

## Jenny-Jack Sun Farm

### "good food news"

The winter squash, all 700 plants, are finally in the ground, rooted securely, and beginning to send their far-reaching, curious vines outward into a field that will eventually be an ocean of intertwined green leaves and yellow and orange blossoms. It's breathtaking when that happens. To see a field working so hard to produce its very own nutritious prize and in doing so create a canopy of protection from an invasive world dominated by critters and sunshine and weeds. But, we're a good month from that projected scenario. Now, its ten rows of ambitious baby plants tucked firmly underneath rich soil every 3 feet and overlaid with bio-plastic. This is our first season growing squash with plastic. The last ten years we have either used paper mulch or used no mulch and hand weeded multiple times over the span of their 4 months in the ground. These two methods work but neither are ideal. The paper mulch is a beast to put down without a machine. It does cover the entire field, walking rows included, but we had to use t-posts and bricks to hold it in place which sort of works if there is no wind and if you use lots of t-posts and bricks. And not using any mulch works, of course, if you carve out the time during the busiest harvest season of the year to weed well, otherwise, it's a jungle and nobody is happy. So, here we are, in our 11<sup>th</sup> season still looking for an edge, for a tablespoon more of efficiency, for a concrete winter squash planting plan that works and makes good sense.

The thing with black plastic is if you want it to pass the time-saving, back-relieving test you need a tractor mounted plastic layer, which we currently do not have. We do not own one for a few reasons. First, they are expensive, around \$1500 for one that fits our size tractor. Second, up until now, we have not been certain we wanted to make bio-plastic a piece of our weed controlling system. It is expensive, controversial, and machine-dependent. Third, most farmers who use plastic in their operation, biodegradable or throw away, tend to farm more land and use a higher powered tractor than ourselves. We operate in a weird area where we are too big to depend solely on hand tools and too small to rely heavily on machines. There are a few companies who make plastic layers for compact tractors like we use, but we know of no one who owns one and we cannot find feedback online from growers with experience. We have been pondering this move for a while now unwilling to pull the trigger. Operating on tight margins prevents too many hasty, unwise decisions, but it also hands you a greenhouse full of winter squash babies ready to meet the land, a full roll of bio-plastic ready to cover 2000' of bed space, and nothing but a bamboo stick and human bodies to lay it down.

There are times like this throughout the year, fewer now than in the beginning, when a certain farm activity on the verge of implementation sneaks up rather quickly and the right tools or a specific system or an organized, thought-through plan is nowhere to be found. That's kind of what happened with this winter squash planting. We knew we were doubling our squash efforts and all of it was going in on plastic, but the part we failed to really unpack was how that plastic would transition from a cardboard roll to tucked tightly on TEN, long, 30" wide beds. We laid all 2000' feet with one person walking slowly backwards unwrapping the roll and two others slowly shoveling soil onto the edges. Despite knowing there was a tool out there that could make the job exponentially quicker and easier, everyone kept their wits, grittily pushed through, and refrained from any head-banging melt downs. We are placing our order for a tractor mounted plastic layer this week but we now know that we are capable of laying lots of plastic by hand and are both physically and mentally stronger for it. Operating within the 'less than ideal' seems to be a common refrain in the farm business, and I don't particularly like it, but I do know there is so much wisdom wrapped up in work that confounds, in jobs that make you feel stupid because a better alternative obviously exists. The pushing through with a cheerful spirit is so damn hard, but it helps considerably to be surrounded by people who do it so well.

## Wednesday On-Farm Market

**What to expect this week on the table:** Arugula, Kale, Cabbage, Sweet Asian Turnips, Watermelon Radish, Strawberries, Blueberries! Green Garlic, Green Onions, Lettuce, Carrots, Beets, Kohlrabi, Summer Squash and Zucchini, Cucumbers, Purple Sweet Peppers, Jalapenos, Poblanos, Anaheim Chilis, Shishitos/Padrons (mildly hot peppers), Green Beans, Eggplant.

**Summer Transplants:** Basil, Heirloom & Beefsteak Tomatoes, 'Juliet' salad, and Roma Tomatoes. Also Eggplant & Hot Peppers

**Farm made items:** Elderberry Tincture, Ginger Tincture, Turmeric Tincture, Holy Basil Tincture.

**Farm Pork:** Link & ground sausage, Ribs, Ham hocks, Lard, Chops.

**Turntime Farm (Ellerslie):** Ground Beef (**currently out of stock, back next week**) And Pastured Eggs

ALSO, Sue Batistini's breads and granola bars!

This market tends to be small but festive; folks shop while catching up with old friends, exchange recipe ideas, talk with the farmers and "Market Girl" chef Shannon, and stroll through the fields where all the produce is grown. We would be honored to be a part of your weekly good food grazing routine.

## Pictures Of The Week



This is the 10<sup>th</sup> and final bed of hand-laying biodegradable black plastic for Winter Squash production. This field is 50' x 200', which doubles our winter squash planting from years past.



Chris cultivating the winter squash field yesterday several hours before a rain. The farmall Super A has a sweep on each side up front and then a larger one on each side behind the wheels. We were a little unsure if this mechanical weeding technique would uplift or dislevel the plastic since the rows are so close but as you can see it worked beautifully. And actually, the sweeps toss some soil onto the plastic, covering small weeds growing on the soil used to weigh down the plastic.



Squash bugs are the major pest in our cucurbit (squash and cucumber family) production. There is not too many straightforward solutions for prevention and most of the effective ones include lots more added labor. So, the way we have chosen to lessen their damage is through a trap crop of 'Blue Hubbard' Squash. 'Blue Hubbard' naturally holds an increased amount of cucurbitic acid which is what these bugs are after in the first place. The hope is that they spend their days sucking the life out of these plants and leave the more valuable ones alone, or at least alone enough to get a head start. Its best to go through the trap crop and destroy the bugs, but in an organic system that means hand picking which is not fun when its 100 degrees. We \*plan\* to keep up with squashing these squash bugs on the trap crop.

*The Extension Entomologist for Auburn University, Dr. Ayanava Majumdar or "Dr. A" as he introduces himself, has done plenty of field research of Blue Hubbard as a trap crop and highly recommends it to organic growers. We've learned a lot from Dr. A and you can too through his website and newsletter: <http://www.aces.edu/anr/ipm/Vegetable/>*

Where to find our produce and products:

**Our produce may be found at:**

**On Farm Market Wednesdays from 9-12 (through December)**

**Columbus Market on Broadway Saturdays from 9-12**

**We have a 110 member CSA with drop-off locations in Lagrange, Columbus, and On-farm.**

**You can find our produce on the menus of Food Blossoms Catering out of Hamilton and Bare Root Farmacy in Columbus.**

Take good care,  
Chris and Jenny