

Farm Report to IYMC July 2025

Dear Friends,

The history of farm labor in the United States is fraught with exploitation, interrupted only occasionally by brief acknowledgement of the humanity of those who labor in the fields, handle the livestock and work in the fruit, vegetable and meat processing plants. Of course, our situation on the Scattergood Farm is unlike most of the approximately 2.5 million crop workers in the US, two thirds of whom are foreign born, and 42% of those without federal authorization.¹ We get to fully experience the benefits embedded in the demands—work that is physically tiresome while also strengthening, emotionally wrenching yet rewarding, spiritually challenging and also uplifting—while receiving salaries with health insurance and other benefits, which can provide for a family and a simple lifestyle, while experiencing community, belonging and the satisfaction of raising food for those we love. Of course, our model is not replicable across the country, but hopefully the dignity and fairness of our work can be experienced by all.

There was much work to celebrate the past year.

The middle school continued to anchor the student experiences at the farm, beginning each day with livestock chores and fellowship, while studying seed saving in their science curriculum. High school students again started their academic year in Farm Term, choosing from four classes: Tree Power, Garden of Delights, Ethical Eating and Farm Frights. Our tradition of concluding orientation week on the farm continued this year, with plenty of work, eating and worshipful silence. Separate Farm and Livestock crews, as well as Farm Team PE classes in the fall and spring, and a Food Preservation class in the fall, offered students a wide variety of opportunities to experience the Farm. Biology classes continued to be involved as well, including helping with cow pregnancy checks last fall. Other students did livestock chores on evenings and weekends, earning a little cash or accumulating community service hours. One student chose to pursue a Sustainable Agriculture Focus and directed their energies towards scaling up our edible mushroom production, working with Ben to inoculate more logs than ever and to put in writing standard operating procedures, so we can continue this project in the future.

Outreach was again a pillar of the Farm mission. We gave tours to parents and friends on commencement weekend and Scattergood Day; welcomed students from the Friends School of Minnesota, Taproot Nature Experience and the Good Earth School; attended conferences hosted by Practical Farmers of Iowa, The Savanna Institute and Iowa Farmers Union; and presented at conferences, field days and meetings hosted by PFI, Marbleseed, and the Rodale Institute. The Farm continues to be part of a shared working group of similar sized vegetable farms and Mark again served the Rodale Midwest steering committee and on a grant review committee for SARE (Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education). Four students and two staff members ventured to Zumwalt Acres in east central Illinois for a trips week service trip in which they volunteered on this regenerative farm as well as several others in the area.

Our farm remains productive: the freezers are currently full of pork, beef, lamb and turkey harvested over the past year. Organic vegetable production was abundant, with a myriad of fresh offerings during the fall and an abundance of storage options through the winter. The high tunnel remained productive through January and then started up again with spinach, lettuce and various mustard greens available in March. We ate lots of pears again, plus a few apples and the first chestnuts were harvested last fall. Already this

summer, excess produce has been shared with the Iowa City Free Medical Clinic, Field to Family and the Iowa City Food Bank.

Because of a large anonymous gift to the farm, we were able to add to our orchards, planting 10 additional apple trees, 10 pears, 8 peaches and 4 apricots. We have already ordered 20 more apples and 8 pears to plant next spring. We also planted some trees for forage, experimenting with 100 each of poplars and willows which will be coppiced in a few years to allow sheep and cows to graze them as bushes. This gift also allowed us to replace 1400 feet of dilapidated fencing along the interstate and purchase some much needed tools for maintaining the gardens, grounds and orchards around the farm.

Ben Heller has been instrumental in all endeavors on the Farm, but in particular has managed the livestock program and provided students with lots of different opportunities to be involved. Dana Foster continued to lead the Middle School farm experiences. Elias Birchett ('24) returned for a second summer of field work and Irving Treadway continued to lead the cooks in using Farm meat and produce. Kent Tjossem has been helpful with good advice, oil changes and replacing a starter on one of our tractors.

It is no great stretch to reread the words of Martin Luther King Jr., delivered in Memphis to sanitation workers not long before he was murdered, and apply them to field workers today: "But let me say to you tonight, that whenever you are engaged in work that serves humanity and is for the building of humanity, it has dignity, and it has worth. One day our society must come to see this. One day our society will come to respect the sanitation worker if it is to survive, for the person who picks up our garbage, in the final analysis, is as significant as the physician, for if he doesn't do his job, diseases are rampant. All labor has dignity." ²

Mark Quee,
Scattergood Farm Manager

Foot notes:

1. (<https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/chart-gallery/chart-detail?chartId=63466#:~:text=In%202020%E2%80%9322%2C%2032%20percent,percent%20held%20no%20work%20authorization.>)
2. <https://www.beaconbroadside.com/broadside/2018/03/the-50th-anniversary-of-martin-luther-king-jrs-all-labor-has-dignity.html>