

Jimmy Acres: A Tommerdahl Family Farm

Vol. 32
September 2018

Hello Friends and Neighbors!

We had more of an abrupt end to our selling season at the beginning of the month than we had hoped...we can always blame things on weather not being quite right, hurricanes dumping too much rain, rabbits taking more than their fair share of the garden harvest, or even dealing with a snake bite. But the truth is, while those things may have happened and harvest levels did dramatically drop, after a summer of working hard to bring our produce to you, we took the month to be a little selfish. We do have the goal to bring real good food to as many people as possible, but we also have a goal to feed ourselves, so we took the month to put some extra time into preserving the last of the summer harvest for winter consumption by canning, freezing, pickling, and dehydrating to fill up our freezers and shelves (as well as our own bellies!).



We've also spent the month doing more goal setting, long-term planning and infrastructure development in order to expand and enhance our produce supply in future years. We're working on setting up a few hoop houses to extend the season and (hopefully) bring you leafy greens and other fall veggies into the winter, working on our proGRASSive farming methods (see article to the right), and starting the process of getting ready to hire some 4-legged employees within the next ~6 months.

While it may not have been our most veggie-full month, it was by far our most fruit-full month to date around the farm. Some highlights include:

- ♣ **Pawpaw** harvest! This native tropical fruit grows wild through our woods along the creek, and by keeping our paths a bit tamer, we were able to get to them more easily than previous years. Many of our trees are still small, but we definitely had a bigger harvest this year than last.
- ♣ **Muscadine** and **Scuppernong** grape harvest has also been much more prolific this year than last. While these are also native plants to the area (and we do have wild ones through the woods), our most abundant harvest is from our domesticated vines that we planted a few years ago. Interestingly, out of all of the varieties of grapes that we've planted, only these varieties were apparently unappatizing to the mob of Japanese Beetles that ravaged the arbor earlier this summer.
- ♣ We had our first significant harvest of **pears** this month as well...so much fruit! While not a native fruit like the others, Kieffer pear trees are extremely common throughout NC due to their high yields and resistance to blight. Their flesh can be hard and a bit grainy, but the flavor makes them great for cooking, baking, drying, and eating raw. Like our other fruits, we hope to bring them to the farmstand next year!
- ♣ Back in the garden, we've had some tomatoes, peppers, and eggplants continue to trickle in, and the okra has still been coming in in bucketfuls. The winter squash and pumpkins are having a good year and their ripening is reminding us that fall is indeed here. This month has mostly been dedicated to prepping soil for the winter, either by heavy mulching or planting cover crops.



ProGRASSive Farming

by Jake



Fall is here once again, and we are busy reflecting on this season and looking towards next spring to when the vegetables erupt from the ground and the weeds and pests are knocking at our door. We are looking to next year to turn this year's shortcomings into next year's vegetables on your kitchen tables!

Since Anna started growing produce at the farm 4 years ago, she has religiously practiced no-till methods, and in doing so, she has observed improvements in soil structure, water holding capacity, and has produced a steady stream of vegetables summer after summer with no added inputs other than a little mulch and compost here and there. This year, we've begun to add some compost and raw minerals to boost plant health and productivity, but our philosophy remains to input as little as possible, knowing that Mother Nature has the potential to return a bounty of food if we just take the time to understand what she needs.

In addition to improving soil health, Anna claims that weed pressure has decreased year after year. Anna also claims that she loves to weed [fact check from Anna: in moderation, true]. I, however, do not share this same passion or patience.

Summer 2018 was the first season I stepped into the gardening ring. While I did not fall flat on my face, I do feel the weed pressure came close to knocking me out. After vacationing from my section of the garden for 1 week in early August, the weeds took over, leaving all of the tomatoes, cucumbers and squash lost in a jungle of grass. I discovered that I either needed to develop a passion for weeding or experiment with a new method of low-maintenance farming so that I can continue to devote most of my time to livestock.

Recently, I have begun my experiment with proGRASSive farming (not trademarked so feel free to incorporate into your daily usage). As opposed to the trendy term of "sustainable farming" that has become popular in recent years, prograssive farming aims to not just sustain the state of our soil, but rather improve and build upon a resource that can always be better. Sustaining is better than degrading as conventional agriculture does, but frankly, we can do better than just maintaining a degraded resource.

What has been my nemesis in the garden this year, I hope to turn into my best friend next year. Grass is already my best friend in the cattle pasture, so why not continue to strengthen that close bond in the vegetable pasture? The idea is nothing new, nothing revolutionary. Not only have other gardeners farmed this way, but nature farms this way as well. By mulching heavily with old hay and cut grass throughout the growing season, we will be applying a blanket of weed suppression along with a slow release source of fertility. Our no-till, compost heavy style of farming provides a home to a hearty population of microbes to break down grass and to feed our plants. By controlling which plants get to grow through this extra thick layer of grass, we can provide optimal conditions for our vegetables through the heat, the hurricanes, and the summer onslaught of grass growth.

At this time next year, I hope to be spending much less time worrying about weeds and much more time harvesting produce for our customers well into the fall. At the very least, we hope to gain a pun-y phrase we can slap on a T-shirt!

If you have any suggestions for things you'd like to see in future newsletters, or have any ideas for how we can improve our customer service or your produce-buying and -consuming experience, please let us know! And as always, please feel free to pass this along to all of your produce-loving friends and neighbors!

"If someone asked you how your marriage was, and you said it was SUSTAINABLE, they'd get a sense it wasn't very good."

~Gabe Brown~

Describing why we strive to regenerate rather than simply sustain in farming

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