

Farmers eye changes in the business of agriculture

Rising fuel costs are just one consideration

By Michaela Kennedy

The right mixture of sun, rain and breezes are blended for bumper crops this year, despite a tsunami of cost hikes. Consumers are flocking to local farm stands as well, finding the local freshness in Jamestown's back yards a safe haven from dangerous mass food recalls of late.

Production is good, Jamestown farmers agree. Insect and mold fungus problems have been minimal this year. Crops have been helped by a little bit of steady rain every week, with enough breezes and drying in between to ward off mold. Harry Chase of Hodgkiss Farm said, "We have not done any fungicide applications, which has been a blessing," and they have not had to use their well either, Chase added.

The Jamestown Community Farm grows between six and seven tons of produce a year, and the weather, so far, brings high expectations. A consistent flow of volunteers also supports the effort. "We have a good core crew, steady from year to year," said program director Bob Sutton as he looks over robust crops. "It's a good growing year."

From a selling point of view, Jennifer Talancy of Stearns Farms Organic Produce has noticed a growth in her customer base since she first opened for business five years ago. Even last year she would bring a surplus of produce home at the end of a market day. Now, everything harvested goes straight out to the farm stand, with little making its

way to her own dinner table.

Talancy admits having some apprehension about selling flowers earlier in the season. Flowers, a luxury item, would be one of the first things people would cut out of their budget, she feared. "Not the case," she said. "I have sold out every time. People are buying bouquets quite a bit."

Yet, Jamestown farmers have faced various challenges this year, as in any place where fuel is woven into the fabric of everyday life. Chase has seen the price of fertilizers skyrocket, and gives ammonium nitrate as an example. "In my lifetime I've seen it go from \$150 dollars a ton to over a \$1,000 a ton," Chase says. "It has more than doubled in the last year." Natural gas is used to make the fertilizer, he adds.

Don Minto of Watson Farm also cites "through the roof" fertilizer costs, as well as tractor fuel prices, as impacts on his production expenses. Minto has been cultivating grass-fed beef for 28 years. In the last three years, however, he has been selling organic meat at the Coastal Growers' Market in Saundertown directly to the consumers. He sells out his stock most Saturdays. "We get it back by direct marketing," he says about the expenses. "I think it's really about shortening the distance between the farm gate and the dinner plate."

Hiring a Rhode Island meat processor has helped reduce costs, too. Minto eliminated the delivery charges from an out-of-state processor at significant savings. He urges all communities to support local production. "If we don't grow a more local food system, we may see as much as

a 25-percent food increase this winter."

Both Minto and Chase warn against the business of using feedstock to make ethanol. "All human endeavors should be secondary to food production," Minto stresses. "We (U.S.A.) have been the bread basket of the world. We've been able to do it with cheap fuel. The realization that we have a finite reserve is beginning to show up everywhere. Oil is easy."

Minto points a finger at the frequent food recalls announced in the news weekly, almost daily, at times. He questioned the ability to control quality in an industrialized meat processing plant that may have 1,000 heads or more processed at one time. He names some national market chains, which have suffered millions of pounds of tainted beef trouble. "Many would rather buy locally where people are taking care of things," he added. "That's what's driving the demand for local producers."

All in all, the general consensus around town is that all the local farmers' markets are enjoying excellent business this year. "There's nothing like getting things fresh from the farm stand," Minto says.

Chase reminds all consumers that local agriculture is also local businesses. "People are beginning to understand that local businesses are important," he says. "I'd rather see Steve at the local hardware store get a little profit than the CEO of Walmart."



Community helpers

Girls from Girl Scout Troop 709 in Jamestown made and hung this sign announcing the hours at the Jamestown Community Farm. They are, from left to right, Meryl Nelson-Lee, Faith Chadwick, Rebecca Small, and Emma Vogel.

Cost of war depicted in documentary

The Jamestown Philomenian Library will present the documentary film, "The Road Home," on Tuesday, Aug. 19, at 7 p.m.

The film is about the human cost of war and the strength of the human spirit.

From July 2004 until February 2007 filmmakers Phil Hopper and Andrew Tilsen followed a small group of injured American war veterans, starting at the Amputee Physical Therapy Unit in Walter Reed Army Medical Center. They stayed with this group as they became involved with the Achilles Track Club in New York City. There they trained for and competed in the New York City Marathon, ultimately becoming known as the Freedom Team.


The film features Dick Traum, the founder and president of Achilles Track Club. He is the first person to run the NYC Marathon on a prosthetic leg. Also featured is Trisha Meili, "the Central Park Jogger."

As the title of the film suggests, they finally go home with these individuals. Back to small towns, cities and suburbs as life continues. Life that is "changed," as the subject and narrator Leslie Smith notes, "forever."

This 60-minute film is recommended for adults and older teens. Film maker Phil Hopper, will be here to introduce the film and for a short question and answer session afterwards.

Registration is not required for this free program. Seating is limited.

The library is located at 26 North Main Rd.



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 More information is available at jamestownrichamber.com




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- Archie Clarke, owner of AS Clarke III Excavating

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