

THE RHETORICAL ROOT

A monthly farm newsletter



SIGNS OF THE SEASON

Partnering Opportunity with Prairie-to-Plate Enterprises

Tricks of the Trade: how the right tools can make farming at a human scale possible

WOBBLY LEGS

Much like this newborn lamb, we are finding our legs again as season no. two hits full swing

April is a fickle month. We gardeners have target planting dates to hit, and when we



just can't wait any longer, we play chicken with the weather....tilling when it's too wet or transplanting when it's too windy. Anything just to get things growing. Even amid this frenzy, the steady incremental changes of the calendar year never cease to fill us with a joyful awe. Seeing the first wobbly steps of a lamb, taking in the full moon on Good Friday, picking up chicks in the mail, and cutting the first asparagus stalks are all heart-warming signs of the life and hope of spring.

During the last two weeks of April, we have been hard at it. We go from very little time spent outside to nearly all of it. We have been tilling and hilling up raised beds for planting, making fence to keep out rabbits, hauling wheelbarrows of compost, hooking up irrigation, putting up the second tunnel, monitoring newborn lambs, and trying to keep track of it all on spreadsheets.

We have nearly all the brassicas in the ground, and a fair amount of greens. Peas are up, as well as a few potatoes. Our tunnel tomatoes are surviving but not thriving. Cocktail cucumbers just went into the second tunnel and we are about to harvest our first crop: radish! They will go to our local grocery stores.

We will be receiving a shipment of compost from Iowa at month's-end, and shortly after we are expecting a delivery of strawberry, asparagus, and rhubarb plants.

A NEW MARKET EMERGES

THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF PRAIRIE TO PLATE ENTERPRISES OPENS UP THE NEW POSSIBILITY OF SUPPLYING A FARM-TO-TABLE RESTAURANT

Earlier this month, a trio from Freeman announced their plans to build a local meat processing plant & butcher shop. This is exciting news to many because there is a massive shortage of butcher shops in South Dakota; producers often have to schedule their animals 6 months in advance! Even more exciting than the mere idea of a butcher shop is the progressive, holistic, local foods-focused business model that Prairie to Plate envisions. "The business is geared toward creating opportunity for livestock producers to access the consumer more directly," the partners said. "The name Prairie-to-Plate symbolizes the vertical integration – from the prairie to the plate of customers – that will keep all dollars flowing to the local community."

Aside from their mobile slaughter unit and land for their processing plant, one of the cornerstone assets that Prairie to Plate has acquired is a local restaurant that will become The Chislic House. The owners envision a farm-to-table type restaurant and approached us about supplying salad greens. Although the details are still being worked out, we are thrilled with the opportunity to begin expanding into some wholesale accounts, especially with such an innovative and locally-minded startup like Prairie to Plate.

LET'S TALK TOOLS

INNOVATIVE TOOLS ARE KEY TO SUCCESS IN THE WORLD OF PROFESSIONAL MARKET GARDENING

I always thought that in order to grow vegetables, all you needed was a tiller and a good hoe. But in the world of compact market gardening, you need to utilize every bit of space and time if you want to be successful. That means spending less time weeding and more time doing tasks that actually add value. There is a great deal of buzz in the market garden world regarding tools as big-name growers come up with new ideas and work with specialty manufacturers to get them on the market. Tine weeders, grid markers, precision seeders, LED grow lights...these are tools I've been geeking out about as we decide what new purchases to make this season. Watch for a look at some of my favorite tools on social media in the coming weeks!

THE LEARNED FARMER

Andre & I greatly value our 4-year college education, but a liberal arts school doesn't necessarily offer a degree with the nitty gritty details of market gardening. So we rely heavily on the resources available to us through books, YouTube, websites, catalogs, and even webinars.

One book that has been absolutely indispensable for us as we began learning the simple logistics of how to grow and space out various crops has been Ben Hartman's *Lean Farm Guide to Growing Vegetables*. Ben and his wife Rachel run a mini-farm called Clay Bottom Farm in Goshen, IN and Andre had the privilege of interning with him for a semester during college. While Andre was there, Ben was in the process of writing his first book, "The Lean Farm", in which he applies the "lean" concept to a small farm setting. "Lean" is a Japanese method of production that minimizes waste ("muda") without sacrificing production. It's typically applied in the industrial setting, like Toyota.

Now Ben is somewhat of a celebrity in the market garden world. By figuring out exactly what items his customers want, how much they want, and when they want it, and by systematically cutting out every bottleneck in his process, he and his wife are able to earn comfortable living wages on less than one acre.

During a meeting I had in northern Indiana this month, Andre was able to visit Clay Bottom Farm and catch up with Ben. He got to tour Ben's new urban farm with a high-tech greenhouse and the propagation and processing rooms attached to their new "barn house." We were generously gifted with Ben's old 6-row seeder and a bag of Mizuna leftover from that morning's farmer's market!

As helpful as books and videos can be, any farmer knows that there is no substitute for connecting in person with mentors who have been at it for a lot longer than you have.





FROM WILD TO MILD

Here's a shot of our garlic patch taken on April 15 after a "bomb cyclone" hit us with snow and ice. You can see the juxtaposition between the green grass and the large snow drift. Whether or not this late spring storm was the product of climate change, I fear for the unpredictability of weather patterns that have and will continue to affect farmers here and across the world. I believe regenerative agriculture will need to play a big part in restoring our climate. That was heavy on my mind on Earth Day this month.

CSA SHARES SOLD OUT

Thanks to all who bought a share from us this year! We were humbled by how many responses we got from both old and new customers. It's going to be a great season of putting together boxes. We love interacting with customers during deliveries and hearing about what you're making with the veggies from our boxes. The best thing about direct sales is that we get direct feedback. That's what motivates us to keep going and get better each year. Thank you!



HAPPY RESURRECTION DAY!

Easter is a special holiday for us. It is the pinnacle of the church calendar, and we always look forward to attending the meaningful Good Friday and Easter Sunday services at our church. The resurrection of Christ assures us that death does not have the final word. It's what moves me to keep doing good in the world. Regardless of what your faith may be, we wish you a happy Easter & a joyful spring! Blessings, Lillie & Andre

