

2024 Farm Report to IYMC

Dear Friends,

Like many of you, I'm sure, I have a number of personal and professional strictures that I follow to address varied crises and injustices in our world. Logically, the leap from these small actions in rural Iowa to heat waves in India, hurricanes in Mexico, wars anywhere and resentment everywhere is strained; however, the compulsion to do something is real. Occasionally I'm asked about these actions: why hang the laundry outside, raise livestock on pasture and grow vegetables organically, when easier alternatives are available? These are not frivolous questions. Ultimately, my answer is that I desire to live in a complex universe where individual actions matter, in which we are empowered to act and doing so engages us with the great totality of things. This modest appeal by a small actor to the vast universe, to me, sounds a lot like prayer.

Once again, students were engaged in many ways on the Scattergood Farm. Student Orientation again concluded with Farm Fun Day for an afternoon of work, food and fellowship on the farm. Farm Term classes studied Fables and Futurism, Manure, and Annie Dillard's Pilgrim At Tinker Creek, while a May Term class looked deeply into prairie ecosystems. The Middle School began each day on the Farm with chores and Collection in the fall, as well as occasional science lessons with soil as an organizing concept. Separate Farm and Livestock crews continued this year as well as a Food Preservation Project class and Farm Team PE classes, which met in the fall and the spring. The Advanced Biology class was frequently on the farm and attended a day of the Practical Farmers of Iowa Conference, while another student attended the Savannah Institute Annual Gathering and the Marbleseed Conference as they learned about grafting fruit trees as part of the Sustainable Agriculture Focus Program. Several students again volunteered to do evening chores on weekdays and we paid a small group of students to do livestock chores on the weekends.

The Scattergood Farm also engaged in outreach to the wider community. We welcomed visits by The Good Earth School, Taproot Nature Experience, Willowwind and Tamarack School. The Scattergood Camp made weekly visits to the farm and enjoyed working with the livestock and sampling various food crops. We consulted with students from St. Olaf College as they sought ways to bolster a school garden project, and with John XXIII Montessori Children's Center in Front Royal, VA as they expand their farm program. We offered tours for Scattergood Weekend and Commencement, and presented at the Marbleseed Conference, the PFI Cooperator's Meeting, an Earth Day celebration at Grinnell College, and tabled an event for Field to Family. We donated hundreds of pounds of organic produce to Table to Table and the Iowa City Free Medical Clinic. We attended conferences hosted by Practical Farmers of Iowa, the Savannah Institute, Seed Savers Exchange, the Iowa Organic Association and Marbleseed. During spring trips, a group did service work at the Savannah Institute in Spring Green, WI, while another biked to and did service work at three local vegetable farms. Mark continues to serve on the steering committee for the Rodale Institute Midwest Organic Center and as a grant reviewer for SARE (Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education--a USDA program).

The past year was quite productive. Nearly all of the school meat consumption was a result of the Scattergood Farm, with two steers and one cull cow, 25 lambs, three hogs and 25 turkeys harvested for our meals. Vegetable production was also robust, with many fall meals featuring

a great variety and abundance of vegetables and with beets, carrots, cabbage, garlic, onions, celery root, parsnips, popcorn and sweet potatoes lasting deep into our second semester. A mild winter helped contribute to early spring growth and we were able to enjoy salad greens, spinach, kale, Napa cabbage, bok choy, cucumbers and nettles before students left for the summer. Tree fruit production was harmed by a spring hail storm resulting in no pears and far fewer apples than most years, though peaches were abundant.

All of this was the result of the hard work of many. Ben Heller continued to manage the livestock program and offered a wide variety of innovative classes and experiences for students to be involved with the Farm, while Dana Foster integrated Middle School experiences. Elias Birchett (class of 2024) has been an enormous help this summer. Our kitchen staff, led by Irving Treadway, did the hard work of converting farm products into delicious meals. Kent Tjossem has been generous with time and guidance as part of the School Committee.

The universe is too large to be understood, but engaging is necessary. Anne Lamott has identified the essential aspects of prayer as “Help. Thanks. Wow.” In my daily life here I appreciate the opportunity to experience each of these often, in thought, word and action.

Respectfully submitted
Mark Quee, Scattergood Farm Manager