

Schreiber and Sons CSA Update April 25

Hello CSAers,

Cold weather and cold feed.

While the weather is warmer than below record freezing temperatures, it is still cold. It was below freezing last night and it is supposed to drop to 31 tonight. Ironically, this is almost comforting news as anything that cannot survive a below freezing temperature is already dead. It is demoralizing to walk through your cherries and peaches and dissect the buds and see the blackened and dead embryos that would become the fruit-but that is what I have been doing.

It could be worse, the grower down the road from me lost his entire cherry crop (\$400,000). I have heard that between 15% and 30% of the apple crop was lost, a lot of the cherries and all of the peaches are gone. By the way, this could add up to half a billion dollars across the state. We have no time to mourn all the cauliflower and squash and cumpers, the peaches, cherries, and apples that are lost, we have to focus on what is left.

We ordered additional seed, started more transplants in the greenhouse and went to a nursery and bought addition transplants. We do the best we can, incur the extra costs that we cannot pass on to our customers and order additional propane. Warmer weather is coming after tonight, we believe the temperatures will be below normal, but much more conducive for growing than it has been.

As the days pass, the season is coming into focus for us. We are going to start the CSA the week of May 5, so the deliveries will be on the 6th, 7th and 8th of May, depending on your location. Our target was to have 8 items in the box, however, it looks like we may start out a couple items short.

The low temperatures gave one CSA member cold feet and they asked for a refund because we were unable to start on time. I feel bad that someone was unhappy enough with the delay that they decided to opt out, but we simply have no control over this. If you are in the CSA you have to roll with the punches; this season is starting out cold, slow and rocky, but one look in the greenhouse and you will see what is coming. We have one person who is doing nothing all day long but planting seeds and transplanting out of the greenhouse. Get ready, we have some great things coming-but it will take a bit of patience.

Greenhouse. What is going on in the greenhouse is incredible. I water and fertilize regularly. We are now setting vast trays out each day to harden them off for transplanting. The basil is incredible. A few of the plants are looking a little ratty because we cannot keep from picking off some leaves when we are watering. I have not grown much basil before, but we are changing that this year; lemon basil, Italian basil and Thai basil..... all coming to you. I bet some of them are ready in a 4 weeks or so.

Farm tour and farm party. You have the opportunity to visit the farm on May 25th---yes, I know, that is smack in the middle of Memorial Day weekend. We cannot help it. We are working that Saturday and the following Monday-when you have irrigated crops, you cannot stop for 3 days. Sunday it is. You will get a formal invitation in a couple of weeks, but for now here is the broad out line. We need people to RSVP to the invitation, we will provide the following - the farm location, a farm tour, tents, a lawn, shade, a couple of grills for cooking, table service and some kind of meat/veggie substitute. You provide yourself, a head count, a dish of something, chairs if you want and your beverage of choice.

Without trying to be too prickly, we are going to give you some specific instructions about parking, which entrances to use and a few dos and don'ts. For the most part, we will open our farm to you and you can look at about anything you want. You just have to remember.... it is a farm, we have dirt and lots of it and

you and your kids will likely come into contact with dirt. This is a working farm not an amusement part, so you have to pay a bit of attention-no walking on the cilantro, no climbing on the equipment unless so designated, no pulling up stakes in the research plots, but other than that, we can do pretty much what we want.

Also, when it gets a little darker, we are going to have a really big bonfire-a really big one.

What is going on at the farm.

At this very moment we are planting sweet corn, potatoes and asparagus and transplanting onions. We are putting on the organic fertilizer on the organic ground. We are harvesting asparagus.

We are full speed ahead on transplanting some of the warmer season crops (e.g. tomatoes) under row covers. After tonight it will be smooth sailing. We have to put up some additional row covers for all of the tomatoes, tomatillo, peppers, watermelon, honey dews, cantaloupe, etc, that we have ready for transplant. I picked about a dozen kinds of tomatoes for the CSA, we have about 100 plants of each of these. These things like romas, Big Beef, Early Girl, yellow tomatoes, yellow pear tomatoes as well as some more common heirloom varieties such as Garden Peach, Brandywine, Black Krim and Cherokee Purple. However, I could not help but try some other varieties. We have another two dozen varieties of other kinds of tomatoes. Most of these are in much smaller plantings of 30 plants or so. They have such exotic names and different physical descriptions, I had to try them. Listen to the names of some of these....Orange Oxheart, Aunt Ginney's Purple, Amish Paste tomato, Principe Bourghese and Caspian Pink.

In each of these updates I try to let you know what is going on, but also give you some insight into some basic and fundamental aspects of farming. We are planting asparagus. To grow asparagus you have to first source the seed, which costs \$400 a pound, plant it in a nursery for a year and grow it very carefully. There are no herbicides registered for this, so weed control is a big problem, so is the European asparagus aphid. This is a pesky little bug that can wipe out your entire crop. You have to harvest your asparagus nursery in April with some specialized digging equipment. You have to find ground that has NEVER had asparagus on it. A soil disease builds up over time and it ruins the ground for ever being planted with asparagus again.

Once you have dug the crowns you have to list (=dig) a deep trench and place the crowns by hand into the furrow at a prescribed distance. We have attached some pictures of our asparagus planting operation on our website. The crowns are put in a large pile by the field. The workers put the crowns in cut up burlap bags and sling them over their shoulders. The pack is surprisingly light due to the ungainly shape of the crowns. They very carefully throw the crowns down, top side up-yes there is a top and a bottom to an asparagus crown. The crew chief keeps track of their progress and makes sure they are keeping the distance correctly. In this case, one crown every 12 inches.

In closing..... cross your fingers for warmer weather, but not too warm. *Get ready for some produce!*

Regards

Alan Schreiber