

# Meanwhile Back at the Farm...June 28, 2001

Howdy Folks,

Well how do you like our new unpredictable weather? Global climate shifts sure make for some weird farming. Who would think that it would rain in June, almost July? This is California for crying out loud. We are technically almost a desert and here we are having rain in the summer. Now I can remember a very few times growing up here that we'd have a freak summer storm but one associated with several days of cold weather is extra strange.

Here we are chomping at the bit for the summer crops to start yielding and nature pulls the plug on the heat needed to mature crops. It isn't really super cold but many crops operate on the degree-day scenario for maturation.

Corn's definition of degree day is all the degrees above 50 count as degree days. So a day like today which might only be 60 degrees counts as a paltry 10 degree days. A 100 degree day could count as 50 degree days. Most corn needs something like 1800 degree days to mature. So there is a big difference in high temperature days versus these cool days. To a lesser degree, squash, beans and all are other warm crops respond similarly.

Now last week when it was hot we had a disaster occur at the Matadero farm where most of our new crops are planted. A leak developed in a valve which meant our water pump was running a lot. The landlord there, concerned about electricity cost, shut off our irrigation system but didn't tell me that this had been done. Several hot days later when I went over with the guys to do something at that farm I discovered this terrible situation.

We have lost maybe \$2000-3000 worth of crops that would have come in near the start of August. Much of them will be replanted and its too soon to tell about the negative effect on other crops that were older and not outright toasted by the lack of water. Still other crops have been attacked by insects since they were highly stressed by the dry hot conditions which made them attractive to flea beetles which chew small holes in

the leaves. All this because we didn't have water for a few days. It goes to show how fragile our agriculture is in the arid west.

On the positive front we planted some beds at the farm in Pescadero. Although we still don't have a contract in hand for our move to this new site I feel confident enough to get started planting stuff we'll need in the fall. The new site is already yielding some new benefits. For instance I planted salad mix there which I would not be able to do this time of year on our current pieces of land due to the high average temperatures here. The cooler coastal conditions may allow us to go through the late summer having salad when we normally would not be able to raise a harvestable crop.

The salad and lettuce mix we have now is a result of covering the beds with shade cloth and sprinkling them several times a day to keep the temperature of the leaves low enough to prevent them from bolting and becoming bitter.

The basil is now about 6 inches tall and we will be able to start cutting it in about two weeks. Boy, I can't hardly wait.

Our two-week permaculture course is drawing to a close this week. I've had a great group here leaning the ecological land design system. I expect quite a number of them will go out and do great things with what they've learned here.

We now have new drop offs in Palo Alto & Menlo Park.! Tell your friends.

The Food

Purslane: This lemony "wild" plant has the highest level of Omega Three fatty acids that occur in nature. Called verdulagas in Mexico, they are lighted sauteed and then mixed with scrambled eggs. Very tasty.

Red Russian: A super nutritious Kale

Speckles Lettuce: This pretty lettuce is also very tasty.