

Harry Hoch
Hoch Orchard and Gardens
32553 Forster Road
LaCrescent MN 55947
Hoch1@acegroup.cc

April 28, 2011

2011 Farm Plan Update

This season our entire farm is certified organic. We may have some black berries produced on nonorganic plants that we will plant this spring. They will be certification eligible after one year of growth on the farm.

High Tunnel Number Two

We are setting up a second Haygrove high tunnel this spring. This one is 25 x 200 and is a little taller than our first tunnel. We will be planting cherries, blackberries, strawberries, and some vegetables in this tunnel.

The blackberries are a new variety developed by the University of Arkansas called Ark 45. This new variety is one of the few primocane fruiting blackberries that produce fruit on the current years canes. This way all the canes can be cut down every fall. The new canes will produce fruit so we don't have to worry about winter injury. Ark 45 is the first primocane fruiting variety with a large firm berry suitable for wholesale production. We had to special order these plants a year in advance.

We have selected several of the hardiest sweet cherries to test in our tunnel. These varieties are grafted on to a new highly dwarfing rootstock so we can fit them in the tunnel. We look forward to producing some of Minnesota's first organic sweet cherries.

The specialty berry plants and trees purchased for the tunnel are difficult to find and are not certified organic. They will be grown organically here and the fruit will be eligible for certification in May of 2012. We have a few Balaton Cherry trees that we are going to transplant from the orchard into the tunnel this spring. The fruit from these trees will be certified organic.

Meat Production

Hogs

We are starting our first phase of integrating animals into our perennial fruit farm. We purchased nine old breed cross piglets this spring from a specialty breeder in Missouri. We have 8 pigs that are half Gloucestershire Old Spot (also known as the orchard pig). We also have one piglet that is half Large black. These old breeds were known for their hardiness and ability to live on pasture. We plan to rotationally graze these pigs around the farm using portable electric ribbon fencing. We are developing a flash grazing system where the pigs will be kept in a paddock for short period and then moved to a new area. We will keep grazing/rotation records.

These rare breeds are difficult to find and very expensive. The nine crosses we have this year will be a good test of their adaptability to our system. We could not find an organic breeder of these rare breeds so we will not sell the meat as organic. We are considering purchasing some breeding pairs so we can produce certified organic meat in the future. All the animals will be raised with organic practices. We have not finalized our plans for processing and sales. We may keep some of the crosses to breed and produce our own piglets next spring.

Chicken

We plan to produce two hundred organic range chickens this year. We purchased 100 day old Freedom Rangers in March and plan to butcher at a certified processor in June. We have a second batch of 100 ordered for June arrival.

The early batch was kept indoors under lights for about three weeks. We then ranged them in High tunnel #1 for about one more week and then moved them outside. We will range them in the berry

beds up until bloom and then move them into the orchards. We have a portable shelter that is moved daily.

The later batch will be raised indoors for a couple weeks and then either moved into tunnel #2 or put outside. They will be put into the portable shelter after the first batch is butchered.

Other Poultry

We may purchase some geese for weeding and some ducks and turkeys for meat production. These will be in small numbers. If we decide to go ahead with other poultry we will purchase dayolds later in the season after the busy spring rush. All birds will be raised with organic practices.

Orchards

We removed about 1/3 of an acre in block 9 east and about .4 acres in block 6. We are adding about a half an acre of high density trees in block 5. These are new scab immune varieties on dwarfing Bud 9 stock. Bud 9 rootstock is winter hardy and moderately resistant to fireblight.

Pollinator Study

We are planting a half acre of native pollinators in block 9 east. This is a research collaboration with the Xerxes Society and the Wisconsin Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems. The research plot will be maintained organically but the seed supplied by the research project did not come from an organic supplier.

Berries

We are putting in a new blueberry bed in block 18. The soil was acidified using apple pumice from our cider production and some organic sulfur. We will be planting 500 plants on about a half acre.

In 2010 we planted about 100 primocane fruiting blackberries in block 13. This year we are adding 100 more plants of the new Ark 45 primocane fruiting blackberries.

Deer Fence

In the fall of 2010 we installed about 2200 feet of woven wire deer fencing. This new fence is ten feet tall consisting of 8 feet of woven wire with three strands of high tensile wire on top bringing it to ten feet. This new section of fence is on our south border starting in block 4 continuing along blocks 11 and 14 and then connecting to the older woven wire fence in block 18.

In the fall of 2010 we prepared about 1500 feet on the north side of the orchard by cutting brush and trees. We plan to prepare another 1500 feet this spring and then erect new fence connecting to block 18 and then continuing through blocks 14, 12, 8, and 7. We plan to continue the fencing project this fall and complete the fencing around blocks 1, 2, 3, and connecting to last year's fence in block 4.

When the woven wire fencing is complete we will convert the electric deer fencing to live stock fencing. At that point we will discontinue the use of Round up herbicide under the electric fences. 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.

Coolers

This past winter we removed cooler #3. We used this small cooler to chill berries and summer fruit. We need more space in our packing area so we took out this little cooler. Now we will be using Cooler #2 for berries and summer fruit. We gutted the old cooler and added significant amount of insulation. The walls and ceiling have new liner. We replaced our old evaporator unit with two new units to increase air flow and cooling efficiency.

Cooler #2 worked well for many years cooling apples in the fall. Now it will be used in the hot summer months so it should be far more efficient now.