The Weekly Note - Week of June 23, 2008 – Box #4

One Step at a Time Gardens

Jan Libbey & Tim, Andrew, & Jess Landgraf

In This week's Box: Green onions, Lettuce, Broccoli, Snow, and Sugar Snap Peas, Garlic scapes, Radish

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First, thank you so much for all of your support and words of encouragement. It was good to get back to full deliveries last week. You may have seen us in the DM Register last Saturday. I had mixed feelings about getting attention around disappointing crops, but the bigger issue really is that small farms are getting noticed in the broader discussion of Iowa agriculture and economy and that says something about the growing awareness of Iowa's local food movement.

This is a long note today - In our "From the Ground Up" and "Farmer Footnote" we have our crop assessment and our report that we feel we need to interrupt deliveries for one (maybe two) weeks. We have two main delivery days – Tuesdays and Thursdays. If we can, we may just have to trim delivery down to one area instead of dropping everyone out during this pause. We are doing what we can and working hard to assure this season straightens out. We ask you to read on and hang in there with us. We do have some good crop coming. Please contact us with any questions.

As another CSA grower wrote to his members – "*For those of you who are long-term members, you have the perspective of a long time horizon and may have some comfort in the average share of produce you have received since supporting the farm. For new members, it is more of harsh experience, akin to investing your savings in the stock market just before a downturn. Fortunately, for both the farm and the market, over time there has historically been a reasonable return."*

News

Summer Solstice – Last week I ran out of room to mention, but was fully aware of, our crossing over the Summer Solstice line. We reveled in the beautiful moon shining …over our flooded lower pasture and road. Marking the Solstice acknowledges that we are beginning our gradual journey toward the dark, short days of winter. Just when it feels like we've finally hit summer, the reality is the season is shifting once again. The impact is that gradually decreasing daylight levels do begin to make a difference in maturation of late summer crops…This after a late start on some crops.

Early season learning curve –There's a lot of detail involved as this membership program gets underway and we've developed several pieces of information to help everyone over our early season learning and relearning curve. We've just updated our website with the following member resources – EOW calendars, member profile form, chart of vegetable selection, and The Recipe Collection. Every week we post our Weekly Note and The 2nd Step Member Handbook has been on the website for a couple of weeks. If you are missing any of these pieces, please check our website at www.ostgardens.com. If you don't have internet access, please contact us for any of these resources.

Member Profiles and Boxes – A little friendly "neighborhood" competition can be good. So…heads up DM members. Downtown members are ahead in the return of member profiles, but West Des Moines is far ahead with box returns. Your challenge is to even up the score!

Veggie Notes

Spinach doesn't like "wet feet" and the beautiful planting we had coming got just that…wet! The plants shriveled up and turned yellow. We're sorry, but this is one of the rain casualties. We had planned for two more deliveries of spinach, but not available now. Spinach doesn't like hot weather either so no replanting until we hit a cooler spell. We have been transplanting lettuce in hoophouse and will be doing some field transplanting soon. Our hoophouse supply should be late July/early August.

Scapes – more of what you received last week – enjoy great seasoning of your food!

Edible Pod Peas – Snow and sugar snap peas are one true seasonal eating experience. These are absolutely delicious treats right out of hand, but also great stir-fried. Check out page 15 in our Recipe Collection for tips on which pea is which – and how the *SNAP & ZIP* technique for eating them works. Cool wet conditions early have impacted supply. We plan to try replanting sugar snaps for a fall crop.

Connections

Laura and David Bernemann, of Mason City, have hosted our Thursday Mason City pick up site for the past three seasons. David, who teaches Engineering and Math at North Iowa Area Community College, can be found regularly helping at the delivery site. He usually arrives at our North Iowa Farmers Market stand on Fridays, arms full of returned boxes – helping to unload their front porch and help our box supply for the next week. Laura, who is an Occupational Therapist at Mercy Medical Center, shares the cooking chores with David and enjoys some flower gardening in their yard. Together, they have three

children who also help at the delivery site. David, like many, has become more concerned and interested in where his family's food comes from now that there are regular food contamination issues in the news. And he is also interested in supporting *agriculture,* as opposed to industrial food production.

From the Ground Up

Iowa Public Television's Market to Market is one of our regular Friday night shows. We encourage you to take a look at the online show from this past Friday, June 20 (www.ipt.org). Mark Pearson, show host, did an excellent job addressing the impact of this spring's weather and the floods. While he was referring to commodity crops, he described three categories that are equally applicable to vegetable crops: Existing crop (what's left) – has been impacted, and will likely result in low yield; Replanted crops – will have reduced yield due to late start (decreasing daylight hours, potentially high summer temps, etc.); Lost crop – no recovery. He makes several references to this spring's cool, wet that was further complicated by the flood event. Pearson's assessment is simply that it's very likely that no single crop will match last year's production. This is a fair analysis of our own crop experience this season.

Farmers' Footnote

When you signed the statement at the end of the membership form that said you understand there is some risk in farming, little did you know you might assume quite so much risk with us this season. After two weeks of moving from what has felt like a crisis mode to some decent weather days for catching up, we've now had a chance to more fully assess our own crop status and want to bring you up to date This crop overview will help you picture how this season is going to unfold.

The greatest impact is on our early season crops, but similar to Market to Market's assessment, we expect to see impact across the board. We have several categories of condition:

Some crops will not produce as we had anticipated – their supply is reduced (excess wet) and they have been slow to mature (in relation to cool, wet spring) – green onions, broccoli, fall onions, peas, first two plantings of green beans - so our harvest on some items to date has dug into the supply a bit deeper than original plan- contributing to lower supply in the next week or so.

Some crops or portion of crops simply failed due to impact of excessively wet soils - radishes, spinach, lettuce, Asian greens, sweet potatoes, some herbs, some broccoli, cauliflower, and cabbage. Today's tiny bunch of radish is it for this part of the season. At our average production rate, we should have harvested over 600 lbs. over several weeks.

Some crops are coming along nicely, but are delayed - Our tomatoes, peppers, and eggplant look good, but are behind and weedy, our squashes have just sprouted and look good, but will be pushing the season, kohlrabi looks great, garlic is looking fair, the potato field looks fair, but in need of weeding, herbs have been slow to develop, but are coming along, the new planting of lettuce in the hoophouse is coming along.

Some crops are yet to be planted or replanted and will allow us to fill in, but later this season. Today we are mowing off most of one of our greens plot – weeds have overtaken and we're better to just start over. We will replant with more lettuce, cabbage and direct seed beets, carrots. We also will be trying a midsummer replant of sugar snap peas.

The upshot is that as we position the farm to fill in some of the gaps we 1) are low on crop and 2) simply need production focus time. Therefore, We believe it's in everyone's interest for us to interrupt deliveries for the next one and possibly two weeks. As I said above, we may be able to cover one delivery area/week instead of both per week as normal. We'll keep members posted with email and our website. This is not a decision we take lightly. The time will allow us to put full attention on weeding, and replanting. We expect our late summer crops will come along nicely and replanting now will allow us to bump up crop availability later this season to compensate for what you are not receiving now.

As we strive to recover and replant, weed and "get back to normal", it does feel like we'll experience the impact of this early weather all season. We'll do our best to push our production, but we'll have some short falls.

We've never – in all our 12 previous seasons – experienced this widespread of a crop impact.

So how much risk do our members assume? We don't feel we should answer this question ourselves nor do we think we can address the question this early in the season. We will be asking some of our members to think these questions through with us. We are asking at least one member from each delivery site to work with us to evaluate the season and any reconciliation. We will invite participation, but would welcome additional interest. We will be asking this group to review the situation with us in early September by which time we should be able to know how far we are from our plan.

What should you expect in the meantime? AS the nature of the delivery interruption isn't completely determined, please watch for email update. We'll also have news posted on our website and we will post a Weekly Note next week regardless of what happens with delivery. When we do resume deliveries, you will receive our high quality produce and we'll hope for reasonable quantities. Thank you for your patience. Keep in touch.

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