

2014 IYM Farm Report

“Silence is certainly essential, but by itself, it is not enough to constitute a Quaker Meeting. What goes on in the silence is far more important.” John Punshon

Over a decade ago, the Scattergood Farm began using cover crops to build fertility and increase production. These crops, frequently nitrogen-fixing legumes, but also various grasses and buckwheat, are now the cornerstone of our fertility program, as well as our attempt to control weeds, suppress soil-borne diseases, attract beneficial insects and prevent erosion. What started with a single purpose has evolved to include so much more.

One product of cover cropping, that I mostly overlooked early on, but now appreciate greatly is its capacity to improve soil by increasing organic matter. Though many soil scientists have remarked that organic matter is profoundly important, yet largely misunderstood, it is generally credited with enhancing a soil medium in which plants can anchor themselves, their roots can respire and easily access nutrients, and water is held. This water-holding capacity of organic matter has been especially important during the past month in which we have endured another flood cycle in our increasingly extreme weather patterns.

Clearly, people in this Meeting House are no strangers to something essential, though not well understood, that has a profound impact in anchoring, nourishing and buffering against trauma: Silence. Cover crops producing organic matter facilitating the miracle of growth is analogous to John Punshon’s equation of silence producing stillness leading to encounters with god.

So what encounters occurred on the Scattergood Farm this past year?

Scattergood students continue to be the primary observers of life on the farm. Farm and Prairie Projects were offered in the spring and fall semesters, along with a Food Preservation class in the fall. Farm Science class made frequent visits throughout the school year and in the fall helped design a project to scale up our worm composting system, including test plots for studying the efficacy of the finished compost. This project received a Youth Educator grant from the United States Department of Agriculture’s Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education (SARE) program. The Soils May Term class also spent much time on the farm, studying soil profiles with visitors from the Natural Resource Conservation Service and helping dig the pits for the worm composting project. Several Global Economy students tracked Scattergood soybeans from seed bag to final destination. All staff and students took part in the Farm Work Day during student orientation and most of the students on campus had some role in caring for the 5 bottle fed lambs this spring. Senior Neal Shaeffer designed and constructed a bicycle-powered root washer which will greatly ease the farmers’ workload during the fall harvest, while two students worked full time on the farm during May term.

In addition to our students encountering life on the Farm, our community has enlarged to include numerous others. We gave Farm tours to many people on campus for Scattergood Day, commencement weekend, and class reunions, in addition to those who came specifically to see the Farm: the State of Iowa Farm to School Advisory Committee, a Regional Planning graduate

class from the University of Iowa, two organic farmers from France traveling the US as part of a State Department program, an Environmental Science class from Cornell College, the West Branch community preschool, an Iowa City care givers group, the West Liberty Rotary Club, the Superintendent of the West Liberty Public Schools, Taproot Nature Experience and Outdoor Adventures Summer Camp. We also hosted a Practical Farmers of Iowa field day and were the site of the premier of *A Map of My Kingdom*, a PFI commissioned play by Iowa Poet Laureate Mary Swander. We presented at a Farmer Fair at an Iowa City elementary school, to a soils class at Kirkwood Community College, the Faith and Climate Change Conference held at Scattergood, and the National Conference for Women in Sustainable Agriculture; and we have provided consultation to Manhattan Country Day School and Wilmington Friends School, as they seek to further integrate agriculture into their students' lives. The Scattergood Farm has been featured in articles in the Iowa City Press Citizen as well as The Radish, a regional magazine. We have welcomed Biology students from Wartburg College to collect pollinator census data, hosted a group of students from Haverford College as they spent a week with us learning about Iowa-based food systems, supplied fall crops to West Branch and West Liberty public schools, provided a summertime Community Supported Agriculture program to Scattergood employees and have remained active in several organizations, including Practical Farmers of Iowa, Local Foods Connection, Women Food and Agriculture Network and the Iowa Farmers Union.

Of course, these accomplishments are the result of the hard work of many. Though Dana Foster was on sabbatical much of the past year, she remained a guiding presence in the livestock program and though she has returned to farm work on a limited basis, her stature on the Farm (and elsewhere) continues to grow. Joey Giffen-Hunter stepped in for Dana until he had to step out and move to Minneapolis as he and his wife Sarah start the next chapter in their lives. Ben Bowman, class of 2002, is now an integral part of the Farm team and has brought with him many talents that mesh well with Farm needs. Of course, the Scattergood kitchen team—David Cohen, Matt Wiegand, Stephanie Sheikholeslami, Mark Shanahan and Sophie Shanahan—transform our Farm products into something delicious and inviting to teenagers. Louis Herbst has been instrumental in finding new ways to integrate the Farm into the academic lives of our students. Ken Fawcett continues to admirably manage our conventional row crops and act as a general advisor on many things Farm related. And special thanks to the Farm Subcommittee of the School Committee, who have guided the Farm through several years of transition and continue to generously support the Farm in numerous ways.

Organic Matter in soil, like silence in Quakerism, is essential and complex. In our farming system we must intentionally cultivate it. So we practice the discipline, embrace the mysteries, and bear witness, after a time, to the glorious creation. Soil, life and work are worship.

Respectfully Submitted,

Mark Quee
Farm Manager