



The Farm at Miller's Crossing

Week of June 28th 2010

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From the Farmers....

We are faced on a daily basis with choices of how we should manage this farm. Some are clear...the weeds are threatening a crop and must be pulled; the crops are dry and need water.

However, as industrial agricultural practices creep into organic agriculture, we are faced with very different choices than we used to be.

There is now a huge array of chemicals certified for use in organic production. Many of the companies behind them are dabbling in organically certified chemicals, and have a strong foothold in the larger conventional insecticide, herbicide and fungicide markets. Familiar names like Dow industrials are on the list. Now to give this movement the benefit of the doubt, these "new" chemicals are safer than most of the traditional conventional formulations, but make no mistake you would not let your children near these products, they are serious.



Last year's outbreak of late blight, and other assorted bacterial and fungal attacks in the cold and wet weather caused all farmers to consider chemical applications. Here at our farm we have used pyrethrums (crushed chrysanthemums) or *Bacillus Thuringiensis* (Bt) once in a while to kill attacking bugs. These chemicals are powerful, expensive, and take time and labor to apply. We would rather not use them, but have on occasion.

There is a lot of pressure out there to use chemicals. We have the Cornell Extension Newsletter urging all organic growers to start their copper spraying programs immediately as Late Blight (the reason behind the 2009 tomato crop failures) has already been seen in CT, Long Island and New Jersey.

What are we to do? The debate boils down to a question of accepting losses. As we strive to improve our planning, cover cropping, compost making and cultivating, the potential for each of our crops to reach their highest yields becomes more and more possible.

We take the approach that a healthy plant given a good start on life can survive and thrive if managed properly.

Our experience tells us that under good growing conditions a healthy and vigorous plant can fend off disease and be productive.

Chemicals can increase yields by giving the plants a longer life to bulk up, but it does come at a cost, both monetarily and environmentally.

So take this year's onion crop. We have a large planting of onions; they were started in early March, seeded in the greenhouse, thinned and planted out in the field. They have been weeded twice and drip irrigated providing optimal conditions for their growth. And then came the thrips. We have thrips every year, they are tiny insects that climb up the leaves sucking the juice out leaving small white streaks where they have been. They weaken the plant, they take away from its ability to transfer sunlight into larger bulbed onions, and they can spread disease. Yet despite our yearly crop of thrips...I am still using our onions from last year. The flavor is good, the storage quality is clearly superior, the majority of last year's harvest was medium sized.

Chris asked me in one of our nightly conversations, "So I guess we just accept our losses?" It is a hard question.

Our employees have spent days weeding onions, we heated a greenhouse to ensure their rapid growth, their management represents the time, energy and money that each of our crops receives.

Every year Mother Nature brings new and different challenges that we must face. Yet when it comes to the use of the arsenal of chemicals that is now on our doorstep, we have come to the conclusion that less is better. We have planted an insurance crop of tomatoes in our greenhouse in case blight comes our way, and we will always over plant to ensure adequate amounts for all of you who support us.



While we reserve the right to use these organically approved chemicals under intense conditions, we have decided that here on our farm we will not implement a proactive/aggressive chemical program, less is better in our eyes.

Enjoy, Katie