



# THE ALLEGED FARM NEWS

## 9 August 2007

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Things have run amok. On the farm, that is. Well, a few other places I can think of too, but I will stick to writing about the amokness on the farm for now.

While I may several months ago, upon descending in full farm combat uniform (sweaty, frayed t-shirt, work pants with worn knees, ripped sneakers and wet, muddy socks) from my tractor, have made a triumphal declaration of the cessation of the weeding campaign, events on the ground are proving trickier than anticipated. I remain confident of ultimate victory in the global war on weeds, but that victory will take longer and come at a higher price than has been suggested at other times during the course of this struggle. We cannot, however, allow the cost of this effort to deter us. We must weed on. To give up now would only make the weeds worse next season.

How did this weediness come to pass after our early successes? This is not simply a home grown phenomenon. I blame infiltrators. With the connivance of various hostile meteorological and biological agents, weeds seeds have surreptitiously entered our fields and sprung up as if out of nowhere to thwart our efforts. Purslane, Canadian thistle and galinsoga in particular—nonexistent threats when I first started farming--have become persistent problems. Drive them from one field and they simply turn up in another. We cleaned them out of the fall roots only to discover that they were on the verge of overrunning the late cabbage and broccoli. Let down your guard for a moment and they return to areas you believed you had cleared them from once and for all. A month ago, after hard work, the onion and leek patch was weed free and now you can barely see the crops through the crab grass and lamb's quarters.

These perfidious weeds do not carry out their assaults on our peaceful ranks of vegetables in order to further any reasonable or compelling cause. Their only objective is chaos. Whether they are motivated by resentment, by some ancient grudge, by perverted faith I cannot say. Nor does it matter. All we need to know about these weeds is that they are the enemies of produce and that the only argument they understand is made of steel and toil.

I am pleased to announce that in the face of this mounting threat we have embarked upon a weeding surge. In the past few days we have driven the weeds from the beans, the late peas, the strawberry patch, a bed of broccoli and Savoy cabbage, two field houses and half a bed of carrots. Progress has been slow, but we remain confident that our redoubled efforts will lead to healthy crops.

Actually, finding healthy crops is not precisely a problem just now. Amokness, it seems, comes in good and bad forms. Yes, the weeds double in size every two or three hours, but so do the cucumbers. You may be wondering why you get so many in each bag. You could just as well wonder why so few. After all, we picked 23 tubs of them this past week, enough, by my rough estimate for about 20 per share. Fortunately we are neither loony nor cruel enough to hand that many out at once. The extras go off to Community Action for distribution to various area food pantries.

Having cucumbers run at least slightly amok is not that unusual. Having three plantings of broccoli in a row prosper is. I have had plenty of years when I would have been

**This week's share: Broccoli, Cucumbers, Eggplant, Fennel, Lettuce, Onion, Peppers, Ancho and Anaheim hot peppers, Squash, Tomatoes, Lemon and purple basil, Dill**

grateful for one decent planting of broccoli in a row. This week we actually engaged in a selective broccoli harvest to come up with the requisite amount. The idea that I could pass up what appears to be a perfectly good head of broccoli because I know I will find a better one nearby is alien to me. I bet I could get used to it. But I will try not to because most likely next year the broccoli will return to normal. Perhaps if I could explain what has caused it to succeed I could replicate that success. But I don't really know what is making it so happy (The cold nights last month? The extra nitrogen fertilizer? The extra attention to weeding early on? The row cover? The odd precipitation pattern? Good karma? Special help from the broccoli fairy?). It is especially odd since so many of the closely related crops growing around it are doing far worse than they have in recent years.

Whatever has been tickling the broccoli's fancy has had a different effect on the tomatoes. While they have finally agreed to join the fun it has certainly taken them long enough. This week's harvest is nothing to feel ashamed of—we got a nice selection of varieties, including a number of heirlooms in good shape—but I would not brag about it either. Given the time of year, the number of plants, the good trellising and the healthy growth, we ought to be able to give everyone a good pile and have enough left to hand over a few tubs to Community Action too. Still, it is nice to have them at last and they taste good this year (especially in a simple tomato salad with a little finely sliced onion, a lot of (purple) basil, a generous amount of salt and good olive oil and a splash of vinegar). At least, the ones I have tried do. I am pretty sure I have not tasted every variety yet. I would describe them all so you can identify the ones you have, but I would probably just confuse and bore you.

It would be a lot easier to just show you when you come out to the farm between 10 and 2 this Saturday for our second farm visit day. We could even do a few taste tests. You can also take a look at some of the other crops that are thriving, such as the peppers, hot peppers and eggplants. You can see all the garlic hanging up to dry in the barn, pick a sunflower, try a husk cherry (our weird crop of the year). You could even participate in that weeding surge and help make The Alleged Farm safe for peace-loving vegetables of every kind. Now that is the kind of work to make you feel proud—and muddy.

To get to The Alleged Farm: Take Route 40 North (it starts at Route 7 in Troy). From the Traffic light in Schaghticoke by the fairgrounds, go another 5.6 miles on 40 to Meeting House Road (marked). Turn right on Meeting House and go 1.5 miles to the fork. Take left fork (straight ahead) onto the dirt road and continue over the hill to the next intersection (Cooke Hollow Road). Our farm at the crossroads (dark blue house).

You are welcome between 10 and 2. Wear sturdy shoes and feel free to bring a picnic (but please no dogs). We will provide drinks and a few baked goods (and perhaps some tomatoes).