

A Step

inside

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Step inside and we'll catch you up on what's been happening on the farm. Oh my goodness - there's so much to catch up on. Late fall we were dealing with crop storage and end of season washing systems that danced around freezing temperatures. Early December brought our final delivery. Mid-December brought lots of record analysis which flowed directly into planning out the 2010 season. Our records revealed that we harvested 31,000 lb. of vegetables in 2009! We're planning even more in 2010. Late December brought extended family time and lots of snow. January brought more snow and more snow. We sent in our seed orders, fleshed out our budget details, updated our member forms (with very little change in price), updated the website, began the search for summer crew members, attended a couple of conferences. Jan even was one of the keynote speakers at the Practical Framers of Iowa meeting. We've made some new equipment purchases, surveyed supply needs, and sport a new logo (way cool...more on this shortly). February includes some travel for myself and tending the home fires for Tim in my absence. At the end of the month we will attend the nation's largest organic farming conference in La Crosse, Wisc. They've even asked us to lead a workshop....anyone want to learn about succession planting? We've just finished the preparation for that session today. This is an excellent conference and it'll be fun to actually be on the presenting side for once...I think.

New Equipment – overhead and underfoot

High tunnels are all the rage and the USDA is even getting in on the action with a new cost-share program through their "Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food" program. We inquired, but discovered that our system did not fit the program. However, the program will help lots of other growers add tunnels into their operation and that's good for the overall growth of local food production capacity. Our second hoop house will look very much like our first, pictured to the right. The hoop house is an unheated structure that provides good early and late season protection as well as more consistent growing conditions for crops. We'll begin construction this season and it will be ready for production in 2011. This addition is particularly important as the increasingly volatile early season weather has caused problems with some crops. The additional space under cover will be a great asset.



Who likes to weed? No one on this farm...that's for sure. But a new weeding machine may just change that. The Reigi weeder, our second big purchase, will be put to good use especially for weeds in between plants in our broccoli, cauliflower and cabbage beds, as well as our winter and summer squash . We anticipate crew members clamoring to help with weeding when it's the Reigi. Pictures and more stories coming this summer!

Help us meet our membership goal - When you do your part, we can do ours better.

Have you signed up for this season yet? Have you invited some friends to consider signing up?

We have several resources to help you:

- Our **2010 member forms** are all posted on our website
- A new **"Invite Your Farmer to Supper"** initiative is explained on the website – please take a look and consider...inviting us to supper!
- **Printed materials** available if needed.
- Jan will be at **the Natural Living Expo** in late March in Des Moines – more details to come.

Members who help recruit new members get the added benefit of a \$10 credit for every new member who joins.

We appreciate your confidence in our farming and look forward to continuing to provide you the best and freshest food this year. We want to be sure our returning members 2009 members get signed up before the press of new members arrives. We'd love to hear from you by late February. Please sign up for 2010 now!

The Seeds of Change - 1st of 3 in a series

This series looks at the dramatic changes/consolidation in the vegetable seed industry over the past 10 years, potential concerns, and how this impacts the decisions we, as your farmers, make about our seed selection/purchase.

Part I : Background – More than ever, this year, as we put our seed order together, we found that we had to scrutinize our seed selection. The rapid consolidation of vegetable seed industry under the control of Monsanto is giving organic growers cause for pause when they select their seed. Monsanto, an aggressive advocate of genetic engineering of seeds, now dominates the vegetable seed industry.

Back in 2005, a letter from our main seed source confirmed what many knew was coming. The concentration we'd been watching in the agronomic crops of corn and soybeans was fully underway in the vegetable seed industry. The letter announced the purchase of Seminis, at that time the world's largest vegetable seed company, by Monsanto. In 2008, Monsanto synched up first place with the purchase of De Ruiters Seeds Group BV. Stay tuned for further discussion on the consequences for growers, potential path for Monsanto and responses by this farm.

New Logo Captures Philosophy

Thanks to the creativity of Mason City member and graphic artist, Julie Kim, we now have a new logo for the farm. The image captures our belief that the farm is really part of a much bigger effort to live more sustainably on the earth . For us that journey begins with fresh, wholesome food, but expands into so many other important areas. Look for our wandering path on all our materials!

