

Riverbend Farm Newsletter May 4, 2008

What a beautiful day. The bloodroot are blooming. The frogs have thawed out again and are peeping and croaking. Birds are everywhere. The river is up about two feet due to the recent rains. The bats and swallows are back.

There was a thrush down by the bird bath today. The peas and spinach are coming up out in the field. All the little weeds are starting to germinate too.

The past couple weeks were spent racing the weather. Monday the 21st I was spreading compost before the rain came in and made it too wet to get in the field. Tuesday was an office day and time to run errands. We did not get a lot of rain, but after last year, any is welcome. On Wednesday I disked up another bed for greens and radishes and planted. In the evening Marty brought his 'new' Oliver 1650 over and plowed up some ground for potatoes and oats and peas. His tractor had a bunch of rust floating around in the gas tank that caused trouble with getting it to run right. Marty disked the ground that we had just plowed and I planted oats and peas (for cover crop seed). Thursday it rained. More office work, repotted eggplant, and I brought the plants in off the wagons as there was snow in the forecast.

Friday was another rainy day. I had my monthly chiropractor appointment and did some grocery shopping as long as I was in town. The only planting was in the greenhouse, about 1200 lettuce got seeded. It actually snowed pretty hard. Saturday was still snowing. A wet windy miserable day. The soil temp dropped to 32 degrees. Too cold for even oats to germinate.

I was listening to the radio while potting up some peppers and eggplant and there was an interview with a Sami elder from Finland, about how climate change is affecting their ability to hunt and fish. His conclusion was that "Nature no longer trusts us." Coincidentally, Lester Brown's new book 'Plan B 3.0' came in the mail. He writes about the changes in climate, food production, peak oil, water shortages and the impact that they will have on societies. The news is not all good. He writes in a very matter of fact way.

About a third of the book is references for the footnotes. Compelling in a train wreck sort of way. An interesting tidbit about energy use in our food system - the biggest energy user is the kitchen refrigerator, not the farm tractor.

Last Sunday Marty came over and I got to help him press the water pump together for his favorite tractor, a mid 50s John Deere 70 diesel. The tricky part was getting tabs on the ceramic part of the seal (a \$40 part) lined up with the impeller and pressing the shaft through the housing, the seal and the impeller without breaking the tabs off the seal. Of course it has to be done blind. We did get it together.

This week Bex was back from Organic Inspector training down in Iowa. On Monday we finished repotting the eggplant. Tuesday I put together another flat rack for an old wagon running gear, Bex seeded the first summer squash and cucumbers in the greenhouse, and it was warm enough to move the lettuce, broccoli and cabbage back out to the wagons. Wednesday another round of greens and radishes were seeded in the field. The first batch that has been snowed on a couple times is not looking so good. The radish leaves have some white spots and are kind of shiny. The true leaves have not emerged yet so they may turn out alright after all. In the afternoon we set out the first of the lettuce transplants. They were a little root bound, having sat in the plug trays a week longer than they should have. Thursday Angelica started working and the folks from the Agricultural Justice Project came out to do their audit.

AJP is working on some of the same issues as the Local Fair Trade Network. They are trying to create better outcomes for farmer and farm workers through a domestic Fair Trade label. It is a great idea that cost me \$3000 last year. AJP seems a little more top down than LFTN and we have spent the last 30 years learning that not all of the supply side stuff works as promised.

Thursday afternoon it was not raining yet, so we planted all the potatoes. Friday morning still wasn't raining so we set out broccoli, cabbage, and some green onions for the CSA. Friday afternoon it did rain. I did some office work while Bex and Angelica potted up the plants that are going to Peterson's and the ones for Cathy's sale. All the lettuce and brassica flats on the wagons went back into the greenhouse since the forecast was for cold nights. I'm having a war with the striped gophers. They are getting in the greenhouse and eating the lettuce and cabbage plants.

Saturday turned out cool, but sunny. A much better day. I spent most of the day reassembling the Budding basket weeder and mounting it on the Super C. I tried it out on some ground that I had worked up and it churns up the dirt between the rows but does not throw much into the row. It could be just perfect for some of those things that need to be hand hoed.

Today was a beautiful day. I took most of it off. In the morning I went over to our daughter Jeri's and helped her straighten up an old addition that someone who did not own a level or plumb bob stuck on the side of the garage. After we pulled it back as far as we could (about 6"), it was still an inch out of plumb. I did move some plants around in the greenhouse when I got home. Mary, Jennifer, and the kids went to the May Day Parade. They sat with Tracy from the Birchwood. Emma is getting some new teeth. Her molars are coming in. She was pretty uncomfortable last night.

The guy renting the field across from us planted green beans last week and put row cover over them. It will be interesting to see how that works out.

Greg