

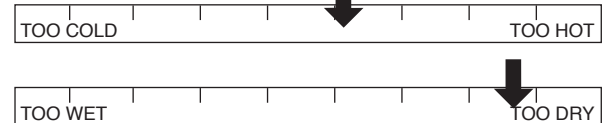


What's in the box and where does it go?

| | Fridge? | Bag? | Notes & Varieties |
|-------------|---------|---------|-------------------------------------|
| Basil | No | Plastic | |
| Cantaloupe | Yes | No | Tirenno, Maverick or Sarah's Choice |
| Carrots | Yes | Plastic | |
| Cilantro | Yes | Plastic | |
| Cucumbers | Yes | Plastic | |
| Dill | Yes | Plastic | |
| Eggplant | Yes | Plastic | Not all boxes |
| Garlic | No | No | |
| Green Beans | Yes | Plastic | |
| Onions | No | No | Walla wallas |
| Peppers | Yes | Plastic | Green bell, hot cherry or jalapeño |
| Tomatoes | No | No | Reds and heir-looms |

Farm Report 8/16/12

Rainfall0.41"
 High Temperature 85°
 Low Temperature 51°
 Farmer Complaint Indicators™:



It's true that we could easily sell more shares than we currently have, we do sell out of our shares quickly each year. And there would be some new efficiencies that would come with a larger operation. But I'm just not sure why everything must constantly grow in size and scale. The topic of size and scale comes up frequently when farmers talk to each other. We are a medium-sized farm in the CSA farming world of the upper Midwest. There are CSA farms serving the Twin Cities that are large wholesale farms, with hundreds of acres of vegetables under cultivation and there are farms that consist of a very large garden that may just have a dozen CSA shares.

Over the years I've come to the conclusion that the only right scale is the scale that you're comfortable with. I also feel that we need to match the scale of the enterprise to the carrying capacity of the land. We own 80 acres here at the farm but only grow vegetables on about 25, and of these only about 6 have vegetables on them in a given year. The rest of the time we are growing cover crops on them that replenish the organic matter that's burned up during the intensive tillage that vegetables require. If we had very deep, flat and fertile topsoil it might make sense for us to grow our operation. But I am not interested in mining the topsoil for short-term gains.

By not continually increasing the scale of our operation we're able to focus on the long-term building of the quality of our soil, and ideally leave it in better condition than we found it. Over the last several years farmland prices have doubled in our area of Wisconsin, but the real value of the farmland continues to fall as operations get bigger and lose sight of what it means to be a steward to a piece of land for a short time.

Get Big or Get Out

For about 30 years this has been the driving philosophy behind agriculture in our country. The idea that small operations are simply too inefficient to meet the demands of our planet with it's nearly 7 billion people.

Farms that grow produce, like ours, are not immune from being painted with the same brush. There's been an explosion of CSA farms serving the Twin Cities metro over the last few years. When we started out in 2003 there were around 15, and it had been that way for a while. There wasn't much competition among farms because the demand outstripped the supply. Over the past decade the number of farms has more than quadrupled, as has interest in CSA.

As the CSA movement has thrived we made a conscious decision to find a profitable size that we could make a living at and not grow beyond that size. Currently we have about 175 regular season shares and 100 winter shares. This is the size we've been at for the last 3 or 4 years, and is most likely where we'll stay. In fact I can see reducing the size of our operation more likely in the future than growing it any larger.

It looks like there will be enough cantaloupe for everyone to get two again this week. Maybe we'll have one more for next week. The larger ones with the green or yellow stripes are the Tirenno, which is a Tuscan-type melon. They're not as sweet as some of the others, but I really like their flavor, it's not as 'musky' as some of the muskmelons. They got some rave reviews from folks last year so they're back again.

The field tomatoes are starting to crank now, we ripped the high tunnel tomatoes out last Thursday, so that's a good thing. We've got a lot of variety this week too. There's also a range of ripeness among them. Some of them are very ripe and should be eaten in the next day or two. Others could use a few days upside-down on the counter. Tomatoes continue to ripen nicely at room temperature. Don't ever put them in the fridge. All varieties are ready for eating when they give slightly to the pressure of a finger. Color is a good indicator on the red slicers, but can be trickier on some of the heirlooms.

Another beautiful bag of beans is in the box this week. A few are a little over mature, but I was eating them raw in the field so I don't even think you'll notice when they're cooked. We've got one more round of green beans in the field, but it doesn't look like they'll be ready for next week. There are also some lovely shell beans coming on quickly now.

As the tomatoes come on heavily I can't imagine not having cilantro. I like to make a quick homemade fresh salsa with a little onion, cilantro, tomato, garlic, hot pepper, salt and a little lime juice. Vary the proportions of each for your own tastes. The mild onions in the box this week make a nice fresh salsa.

Dill can be a tasty accompaniment to a vinaigrette to toss with your roasted or sautéed green beans.

Basil took the week off last week but is back. Some of the older planting has been suffering from bug damage so it's not been as nice. This is mostly from the new planting, but we'll see how long it remains in good shape.

Again not enough eggplant for everyone this week, but if you missed out last week you should get one this week.

The cucumbers are starting to wind down, but we've had them in the box for ten weeks, so maybe it's time to say goodbye.

Farm News

It's continue to be quite dry at the farm and the irrigation has been running frequently. Thankfully the temperatures have moderated and the plants aren't requiring the water just to stay alive like they were a couple of weeks ago.

I finally managed to get the fields for 2013 laid out and plowed up. I always mean to get this done in early July, but there's always something that comes up. We'll be back in the farthest away fields from the buildings which is a nice change. There's more deer to fight over the veggies with, but we also get to enjoy foxes and pheasants.

Speaking of pheasants, they've had a good year here on the farm. I think a couple of different pheasant families raised a brood this season since we've been seeing fairly large groups of 10 to 15 young pheasants in the fields. Hopefully they do well this winter and continue to thrive. It's also probably why we've been seeing red foxes around more.

As I mentioned in the email last week it's not too early to start thinking about joining us for our 10th annual Pumpkin Day on Saturday, September 29th. Arrive between 3 and 4, we'll take a hay rack ride around the farm, maybe even see some deer or turkeys like we did last year. Then we'll swing by the pumpkin patch to pick some pumpkins. Then have a fabulous pot-luck spread at the barn. It's too early to tell how the pumpkin crop is going to be this year, the leaves are still keeping their secrets hidden beneath them.

Coming next week: Tomatoes, cilantro, dill, purple viking potatoes, cantaloupe, garlic, kale, carrots.

Fresh Tomato Salsa

- 1 pound vine-ripened red tomatoes (about 3 medium)
- 1 fresh serrano or jalapeño chiles
- 1/8 medium onion
- 1/4 cup fresh cilantro sprigs
- 1/2 teaspoon minced garlic
- 1/2 teaspoon sugar
- 3/4 tablespoon fresh lime juice

Quarter and seed tomatoes. Cut tomatoes into 1/4-inch dice and transfer to a bowl. Wearing rubber gloves, seed and finely chop chiles. Finely chop enough onion to measure 1/8 cup and chop cilantro. Stir chiles, onion, cilantro, and garlic into tomatoes with sugar and lime juice and salt and pepper to taste. Salsa may be made 1 hour ahead and kept at cool room temperature.