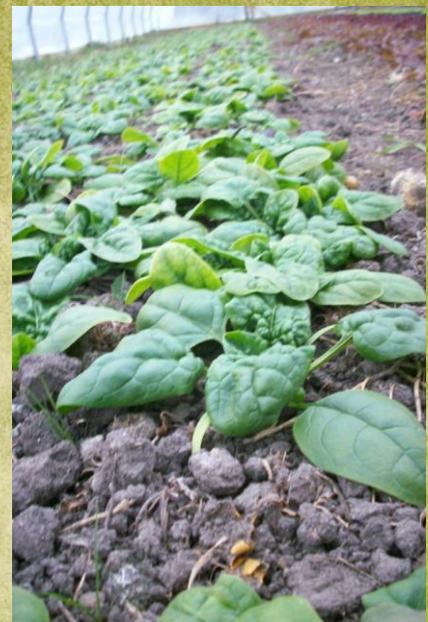
Survey Results and Plans for Next Season

We appreciate everyone who filled out a survey, as we take the feedback very seriously. A couple things that were fairly universal are that people were interested in getting eggs and fruit offered in some way. Currently we are planning out how to raise about 100 laying hens to rotate through our fields this coming season. Pastured organically-raised eggs are very expensive to raise, but we think that we could do them for about \$4.00 a dozen for raising the hens on pasture, with non-GMO feed that is natural and/or organic with no medications. When we figured out the projected cost of raising the chickens, that is pretty much what we would have to charge in order not to lose money.

For the fruit we will be starting out with planting strawberries next spring, which unfortunately will not be bearing much fruit until the following spring. However, for other fruit we are currently thinking about trying to find some small orchards or small berry patches where we could take over management of the crop and grow them organically in the same way we do the vegetables. The other option is to buy fruit and resell it, but we are opposed to this idea because we want to offer only what we grow. If we start reselling other people's produce, we feel some of the connection to where it is grown will be lost, and the quality and freshness that sets our produce apart will start to diminish. If you know of someone who has some fruiting crops in the area who may be interested in having us take care of them, please let us know.



The lettuce (above) and spinach (below) is still going strong in the coldframes.





The coldframes allow us to keep growing certain vegetables even in the winter.

Other interesting things found on the surveys were that people wanted more broccoli and potatoes. They also wanted fewer beets. People were very divided on the herbs; some people did not use them, and for others the herbs were a big part of why they liked the CSA. Overall the feedback was very positive. However, if you did not fill out a survey or think there is something important to be said just email us at anytime. One change we are considering for next season is the pickup time for the CSA. For most people the days for drop-offs work, but those who have jobs that get out at 5pm often felt that their produce choices were limited. For this reason, we are considering having the drop-offs from 5-6pm this year. Sometimes in the heat, some of the herbs and other leafy vegetables did not look as fresh by the time they had sit out for two hours, and hopefully shortening the length of time they sit out will keep things fresher for everyone. This will also give us another hour on drop-off days to focus on field work when we are so busy in the summer. Another possible change is what to do for

those who forget to pick up their share. Very understandably people have a lot going on, and sometimes forget to pick it up. We had some trouble though with having to harvest shares over again because people requested to pick up their share later after forgetting to come to the drop-off. What we are thinking of implementing is a system where if someone has not come to the drop-off by a certain time, they will get a call to remind them. Also, we will encourage people to program a reminder into their cell phones. If you are unsure how to do that, we can help you if you bring your phone to the first drop-off. Obviously, being a part of either system would be optional, but would probably really help people remember to pick up their veggies.

Next year there will only be a \$5 increase for both half and full shares for the 2012 season. Even though the prices for fuel and other inputs are likely to go up by a higher percentage, we feel that improved efficiencies that come from doing more shares (we are expanding the number of shares offered) and cost saving improvements in production will hopefully more than offset for the increasing costs of our inputs.

Other than these possible changes, the same quality and general quantity will be offered but with some tweaking of the composition of the shares each week, after seeing what people liked best this past season. Again we are very interested in your feedback on these ideas for improvement, so shoot us an email anytime. We were very happy with how the season went and very much appreciate your support of our farm. We look forward to seeing you again next season.

If you have ideas for an article, or you would like to contribute a recipe to a future newsletter, please email mforganics@yahoo.com or call Michele at 517-896-6884.