

Field Walk...

First frost.

Three weeks ago I was irrigating heavily under 90 degree temperatures, and this past week we had our first frost.

The first frost is arguably the most important event of autumn. First frost is the turning point of the growing season, the one event that changes the texture of the fields overnight. For many crops, frost means they are finished for the season. For others, it means they are just beginning. Tomatoes, basil and beans are wiped out by frost. Kale springs to life when touched by the extra cold whiff of winter.

Farmers have mixed feelings about the first frost. An early frost can end a growing season prematurely. A late frost can continue harvests beyond what is physically desirable. I've got mixed feelings about this recent frost. It was a tad early, a bit sooner the mid-to-late October "average" first frost for this area. Certainly, tomatoes and beans had a few more weeks remaining. But, it wasn't too early. And it wasn't too bad, either. The worst-case first frost comes more than a month early and dips into the mid-twenties. This is rare. This year, we're close enough to average to call it normal. We can live with this.

That said, many frost-sensitive crops remain in the fields, several rotations of which still have some growing to do. Lettuce still needs to grow some more. Several salad greens still need to grow. Scallions, bok choy, fennel, spinach... there's still some growing season left. This selection of crops have various levels of frost sensitivity, but they need a little help when temperatures dip toward freezing. And thus, the carpet of white. Row cover.

First frost means that row cover is back. Row cover is that blanket of white you'll now be seeing covering the fields. Row cover is a plastic-based re-usable material that lets light, water, and air through, but keeps warmth in. It also serves as a physical barrier to bugs and water evaporation. It's an essential on most modern organic farms because of its versatility, dependability and relative low cost. The downside is that it takes away the charm of a garden. But, it extends the growing season like nothing else in the fields.

The first frost has come. Autumn has fully arrived. There's more to come, with more beauty, color and change...

Volunteer Opportunities:

Workday next Saturday, October 21, 9 to 12... And then Garlic Planting the week after!

Important Shareholder Meeting!

Sunday, October 22, at 4 p.m., we will gather at the farm to elect four new Core Group members and discuss other issues.

What's in Your Share

Fennel

Carrots

Spinach

Celery

Cilantro & dill

Salad Mix

Swiss Chard

Green Peppers

Garlic

Onion

Radishes

Turnips

Arugula will be offered extra

Fennel

I know several of you absolutely love fennel, but many may not have tried it yet.

Fennel is an herb with an anise or black licorice flavor. Fennel forms a bulb, leaves and seeds that are edible. We will be offering the fennel bulb primarily.

Use a fennel bulb like you would use celery. The texture is similar. It can be baked, steamed, sautéed or grilled, and is also wonderful in salads. Try it with a tomato sauce or a salsa verde.

Here's a quick recipe to get you started:

Preheat oven to 325. Trim and quarter your fennel bulb and steam for 10 minutes. Rub a baking dish with butter or olive oil. Arrange steamed fennel in dish and dot with butter, or drizzle with oil. Season with salt and pepper (add dry white wine for added flavor and moisture). Cover and bake for 20 minutes. Remove cover. Baste with its own juices. Add parmesan cheese and continue baking until completely tender, about 10 more minutes.

Crops on the way:

Lettuce, scallions, beets, bok choy, ... and peas in about three to four weeks! Later, cabbage, broccoli, and kale... leeks and winter squash!