

## ISU Student Organic Farm\* – 2007 Field Season

Andy Larson, president

We began our growing season on two benches in an unsprayed portion of the Horticulture Hall greenhouses on campus. We had two “planting parties” during which the Student Organic Farm (SOF) members planted many varieties of vegetable seeds in flats. In the future, we must be more diligent about instructing overzealous planters as to which seed varieties need which cell sizes (we had some squash seeds growing in very cramped conditions). Since most commercial planting media contains a wetting agent, we started seeds in a planting medium of our own design. It was mixed on site and consisted of one part peat moss, one part perlite, one part composted manure, and several pounds of bone meal per 15 gallon batch. We moved flats of transplants to a shade house at the Horticulture Research Station for hardening-off.

Field planting was late due to a rainy spring. We had standing water on the north end of the farm for a long time, and the tractor got mired at least once in saturated soils as we attempted to do our field preparations. Thus, spring plantings of most cool-season crops were delayed until fall. In terms of annuals, we planted a dozen beds that were prepared with a four-foot roto-tiller. We had one transplanting day with kids from Youth and Shelter Services (YSS) in Ames. We planted multiple varieties of squash, cole crops, beans, peas, tomatoes, sweet peppers, chiles, onions, potatoes, and root crops, as well as about a quarter of an acre of sweet corn. Most beds had a drip hose for irrigation and were mulched with straw from the ISU Agronomy Farm to help maintain moisture and reduce weed pressure. Weeds were controlled mechanically by mower, trimmer, or hand tools. We had significant insect pressure from squash bugs and cucumber beetles. Perennial plantings include peach trees, raspberries, rhubarb, asparagus, and strawberries. These beds were

mulched with wood chips from the City of Ames, but we still had spotty thistle problems. Much of the produce harvested went to the SOF members for home consumption and preservation, but we still donated several hundred pounds of food to local charitable organizations including shelters, food pantries, and a halfway house.

We had 18 subscribers to community plots at the east end of the SOF. These were all university-affiliated people with little or no access to land who paid \$25 for season-long access to a 15 ft × 20 ft plot, water, and tools. We expect to be able to accommodate 24 subscribers next season.

We have big plans for next season. From a farm system standpoint, we hope to put in place updated trickle irrigation, experiment with woven polyester row covers for insect control, design a permanent rotation for the annual crops, and install turn walkways between annual beds. Most importantly, one of our big goals is to form a relationship with ISU Dining Services and begin selling produce to their burgeoning Farm-to-ISU program. This will be an interesting organizational challenge that we are excited to meet because it will push us to be more organized in our plantings, more focused in scope, larger in production, more dedicated in our labor and leadership, and more economically sustainable in our farm business model.

\*Note: The ISU Student Organic Farm follows organic practices but is not certified organic. It uses non-certified sources of straw, mulch, seed, and plant starts. It does not have a clean out protocol for shared equipment.