

Picking Beans

Tuesday, August 12, 2008

I'm notoriously known to disappear during bean picking. It's easy to find something else to do. But there were many long rows for the workers to harvest so I jumped right in there, in an effort to keep myself from planting more beans. It didn't work.

We grow three kinds of bush beans – Blue Lake, Italian Flat Roma, and Cherokee Yellow Was. They were planted in the first week of May and did catch a few rains before the spigot turned off. The later plantings missed the rains but sprouted up anyway. Thank God for humus, (and cows).

Growing beans is as easy as beans, because the big leaves immediately shade out weeds. Once through with the hoe and a few times with the cultivator and they are flowering and making beans before you know it.

The very dry June hurt the early planting. They were trying to get fruit with no moisture, so the first pickings were weak. We sent five bushels to Nashville and a few to our neighbors to can.

Next week we are back at it. During a break, the milk lady drove up. I yelled out “more bean pickers!” and she hopped back in her truck and drove off. Well, not really. After hearing how much fun we were having, she followed us back to the bean patch.

This helped kept the workers' minds off of unionizing Long Hungry for a few minutes, but soon they were back at it. They are having a hard time getting a raise, because they don't get paid. They want more breaks, but the breaks take more energy than the work. They want better hours, but these are the best hours of their lives. As the boss, it sounds like they just like complaining, so like a boss, I close my ears.

As the momentum for a strike continues, another van pulls up. Scabs, it looks like, come out to the bean patch and quell all the commotion. I accept a few apple cores and frogs in return for letting the new folks get to help pick beans, a trick I learned from Tom.

Eleven bushels go to Nashville, and we can one. Hot, snapped Blue Lakes are packed into hot, sterilized quart jars and filled with boiling water. Lids are tightened on and they are pressure canned for 25 minutes. A delightful “ping” lets us know they are sealed up as they cool down after processing.

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Next week I'm still at it, trying to hold myself back. The first plantings are pulled and de-beaned in the shade, a welcome relief. The second planting caught the July rains during bloom and is much better. A third planting looks promising, also. But what about September?

Late July is the perfect time to plant beans. Out goes a row of beets, and in goes a row of beans. Onions are pulled, beans are planted. Where we plant fall beans needs to be free of old bean plants and the pesky bean beetles, so we pull them and feed the cows with the old vines. The soil under the old crops is moist from their shade, so the new beans will sprout with no rain.

Organizing anything at Long Hungry farm seems futile, and a union is no different. But growing remains fruitful, and we all hope to grow. Maybe we will amount to more than a hill of beans.