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April 25, 2010

2010 Farm Plan Update

This will be our first season producing all organic crops. Apple blocks 6 and 7 on our farm and Farm Two will be 36 months without a prohibited substance in August. All other blocks were certified last year.

High Tunnel

In November of 2009 we erected a 28 x 200 Haygrove high tunnel. This spring we have begun planting the tunnel. We are experimenting with several types of berries in the tunnel. We are also inter planting vegetables between the berry rows. We intend to harvest the vegetable crops in mid summer and remove the plant material allowing the berry plants to fill their allotted space.

The tunnel site was prepared in 2009 by first leveling the area and then applying compost and gypsum. A clover blend was grown and then tilled in December of 2009. After attending several conferences on high tunnel production we chose several berry varieties that have proven to work in high tunnels. Unfortunately there is little information on organic berry production in high tunnels so a lot of our planting will be considered experimental. Cultivars, spacing, and interplanting systems will have to be adapted and changed in the future.

Crop

Last years apple crop was just over 6000 bushels, down significantly from the 8000 bushel crop in 2008. Last year we reduce our apple acreage by eliminating some of the less efficient apple orchards. This reduction in acreage made pest control more efficient and gave us a higher packout of first quality apples. This was good for cashflow but it caused a significant reduction in our cider production. It took a double hit with a smaller overall crop and a lower percentage of cider grade apples. Our cider volume dropped from around 9000 gallons to just over 5000 gallons in 2009.

Our 2009 cider sales had strong demand. Our volume of lower cost transitional cider was very limited. We found several coops carrying Midwestern conventional cider along with our Hoch Orchard Organic Cider. Some coop customers are looking for a cheaper fresh cider. This issue has pushed us to consider making a local conventional cider by buying apples from our Minnesota neighboring orchards and selling it as Minnesota Cider. Produce managers have expressed interest in buying a local conventional preservative free cider from us now that we will only be producing certified organic cider from our fruit.

If we follow through with this potential conventional line of cider we will put together a procedure for segregation and lotting of the conventional cider. For now this is just an idea so we are not including it in the organic plan.

Deer Fencing

We will continue to use the electric deer fences in 2009. The slant style fencing will be treated with Round up herbicide using a directed spray applied by backpack sprayer. Care to spray in calm weather and maintaining appropriate buffer strips should eliminate any chance of drift into the adjoining organic orchards.

In our 2009 Organic Plan I included the design and cost estimate created by the Minnesota DNR to replace our energized fences with durable 10 foot woven wire fencing. The \$50,000 price tag is a

little to high to take on all at once. We are planning to replace the electric fencing in phases over the next three years. We plan to install about 2000 feet of woven wire fence on the south orchard border this summer and fall. In 2011 we plan to replace about 2500 feet on the north orchard boarder, and finally in 2012 complete the replacement of fencing on the east border and around the farmstead. When this project is complete we should no longer have a need to apply synthetic herbicides under the fences.