

2020 Farm Report to IYMC

Dear Friends,

As we have all settled in to the practices of physical distancing and compulsive hand washing, for many years industrialized agriculture has used isolation and sanitation in their biosecurity plans. At the Scattergood Farm, though, we have sought to invite and increase human, insect, microbial, plant, and animal diversity by adding habitat and livestock, reducing tillage, and welcoming friends and strangers.

Though the last year ended unpredictably, we still invited students to use the farm as a learning laboratory while sharing our stories and our food with many others.

The school year began with Farm Term, which offered classes in Harvest Rites and Farmlore, Climate Change and Agriculture, and Animal Behavior. Students experimented, learned, created and developed presentations that were shared first with the Scattergood community, and then during our fall Open House. Several students also took part in a Farm PE class that included a lot of harvesting, while others joined a Farm Club and attended the Savannah Institute Annual Gathering and the Practical Farmers of Iowa Annual Conference. As part of the Youth Climate Strike in September, several staff and students joined Tom and James Wahl in planting 120 chestnut trees. The 9th Grade Biology class researched and made recommendations of how to convert 1 acre of pasture to an orchard with a native plant understory, an endeavor funded by a SARE (Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education) Youth Educator Grant.

In addition to the work with SARE, the Scattergood Farm also partnered with Practical Farmers of Iowa and The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation to host a field day in September featuring pollinator habitat restorations and native tea plants. Throughout the year we welcomed guests from Taproot Nature Experience, Willowwind School, Mount Mercy University Sustainability Club, and researchers from the Luther College Biology Department. We assisted a Central College student researching institutional Farm to Table programs and gave many tours to student families and prospective staff members. Mark was recognized as a Master Researcher by PFI and presented at their annual conference. Students provided childcare at that conference as well as the Johnson County Food Policy Council Annual Meeting. We have, with the Rodale Institute, begun to explore no-till vegetable production, and have started a Saturday vegetable market for local folks and have donated food to Table to Table, the Center for Worker Justice, and the Iowa City Catholic Worker House.

Many have been involved in the work of tending the farm, preparing the food and teaching the students. Thanks go to Ben Bowman who has cared for the livestock the past six years, Jenny and Leah Beben who are working on the farm this summer, Dana Foster who will guide the middle school in farm chores and exploration, and our primary cooks, Irving Treadway and Karen Huff, who continue to find creative ways to get students to eat their vegetables. Special thanks go to Thomas Weber who recognized and celebrated the educational, culinary and outreach potential of the Scattergood Farm.

The Scattergood Farm is an organism that cannot contract COVID-19, so it will continue to build resilience with diversity and hospitality, instead of distance and sterility. The farmers, though, must go wash their hands now.

Respectfully submitted by
Mark Quee, Farm Manager