

THE ALLEGED FARM NEWS - 16 JUNE 2005

We spent much of this May working in three layers of shirts and winter hats. There were several afternoons I expected, not unreasonably, to see snow squalls bearing down on us from McGraw's hill to finish off the seedlings we had dared transplant out. As for the seeds we sowed, they would grudgingly send up a few tentative leaves, take a look around and, not liking what they found at all, hunker down to wait for some other, more promising season. It was tempting, when one's teeth weren't chattering, to ask, global warming? What global warming?

This past week would appear to have been the planet's answer. It was as if the Earth had said, go to hell you fools, and then done its best to give us a little foretaste. Our cats slowly deflated in the heat. The chickens could not muster up much enthusiasm for their food. And everything—us, the dogs, the plants, the barns—was bathed in sweat. Everything, in any event, but the pigs, who aren't much for sweating. Instead, Mickey Boy sank himself up to his ears in his mud wallow. It was tempting to join him. Well, almost. Fortunately, the heat never got to us quite that badly.

Of course, neither the bleak weather of May nor its infernal June counterpart actually has anything directly to do with global warming (or "that liberal attempt to scare us out of using as much oil and coal as we damn well please" as I believe they call it at the White House). Despite what lots of people seem to think, the local effects of global warming are neither as simple nor as immediate as, say, the local effects of turning up the hot water in the shower.

If we keep behaving the way we do now, the temperature on average will, indeed, go up—and we will be able to tell our grandchildren about how when we were young there were these things called glaciers and lower Manhattan was not below sea level. But we will still have to suffer through the occasional miserably cold May in addition to many miserably hot Junes. In fact, our cold Mays could well be colder than this past one, and those late May snow squalls more than a pessimistic farmer's delusion. That is because what is most likely is simply that the weather will get worse. And that's something I could do without.

Not that I am suggesting we take global warming more seriously because it will make life less pleasant for a small scale organic farmer in northern New York. But we might keep in mind that even something as innocuous as an abnormally hot or cold week can do real harm on a farm (just ask our broccoli) and worry about what seriously bad weather will mean for all the people who grow our food—and for the food they grow. Perhaps losing a few glaciers or some sea ice doesn't matter. After all, what have glaciers and sea ice done for us recently? Perhaps worrying about the fate of glaciers—like worrying about the fate of species—is just the pastime of liberal elitists out of touch with the common folk. But the possibility of losing a significant portion of our food supply

This week's share: Arugula, Bok choy, Lettuce, Mizuna, Radishes, Spinach, Marjoram, Mint

This week's news: As some of you may recall, I sent out a letter in May suggesting that however well we did our job last year, we would do better. I am hard pressed just now to recall what possessed me to engage in such hubris. I should have known the weather would find out, and, implacable as any Greek deity, make me pay. Yes, we have a rebuilt, well insulated storeroom and a cold frame made of scrap steel pipe. And we finished the big shed on the back of the barn—given our carpentry skills, it's a creditable piece of work—so we have a roof over us as we wash the produce. We have set out tens of thousands of transplants, sown bed after bed of roots and greens and put in enough seed potatoes to make a row two miles long. Fat lot of good it has done us. Here we are in the middle of June scrambling, same as every year, to fill the bags.

I ought to learn to accept the fact that this is simply how early season farming goes in this climate. Such wisdom would save me from the mounting sense of frustration I feel each spring as I watch all my plans crumble. I would spend less time swearing at things—at clouds, at tractors, at bugs, at bolting lettuce. I would be woken less often by annoyingly realistic dreams about unreliable delivery trucks or mislabeled bags. I would feel less incompetent.

Of course, I also ought to learn to accept the fact that no matter how slowly the season seems to start, things will pick up in time. Every year, deep in my first delivery depression, I fear that we will simply run out of produce in a couple of weeks. I look around the fields and greenhouses at all the early crops rushing past and all the main season crops lagging behind and I find it too easy to imagine an embarrassing gap between the two—a week when we will go out and find absolutely nothing to pick. Not that this has ever happened. Every year, some crop I have despaired of or forgotten about comes to the rescue and before I know it we are trying to fit ten zucchini and a couple of melons in your bag and I am busy worrying that we are overwhelming you with vegetables.

No doubt if farmers made any money someone would invent a pill to help me with these emotions. Do you feel tired, stiff, anxious about your carrot crop? Do you have trouble standing up straight after weeding a bed of parsnips? Do you worry frequently about leaf hoppers? Do you ever