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## Fernbrook Farm CSA

Winter 2019 Volume 12 Issue I

## 2018: Wonderful, Wet, Weedy, Wild





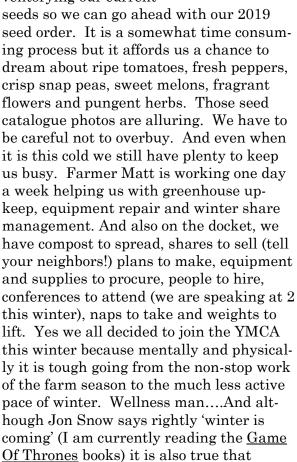


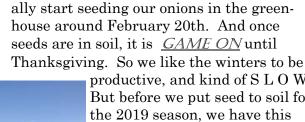




Hello and greetings from Fernbrook Farm CSA. Ah—Here Jess and I are—in the office with the little heater cranked up. wearing full winter gear and hoods. IT IS COLD OUTSIDE! Like 7 degrees and

windy as can be. And yes I do love it. These deep freezes generally knock back the bad bug and plant disease populations giving us a little breathing room come spring. And they give us a little hibernation time. Warm winters make me uneasy. So let's celebrate the cold! (just gotta make sure no pipes freeze as they did last winter...) Jess is inventorying our current





Spring ain't too far behind. In fact we usu-

productive, and kind of S L O W. But before we put seed to soil for the 2019 season, we have this tradition of looking back at the previous farm year, sharing some farm tales, reflecting on how we did and projecting forward. It is a little thing we call the winter newsletter (all rights reserved). So lets pour another cup of joe, put on some bluegrass music and venture back in time to what is, and what shall always be known, as the 2018 farm season....(1.21 jiga-



watts!)... Winter 2018. I recall a very cold December followed by a few months of relatively warm winter weather and lack of snow. Jess gave a presentation with another farmer on winter food production and distribution at the annual NOFANJ conference at Rutgers which went over very well. The whole crew plus old farmer Nick Delmar attended. We coordinated the composting of food scraps and compostables at the event (A theme you will see again in this newsletter!) We also attended a workshop where farmers detailed using cardboard as mulch / weed suppression on a farm scale which inspired our own 'Project Pizza Box' - more on that later. Oh—and man did I watch some NFL football. At the risk of angering some Giants fans (Sam...Matt)..Fly Eagles Fly! Sorry Tom Brady but it was St Nick Foles' year. Boy was that fun. Okay—herein ends all super bowl chatter. Farmers Lindsey Wilson and Erik Dalton came out of hibernation a little early to start back up at the beginning of March. And what a March it was!!! Count them - 4 Nor'Easters! We plowed a lot of snow and continued on page 2



tried to make sure our greenhouses didn't sink under the weight of the snowfall. My boys did enjoy some good sledding at the farm (and helped seed scallions) and it sure

was pretty. But it did keep us on our toes. Take this email we sent out to the winter share subscribers: Please try to pick up your share tomorrow or Saturday - our generator is up and running so shop is ready for action! We will still be open on Monday, but we have heard some whispers of another big storm on Sunday night so it might be difficult to come then. The driveway to the farm is cleared, but there is

still a power line hanging low

across the entrance on 545 -

there is about an 8 ft. clearance. We are unsure when it will be fixed, but it seems folks are able to drive underneath it safely. Thank you! Yeah quite a month. And although we bid farewell to Farmer Dan (farming in Maine) and Farmer Nick (farming in Maryland), we had Jess, Erik, Lindsey, and workshares Vanessa and Sue working and we filled the greenhouse with trays of onions, cabbage, kohlrabi, leeks, scallions, herbs, beets and more. We generally get our first plants in the field the first week of April so we try to have good sized transplants ready to go. And as March ends, more young farmers show up! In 2018 we welcomed Matthew 'Matt' Casey and Samantha 'Sam' Metz to the crew. Matt grew up in Whitehouse Station, NJ and got his engineering degree at Penn State. He spent the last 8 years working as a chemical engineer in Houston, Texas. He decided to make a career change and after some travelling and backpacking, he decided to venture into farming and food growing. Lucky for us he found Fernbrook and signed on the dotted line. Like me, Matt got into farming a little later in life but he is already back

for year 2 so he is serious about the pursuit (hopefully not TOO serious...). And we were lucky to nab fellow New Jersian Sam Metz. (Yes she is a Mets fan). Sam is from Montville and attended the University of New Hampshire where she got a degree in Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems and got experience working at the college farm which included greenhouse, fieldwork and even some hydroponics. Sam brought with her a great

work ethic and an uncanny ability to find 4 leaf clovers (hence her nickname '4 Leaf'.) And so the core farm team was set. April started cold and wet (spoiler alert....a recurring theme) which gave us time to service all of our tractors and get trained in their

tors and get trained in their safe operation. Eventually we got into the fields. Erik did a lot of discing and spading and soon we were seeding spinach, carrots, turnips and radishes and transplanting our kale, cabbage, onions and lettuce. As I think back to those days, they are muddy. My memories that is; and the soils. Wet years are challenging because you really don't want to work or plow wet soils as it can be destructive to tilth and the health of microbial communities upon which soil life depends. So patience is a virtue and when you do get those dry-ish windows, it

is work, work. We have a saying, "when you have a window of opportunity, bust through it!" Make hay when the sun is shining etc...During this time we had the opportunity to attend a discussion group with author, activist and ecological farming advocate Dr. Vandana Shiva at TCNJ. It was a real honor to participate with her in a discussion that covered topics of falling farmer income, seed sovereignty, herbicide residue, the LGBTQ farming community, climate change and composting. Dr. Shiva has garnered

respect across the globe for her many years of activism and inspiration and it was a great opportunity for the Fernbrook crew. May was a decent month and we made good headway prepping fields, planting, weeding and getting the farm ready for opening day. SO MUCH PLANTING!! We had some long, productive planting days and we got some extra hands here and there - Sam's brother Max helped us get our spuds in the ground for instance. We also experimented with early beets, lettuces and onions in the high tunnel and they all did very well. Out in the field our garlic was coming up strong and we got our u-pick cherry tomatoes in on the early side. But the weather had turned pretty wet again. This gave us precious few opportunities to seed, do field prep, and most importantly cultivate. When soils are wet the weeds doth grow. And grow they did! In May we start brining on more parttime farmers and Vanessa, Richie, Katie, Meghan and Danielle lead the way to help us with the growing mountain of planting and handweeding (Which you CAN do when soils are wet but it is slower than tractor cultivating). The crop that really suffered was onions. Onion foliage is

thin and won't crowd out weeds like squash, cabbage or melons so they need a lot of attention and as the rains kept falling we had a very hard time keeping up. At one point we had the bunching onions clean but the weed pressure came

back with a vengeance. So we had onions but not the volume we would expect. *Opening Day 2018!* Our 12th. It was early this year, but we had lovely spinach, lettuce, greens and produce ready. Jess took over the management of the farm shop this year (see article about it) and we had it filled with products like organic coffee, fresh local eggs, cheese from Fulper Farms in Lambertville, new organic mushrooms from Manalaplan and so much more! It *Cont on page 6* 

### Fernbrook Farm—Growing Food and Farmers!

2018 was the 11th season Fernbrook Farm CSA has hosted Farm Apprentices. Since 2008 we have 'graduated' 29 aspiring farmers! Our Apprenticeship is basically a trade of their time, energy and hard-work for our knowledge. We hire people who are seeking to learn how to farm and we do our best to teach them the skills and give them the tools they will need to be successful farmers / growers of food. It is how I started my farming journey in 2003 at Brookfield Farm in Amherst, MA. This year we had new comers Sam Metz and Matt Casey. We also had Second Year Apprentices Lindsey Wilson and Erik Dalton and Jess Brandeisky who is our Assistant Manager. They are, as I say, the engine that makes the farm go. We throw a lot at them—tractor work, seeding, harvest, managing the shop, tending to the livestock etc. And we also send them to learn at other farms, workshops, classes and conferences. We are proud to be a part of 'NJCRAFT' (Collaborative Region-



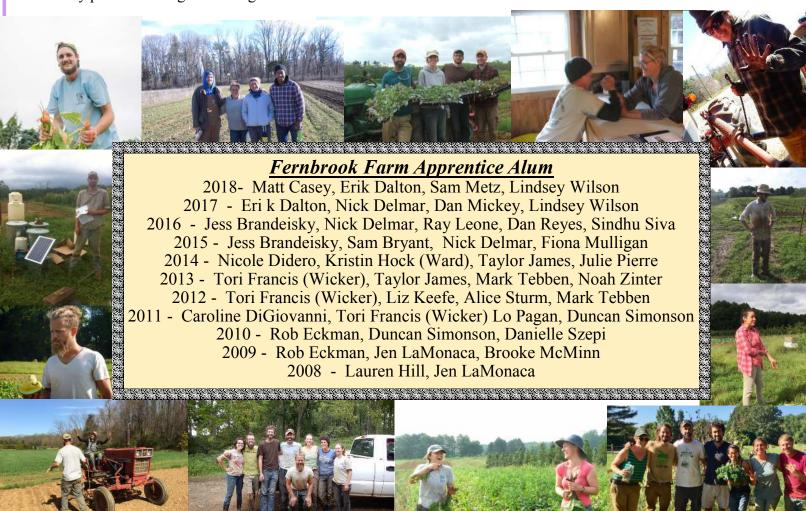
al Alliance for Farmer Training) which is a network of small farms in NJ and Eastern PA committed to sharing information and developing beginner farmers. The idea is to give Apprentices a well-rounded, meaningful experience. Because this type of farming is complex involving everything from auto maintenance, managing workers, marketing, bookkeeping, under-



Jess, Matt, Erik, Sam and Lindsey

standing soil health, carpentry, botanical disease suppression and so much more. We hope to be a place where young farmers can get a solid foundation on which to build their agricultural careers! Lindsey, Sam, Erik and Matt had to deal with the wettest year in state history (quite an education...) But they showed a lot of moxy, heart, gumption and worked with ALACRITY!! Despite the challenges we succeeded in providing fresh, chemical-free produce to all our members for 26 weeks and 4 months of a winter share. We

raised some really nice pigs, composted hundreds of tons of compostables, and built a new crew lunch room to boot. Thank you farmers so much for your dedication, your passion and your many contributions to this farm. We are very excited to welcome Sam and Matt back for the 2019 season and we look forward to seeing and connecting with Lindsey and Erik as they pursue their agricultural goals and dreams! THANK YOU FARMERS!!



While you're at the farm, check out Fernbrook Farms Environmental Education Center, a nonprofit created to provide handson educational experiences for all young people by exploring the

### **Education Center News!**

complex interconnectedness of our natural world in order to learn about food, agriculture and the environment. The Environmental Education Center provides year-round programs through summer camp, homeschool classes, school field trips, birthday parties and much more. Please visit <a href="www.fernbrookfarms.com">www.fernbrookfarms.com</a> or call 609-298-4028 to learn more about all their terrific programs!!



Nature. What a beautiful thing it is. Often, I am inspired by nature quotes and I have been sharing them on our welcome board for everyone to see. You may have noticed them this past summer. A couple of my favorites are:

"In every walk in nature, one receives far more than one gives." –J. Muir

"If you truly love nature, you'll find beauty everywhere." –Van Gogh

As adults, we can connect with these quotes as we reflect on our own experiences in nature and how valuable they have been in our own lives. Kids on the other hand probably find more connection with the following quote: "When life gives you a rainy day, play in the puddles!" – Unknown

As I like to say, if there is a child and a mud puddle, where is the child going to end up? ...in the mud puddle of course! I have seen it endless times here on the farm. They enter the barnyard and see a puddle. That mud puddle is like a magnet to kids of all ages - from 2 year olds to 12 year olds. They want to walk through it, stand in it, jump over it, jump in it, splash in it, create games in it, the list goes on. The best part of it all, the

pure joy on the child's face when they're in that puddle. I hope you enjoy the nature of Fernbrook Farms as much as these kids in the puddles. Feel free to walk the trails or visit the farm animals over at the education center when picking up your share. If you have any questions about our programs, please don't hesitate to ask! Thanks!

Brian Kuser, Education & Summer Camp Director

Fernbrook Farms Environmental Education Center



## New Logo; New Website!



# FARM

In Fall 2006 when I was hired to come down to Fernbrook to launch the CSA, I was working in Massachusetts at Brookfield Farm. As I was finishing work there I was doing things to get Fernbrook Farm CSA off the ground. One thing we needed was a logo and my farmer friend Marc Cesario used his skills and drew the logo - on a napkin at a

bar. He later did a more detailed version and that folksy, handmade logo has been with us ever since and has served us well. But things change and all of Fernbrook Farms - the CSA, The historic Inn, the Environmental Education Center and the Nursery have adopted one new logo (after a number of permutations of course). We are excited to have it! In addition, Fernbrook Farms now has one website with great information on all of the businesses and happenings here. Like the original logo, the first CSA website was created back in 2006 and while

also serving us well needed to be updated. Many thanks to Brian Kuser for leading the charge and taking on a great deal of the work to implement Fernbrook's new website. It will be a better source of current information, news, updates, photos etc. And it should give visitors an all-around better sense of the farm and what we have to offer. And you can make on-line payments! Thanks as well to our own Jess Brandeisky for putting a lot of work into this project. We are really happy with the outcome. If you have not checked it out, please do so atwww.fernbrookfarms.com Just click on the CSA tab to get the latest news from us.

And once the season begins, you will get your regular Friday email with the farm and food news for the week. (If you want to add an email address to the list send it to us:

jess@fernbrookfarms.com)



### **How Much Does The Food Cost?**

We frequently get the question—"How much does the CSA food cost" and "How much food do I get from my CSA share?" Good questions! Obviously,

the better the growing season the more food you get for your dollar. As you will see below, I think shareholders got a very good value for their food dollars in 2018. It breaks down like this:

In the farm shop we gave out 314 pounds (349.5 in 2017) of food over a 26 week season for an average of 12.1 pounds per week. In the U-Pick fields, we distributed 94.1 pounds (91.4 in 2017) over that period for an average of 3.6 pounds per week. In 2018 a share was \$650. So if you got your food from the shop every week and did all the U-Pick, you paid \$1.59 per pound. If you only got food from the shop and didn't do any U-Pick, you paid \$2.07 per pound.

Our 10 year average is 12.7 pounds per week from the shop and 3.9 pounds per week from the u-pick fields. Our 10-year average is \$1.78 per pound doing no u-pick and \$1.34 per pound doing full U-Pick. And I should add *that these prices DO NOT include U-Pick herbs and flowers* (which were available for 17 weeks in the fields. If you got a lot of fresh flowers, sunflowers and herbs one could argue it easily *added over \$200 to your value!!!!*)



That's a lot of numbers. But like with any statistics, the numbers only tell part of the story. For instance, measuring in pounds makes the analysis skewed toward

the heavier crops – tomatoes, melons, winter squashes, etc. You could have an amazing year in high value crops like lettuce, spinach, garlic and kale but that won't change your pounds per dollar as much as a bumper crop of eggplant or pumpkins. And raw numbers don't rate the variety and quality of the food. We're trying to demonstrate that in fact organic (we are not USDA certified) *is not prohibitively expensive*. We don't get crop subsidies, we don't use any synthetic fertilizers, insecticides or herbicides, and we don't use any GMOs (Genetically Modified Organisms). And we do our best to protect biodiversity, use openpollinated seeds, promote soil health and provide you with fresh, safe, delicious and nutritious food. I promise we'll do our best to beat the 2018 totals this year! And of course, we always value your feedback. How can we do better going forward? Please send any ideas to info@fernbrookfarmcsa.com. Thanks! Here's to your health AND your wallet.



F\$\$\$ - Reminder that a <u>full share</u> for the 2019 season is \$660. \$100 was due with your registration, \$280 is due Feb. 15th and the remaining \$280 is due by May 1st. Our <u>TEN WEEK SHARE</u> is \$350 with \$100 due at registration and the remaining \$250 due Feb. 15th. Checks can be made out to 'Fernbrook Farm CSA' and mailed to the PO Box listed on the front. AND you can now register and make payments <u>on-line</u> at fernbrook-farms.com! If you have questions about your balance or want to talk about a payment plan, contact Jeff at info@fernbrookfarmcsa.com



is a day filled with handshakes, hugs, tours, and overall excitement. It takes a lot of work to get to opening day and then even more to get to Thanksgiving. Once we get through that open-

ing week, the real grind begins. June, July and August are out-and-out relentless. And it is crucial not to get behind. So we hire as many folks as we can afford to and we try to squeeze as much as we can out of each and every day. That is the reality of this kind of farming. I describe it as 12 months of full-time work compressed into 8...and uber compressed into 3. Erik and Lindsey went through it in 2017 but it was the first for Matt and Sam. Trial by fire! In early June we did our first delivery to The Center For Health and Healing in Tom's Riv-

by fire! In early June we did our first delivery to The Center For Health and Healing in Tom's River, NJ. We are excited about this new partnership and hope to expand it in 2019! We do manage to fit in off-farm trips and tours. We are proudly a founding member and active participant in NJCRAFT - Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training. We are a network of sustainable farms in the area committed to teaching young people interested in farming. Basically we

each host a tour or workshop and offer our honest thoughts and learnings on how we farm and the ups and downs therein. Our crew went on tours and learned everything from processing chickens to farm finance to greenhouse production. NJ farmers have a lot of great wisdom to share. Back at Fernbrook the heat of summer was being routinely broken by storms...a lot of storms. Seemed like every week we were getting one. Plants and all life need water to live but of course, it can be a classic 'too much of a



good thing' and I am afraid in 2018 it was just that. Plants with wet foliage are more susceptible to fungal diseases (this can be due to rain or high humidity). And we got burned by a big one called cucurbit downy mildew. Luckily it arrived at the end of cucumber season sparing them but it knocked out about 50% of our winter squash including what was looking like a gorgeous field of butternut. Painful... At the time

we knew it was quite wet but didn't know it would be the wettest year on record. We ended up about 20" above normal for the year here in Chesterfield which included 10 of 12 months exceeding normal totals and we had the wettest fall on record. The effects were many including missed planting dates, unharvestable potatoes, stunted cabbage and broccoli in standing water, seed rot in some beet seedings and of course continued weed pressure. It was stressful. I give the farmers here a ton of credit for keeping their heads high and pushing through every single day. And we did grow some really nice food (somehow). Watermelons,

cantaloupes, tomatoes (plums, slicers, cherries and heirlooms), eggplant, bell and hot peppers, spring beets, Chinese cabbage, okra, early cucumbers, summer squash, garlic, and blackberries top



the list of crops that did very well. And as you will see later in a separate article, the amount we distributed was just under to our 2017 total. But, truth be told, 2018 was a double whammy of the record rain and slightly lower CSA sales. As home delivery systems and aggregate CSA companies become more

prevalent, single farm CSAs like ours have suffered across the country. A recent article in the <u>Chicago Tribune</u> asks if there is a future for CSAs. It is being felt by CSAs nationwide; I know of a few farmers who called it quits this year. I write all this not to complain. But we have always tried to be very honest about the ups and downs of farming and we are seeing some troubling trends. We are blessed here to have done pretty well

and we LOVE and appreciate our dedicated shareholders. Without you, this farm does not exist. But we have had to work much harder to get to the basic sustaining levels of membership. So, we invite you to talk to your friends and neighbors. We need to recruit the next generation of CSA members! And our new 10 week share has been an inviting way for new families to give it a shot. A CSA subscription supports chemical-free farming, increased native pollinator habitat, bolstered soil health, diverse food production, farm-scale composting, training of young farmers and access for hundreds of families to beautiful, productive farmland and healthy, delicious produce. We are excited and optimistic for the 2019 farm season and beyond but there are some dangerous headwinds to be sure and we really do appreciate your support and promotion of the CSA. Any feedback you have for us is always welcome! Enjoy the winter newsletter. We hope it gets you excited for the coming season. And if you have pizza boxes, please save them for us and feel free to drop them off at the farmshop porch - so we can expand Pro-

ject Pizza Box! Once again, so many thanks to all of the farmers who grew the food in 2018 and thanks again to you for being part of our **FARMILY**. And here's to a fruitful, healthy, delicious 2019 farm season!

Your Farmer

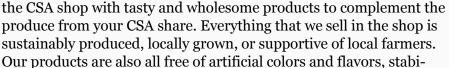
Jeff Tober





#### **CSA Farm Shop**

Hellooo from the Farm Shop, where your culinary dreams can come true! This year we worked hard to stock





lizers, and other chemical toxins, so you can feel good about your purchases and what you're consuming. For example, the Tait Farm cooking sauces and vinaigrettes in the shop are made with simple and natural ingredients sourced from PA farmers. The shiitake and blue oyster mushrooms from Mushroom King Farm in Manalapan, NJ were grown using a system that greatly reduces water inputs and takes advantage of natural elements by growing in greenhouses. Super fresh and responsibly grown, you can taste the difference in flavor from the grocery store. And with so many other tasty options like Farmer Rob's dry beans (Fernbrook 2009 and 10!), Fulper Farms' NJ cheeses, and Farmer Scott's eggs and frozen chicken breasts, we hope that it's easier for you to make a convenient 'all-in-one' stop for you and your family's meals. I often imagine the situation when, among the panoply of fresh veggies, shareholders wonder, "What am I going to do with all this bok choy, these hinona kabu turnips, carrots and a cabbage??" We hope the goods we offer help you to plan your meals and get the most out of your Fernbrook veggies. As a farmer, I believe it is incredibly important to eat foods that are minimally processed, fresh, and grown or produced in tandem with a healthy environment... and delicious, too! In a world where synthetic additives make their way into many grocery store products, we are thankful for the healthier options. We hope that throughout the season you perused our shop goods, chatted with Katie about recipe ideas, and enjoyed some of the products that we had for sale. And if you

chatted with Katie about recipe ideas, and enjoyed some of the products that we had for sale. And if you haven't, be sure to in 2019! We're looking forward to some new products this year and many more great recipe ideas. Many thanks and kudos to Jess for managing the farmshop, to Katie for staffing it and our bookkeeper Yvonne for helping us troubleshoot the accounting issues. 2018 was a transitional year and we hope you found the shop to be a fun, welcoming place and a source of great food for your family! If you have any ideas for the shop contact us at jess@fernbrookfarms.com



### <u>LETTER FROM 'FARMER Q'</u>

Supermarkets have figured it out. Not so long ago the fresh produce aisle was just that, one aisle or more likely one *part* of one aisle for the whole store. Then along came the organic food movement. There were a few specialty stores that carried a small section of organic food but mostly you had to go to a farmers market to find it. A little over 30 years ago the concept of a CSA began to blossom in Massachusetts and organic food became more available direct from farms. That concept of a CSA spread from New England throughout the Northeast and today all across the country. Organic food was not just a fad, it was here to stay. So the supermarkets, all of them, expanded their fresh produce sections, carried more and more organic produce and now

they deliver it right to your doorstep! You don't have to leave the comfort of your computer screen. So with all these choices and all that convenience, why bother to join a CSA? For one, our produce covers all the bases local, chemical-free, fresh, diverse AND a very good value for your food dollar. Most supermarket produce is not even from the USA much less 'local'. I like to think of Fernbrook as a place apart where the constraints of time give way to the passing of the sun, where stress gives way to the calm of nature, and where children get to explore and learn about the sources of their food. Coming to the farm nurtures interpersonal relationships with farmers. We are supporting young people (our apprentices) who want to make a career in agriculture. We value the experience of a deeper exposure and greater knowledge of farming and the outdoors. We believe in the innate discovery that comes from harvesting some of your own food. We are all family and friends sharing in the bounty of nature face to face, not in front of our computer screen. The United States became a net importer of food for the first time in 2005. In 1900 there were over 25,000 types of vegetables worldwide that comprised the bulk of our food, today it is estimated there are less than 100. As a result of patented seeds and court sanctioned engineered genetics, the actual real choices we have in the food we eat is being slowly eroded. The U.S. Dept of Agriculture believes in and supports large monocrop production. Even the organic farm Earthbound grows over 30,000 acres (mostly lettuce). We definitely need good distribution systems to insure that wholesome foods get to the over 350 million people in this country. Small farms (less than 25 acres), diversity of food choices from people like Seed Savers, and young farmers are an important part of that paradigm. That is why you join a CSA! Happy New Year; may you and your family have peace, health, and love throughout 2019. See vou on the farm. Larry Kuser grew up on the farm and is President of Fernbrook Farms Inc.!

Fernbrook Farm CSA 2018 ~ By The Numbers:

Total Shares: 355 Weeks Of Distribution: 26

Acres Used For Veggies: about 20

Acres in 'Fallow' (given a year off to build soil health) 2.6 acres

Average Weekly Farm Shop Distribution: 12.1 Lbs Average Weekly U-Pick Distribution: 3.6 Lbs

Largest Share: 38.5 Pounds (Week 14 August 27th)

Smallest Share: 4.6 Lbs (Week 1 May 27th)

Lbs of Summer Squash / Zucchini Harvested: 7,470

Lbs of Eggplant Harvested: 4,983 Lbs of Fennel Harvested: 1,715

Lbs of Chinese Cabbage Harvested: 2,184

Lbs of Cucumbers Harvested: 6,555

Lbs of Tomatoes Harvested (non u-pick): 12,565

Lbs of Lettuce Harvested: 2,101 Lbs of Parsley Harvested: 380

# of Weeks Cutting Flowers Were Open: 18

Pigs Raised: 16

Pounds of Compost Spread (roughly): 250,000!

Number of Winter Shares Sold: 82

Number of Pizza Boxes Uses As Mulch: About 1,800!!!! (Project Pizza Box!) Infamous Statistic Of 2018 - Wettest Year In New Jersey State History!

Location For Farmer Skip Day - Asbury Park, NJ

## Fernbrook Farm CSA PO Box 228 Bordentown, NJ 08505



