

Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative)

Scattergood Farm Letter

July 2017

Dear Friends.

Since winter I have been pondering a quote from Wes Jackson, founder of the Land Institute in Salina KS, who famously said “If you are working on something that can be finished in your lifetime, you are not thinking big enough.” Though I fancy myself a thoughtful farmer, and I am certainly focused on perennial issues of food production and soil health, offering valuable learning experiences and being a good neighbor, and I feel that these fall short of the challenge Jackson posed.

This seems especially relevant this past year in which we have lost two former Farm Managers, Belle Hinshaw and Don Laughlin. They likely faced the same issues that we currently face, some short-term like too much rain or too little, poor quality hay and not enough of it, soil too wet or too dry and always too weedy; and also some longer term issues like how to honor and encourage the gift of fertility, how to let our work speak to the world, how to cultivate wonder and awe and offer experiences that can inform or transform an adolescent life.

Embodying love and integrity Don and Belle each thought big and lived well, finishing plenty and leaving just enough for the rest of us.

So what have we finished this past year?

Ninth and tenth graders who were part of the Farm Immersion Program studied sustainability and developed rubrics to help the Farm evaluate its performance in managing soil health, water conservation, energy use, biodiversity and doomsday preparedness. Agricultural Research class studied biochar production and benefits, aquaponics, and proper potato storage conditions. May Term Class designed and constructed a greenhouse lean-to on the south side of the barn, repurposing windows from the condemned farm house. Farm Projects and crews helped in so many of the daily functions of the farm, while Prairie Project and PE removed autumn olive and helped manage the sheep as they grazed parts of the prairie for the first time. All students took part in a massive squash harvest in October as well as Farm Fun day during orientation in which we harvested, constructed, weeded, and organized, followed by a picnic and the first Meeting for Worship of the school year. Two graduates, Isaac Chen and Theodore Byrnes contributed greatly to the Farm during their four years here: night feedings of bottle fed lambs, weeding, harvesting, planting, and simply being present to all that happens on the farm and advocating for it. They will be missed.

The Scattergood Farm also welcomed many guests. Students from Mark Twain Elementary, Willowwind School, Stepping Stones Preschool, and Taproot Nature Experience all from Iowa City, as well as Summit School in Cedar Rapids visited throughout the year. Campers from the Scattergood Summer Camps, Peace Camp, Outdoor Adventures and Congregational United Church of Christ visited this summer. Environmental Science class undergrads from Cornell College and Regional Planning graduate students from the Universities of Iowa and Minnesota visited last fall. We also grew food for a wedding, hosted children’s activities at the Iowa City Farmers Market and remained active in Practical Farmers of Iowa, Iowa Farmers Union and Field to Family.

All of this was the work of many. Ben Bowman remained diligent in his work with the livestock. Dana Foster shepherded the Farm Immersion Program and May Term Farm Class. During his time at Scattergood. Mike Severino established the Agricultural Research class, worked hard to maintain the prairie, and never seemed happier than when he stood before a large pile of manure with a shovel in his hands. Tim Schulte guided the razing of the farm house and the raising of the new greenhouse. Our cooks continued making wonderful meals maximizing the bounty from the farm. Sam Taylor, Karen Huff and Isaac Chen have helped keep the farm productive and beautiful this summer. Ken Fawcett managed our row crops and advised us in many other areas. And the Farm Subcommittee of the School Committee again listened carefully and assisted when necessary.

So, does working hard on a beautiful farm producing food for its community pass the Wes test? Likely not, but then I think of the early Quakers of Iowa Yearly Meeting Conservative who fought long to start Scattergood, to keep it open until they couldn't, who reopened it to start another perennial battle of enrollment issues and fiscal challenges, and I am so thankful for their foresight and strength and faith and generosity, so that I might now continue the work of Don and Belle, and do a thing I love, for people whom I love, in a place that is worthy of so much love. Perhaps for some, the work of this lifetime is enough.

Respectfully Submitted,

Mark Quee, Farm Manager