

Sweet Potatoes, Sweet Potatoes & More Sweet Potatoes!

Friday, October 23, 2009

Sweet Potatoes are the last major crop we plant in the spring, and also the last to get harvested. All we need is two days without rain, and a whole lot of help. Monday and Tuesday we got both. Eleven rows were 700 feet long and three rows are half of that, and both rain and frost were in the forecast.

A wedding happened on our farm during the weekend and it was a beautiful sight to witness, Jess and Tex committed themselves to each other.

The old post office was transformed, with goards, pumpkins and flowers, and we all dressed up as best we could. The rain held off and everything went smoothly, including three rows of sweet potatoes getting dug and hauled to the barn.

Monday morning found us picking a dozen bushels of peppers, ten bushels of green beans, 300 heads of lettuce, and a whole lot of other vegetables for the trip to Nashville. Then it was back on the hill where we sunk in the plow and unearthed five more rows. Friends from Cookeville were camping out and lent their hands.

We laid them out on a shed floor, to later be sorted and rubbed. The seconds are simply the smaller and odd ones, the firsts go into long term storage in the cabin. After a few truckloads filled the floor, I heard the young children talking "There are more potatoes here than is the store!" "That's why they call this a farm." Kids are a major reason to have a farm.

Another friend from Nashville appeared and everyone grabbed up the sweets. And the rain held off. A slight drizzle the next morning was unwelcome, but it quit and we decided to press on. We rolled the vines to one side and as I plowed one-person walked behind and kept me unclogged. The potatoes that come up in clumps, are shaken free and left to dry. Rain threatens but waits.

We field sort these last six rows, separating out and rubbing down the firsts, which amount to well over a hundred bushels. The kids are very helpful and excited, they make it a joy. We toss each other funny looking ones, and slowly work our way up and down the rows. Fall foliage brightens the far hillsides and the rains wait.

Four truckloads make it to the cabin, and the seconds to the shed, just as it starts to pour. The

workers smile at the empty field, wet with rain. A mighty push got the job done in the nick of time. When this rain leaves it is likely to frost, which damages the sweet potato vines, and then the potatoes. We would have had to dig them by hand. The farm runs on love and luck.

So now we have 400 bushels of sweet potatoes. E-gads! A few other CSA's want a few tons, but we are looking at 20,000 pounds of them. We'll continue to sort, rub, and cure them but we could use your help. Come by the barn and grab a bushel, bring a box. The baskets cost me \$2.75, but the potatoes, like all foods are free. We save the seed potatoes year to year, just like the Hire family did over a hundred years ago out in the Northern part of Macon County. The fertilizer comes from our cows. All we do is plant, hoe and harvest, and you can't count your labor on a farm. The Nashville co-op covers the farm's annual budget.

Not only the young kids, but our 20 year olds also had a blast. They got to plant, hoe and pull weeds up in the field, and then reap the harvest. It is very satisfying work, a good learning experience, and meaningful. They get to deliver the food to extremely happy co-op members in Nashville, and can see the whole process. It's unfortunate that high schools don't incorporate organic food production in their curriculum.

What's next? Pick the rest of the peppers and beans before the frost, get the garlic crop planted, continue harvesting greens and think about cutting firewood. Oh yes, let's start the overflow of a few sweet potatoes in it and get the butter out.