



Trumpeter Swan Farm

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Newsletter April 2015

Cover Crops

Any time a field is bare dirt, it is exposed to the elements. Wind will blow away top soil. Rain will wash away top soil. And soil nutrients can be lost. So when a field is not in use, we plant a cover crop on it.

Cover crops hold the soil in place. And, while they grow, they scavenge any free nutrients, especially nitrogen, which can wash away in rain. Finally, when a cover crop is tilled back into the soil, it increases organic matter, providing food for beneficial bacteria, fungi, and earthworms.

Different covers have different uses. This field has two covers, planted last fall after harvest. On the left is oats and oilseed radish – they grow quickly in fall, but then winterkill, and are ready to disk in two weeks before we want to plant in May. On the right is winter rye, a hardy wheat that survives the cold winter. After growing in the fall, it goes dormant like our lawns, and then greens up and starts growing again in the spring. We like to plant this in low areas that will be wetter in the spring. The growing rye will more quickly absorb the water, drying out the field, and in early June it will be ready to disk in for later plantings in June or July.



Coming Events

**Open House – Sunday, Apr 19, 1pm-4pm,
Coincides with Baby Animal Fair in Buffalo**

Our earliest seeds should be emerging from the soil. Kids can plant onion sets, plus take some home to plant outside somewhere. See the small eggs the new hens are laying, and take some home.

You may want stop at the Baby Animal Fair in Buffalo. It's free with donation to food shelf. Chicks, ducks, lambs, llamas, and other local animals.

It's from Noon-4pm. Stop by before or after visiting the farm. Located in the Civic Center, turn right off MN55 (at Menards) as you come into town. Sponsored by Heifer International, they showcase their work providing farm animals to help families worldwide get started. See www.babyanimalfair.org for more info.

What's Growing

On March 12th, after the early warmup, we were able to till a field and plant seeds. It's earlier than normal, but we just go with the flow. We planted cold tolerant seeds, like lettuce, spinach and peas.

A month later, after some colder spells, the spinach is finally emerging. The others, if they make it, should not be far behind. Warm weather should speed things up.

In the high tunnel, green onions are growing well, and spinach and lettuce are finally starting to grow. Just need that sunshine.

In The Field

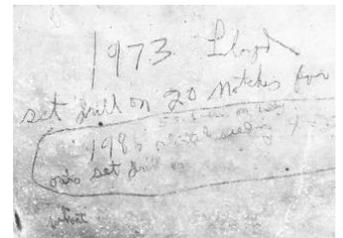
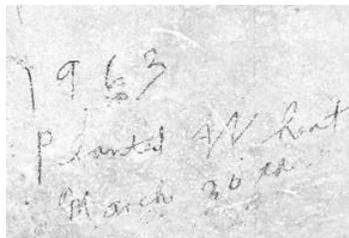
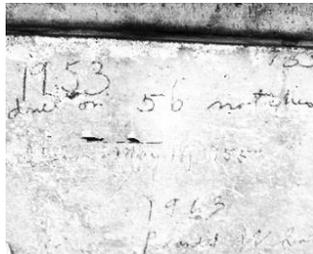
It looks like we will be able to start planting in earnest in the last half of April. We welcome the rain, but not too much. Need those breaks for the soil to dry enough to till and plant.

At this point, we are sticking to plants that can tolerate frost, as we figure May 15 as our typical last frost. So lettuce, spinach, peas, onions and potatoes.

We will start seeding trays of tomatoes, peppers and squash – for transplanting after the soil is warm and the chance of frost is past.

Equipment Corner – Grain Drill

We use a Grain Drill to plant cover crops. Not sure why it's called "drill" – it's actually two disks of steel spaced every 6 inches that open up a shallow furrow where the seeds drop into. Then, chains dragging behind the disks close up the furrow. Our Grain Drill is over 60 years old. The design has not changed much over the years, and new ones are similar design. Over the years, farmers have made notes on the inside cover, in pencil, about what and when they planted. The oldest entry is 1953, the year I was born...



Farm Personalities

Ashley Rickards is our Field Manager, responsible for all the planting, cultivating and harvesting. Ash started working on the farm in 2010, looking for a farming job that could grow into something permanent, and let him use his horticultural skills he learned earlier. Two years later, the farm was big enough to allow him to do that, working year-round as a full time job.

Brynn Lackram is his daughter. She worked here part time the last few years, and this year is working more steady hours. Her four month old son, Jayce, has visited the farm several times. But it will be a few more years until we can put him to work...



In The Coop

The chicks we got in November are now starting to lay eggs. They start out with extra small eggs, sometimes called "pullet eggs". (Young hens are called pullets, young roosters are cockerels.)

The eggs size up pretty fast, so by the start of the Buffalo Farmers Market in May, we should have enough for CSA and market customers.

The February chicks are now getting big enough to start venturing out into a protected space of the barn. They will start laying in August, in time for the peak summer time demand.