

A Step

inside

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Snow much transition in one week. On February 28 I hung laundry out in welcome of Spring. All the next week,



we began to feel winter release its grip, but the snow mass here seemed unphased. It wasn't until Friday, March 5 that we finally could detect the melting. That weekend's rains, followed by persistently warmer temperatures have transformed the landscape. Fields encased in snow for several months are finally released. Birds that have long departed and suddenly back in abundance. March 5 I spied the first pair of geese along with two bald eagles. March 12 we welcomed the first robins in the yard and now raucous redwing blackbirds too. I noticed a kestrel on the power

line, saw the back of a flitting bluebird, and revel in the sweet song of chickadee and cardinal proclaiming the seasonal shift. Welcome to spring!

Activity on the farm also marks spring. We began seeding flats with broccolis (pictured right) in late February and now have so many flats in one stage or the other that we'll be moving some into the greenhouse soon. While the outside sorts itself out, we build our first supply of this season's supply of young vegetables.



It's cathartic to note this sudden shift. Winter has held us long and deep this year. Even the release has held us close with foggy days and nights. The occasional sunny events are enough to celebrate and anticipate more soon.

Calendar of Events

- [Thursday, March 25](#) – Look for Jan at the Garden Seminar at North Iowa Area Community College (Hours: 8:30 a.m. – 1 p.m.)
- [Saturday, March 27- Sunday, March 28](#) – Look for Jan at the Natural Living Expo at the Des Moines Convention Center (Hours: 10 a.m. – 6 p.m. Saturday; 11 a.m. – 4 p.m., Sunday)
- [Thursday, April 1](#) – **Early Bird Discount ends – Don't miss this \$15 discount!**
- [Wednesday, June 2 and Thursday, June 3](#) – First delivery of the season!

Website update coming - Stay tuned for the rollout of our 2010 webstie update.

Seed Issue Connected to Complexities of Agriculture

2nd of 3 in a series on *The Seeds of Change - 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.*

Since I wrote the first in this series in the February issue of [A Step Inside](#), the controversy surrounding Monsanto's dominance in the seed industry has continued to be in the news. At the same time, the scope of the debate has also received more attention. Friday, March 12, Public Radio Program, [Science Friday](#), covered the issue of genetic engineering of food crops as a strategy to address global hunger. On the same day, Ankeny, Iowa hosted the first of a series of planned joint US Dept. of Justice & Agriculture Workshops for public discussion focused on this very question of competition. The issue of control of the vegetable seed base that I brought up as we encountered it through our seed purchase has complicated and diverse threads.

Check www.farmertofarmer.org, you'll learn about the consequences conventional commodity crop farmers are feeling as a result of the concentration in the seed industry. A new report, "Out of Hand" urges USDA to "reinvigorate public breeding and cultivar development to ensure needs of farmers and general public are met and that research is conducted in an open and honest way." Listen to [Science Friday's](#) March 12 podcast, you'll learn more about genetic engineering of food crops that is argued as a critical strategy to meet the growing food needs in our global community.

These debates may not be common "supper talk" in your home, but I encourage you to pay attention. Your choice to be a farm member may, at first blush, be about security of your own food source, but it doesn't take long to recognize the interconnection between delicious food on your plate and broader agricultural issues. Wendell Berry' put it well in [The Pleasure of Eating](#) - "Eating is an agricultural act..." and "when food, in the minds of eaters, is no longer associated with farming and with the land, then the eaters are suffering a kind of cultural amnesia that is misleading and dangerous."

Winter Workshops – One of our significant winter activities is farmer workshops. In January we attended the Practical Farmers of Iowa conference where Jan was featured as one of the keynote speakers. Mid February Tim attended the Practical Farmers of Iowa Cooperators meeting where he co- led a session about the mix of cultivated and natural areas on the farm. Then in late February we attended and presented at The Organic Conference in La Crosse, Wisconsin.

This Organic Conference is the nation's largest organic farming conference and reported a record attendance of 2,700 this year. We participated in the half day Organic University – Jan attending a session on plant and soil relationships and Tim attending a session on weed management. There is always a fantastic selection of workshops and knowledgeable farmers. We came away with numerous new insights. The session we led? The topic was succession planting. We had anticipated maybe 50 and had designed a hands-on component to the workshop. Ha! There were 200. But undaunted and committed to the importance of the interactive learning, we managed the small group feature anyway. We had a great time.

What travels took Jan away so much of February?

Just before our five day trip to Wisconsin to the farming conference, I got to spend 10 days wonderful days touring in Hawaii with my mom. We learned a lot about the plants and animals of Hawaii and ate well thanks to visits at many farmers markets. Along with fresh produce, the markets featured beautiful floral bouquets such as these pictured here.

