

2010

Student Organic Farm Summary

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Recommended Citation

Gunther, Theo, "Student Organic Farm Summary" (2010). *Iowa State Research Farm Progress Reports*. 352.
http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/farms_reports/352

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Student Organic Farm Summary

Abstract

The ISU Student Organic Farm (SOF) completed our fourth season at the ISU Horticulture Research Station. We had a number of outstanding efforts, visitors and new involvement, addition of 15 new fruit trees, as well as some recurring challenges. There were 12 community plots rented with plotters including current graduate and undergraduate students, alumni, ISU staff, and other members of the Ames community. We had the highest number of well-managed, productive rented plots of any year at our current location. It was great to have such efforts from the entire range of our participants. There were excellent crops of peas, potatoes, carrots, squash, cucumbers, beans, tomatoes, peppers, beets, and kohlrabi. Additionally, nine cherry trees and six pear trees were planted at the site and we expect some of them to bear fruit in the coming years. Also there was a trial of tomato varieties grown organically, which was informative and will be refined for continued improvement next season.

Keywords

RFR A9002

Disciplines

Agricultural Science | Agriculture

Student Organic Farm Summary

RFR-A9002

Theo Gunther, SOF Chair

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Produce was mostly used by students who were active and present when produce was ready to be harvested. We also were able to establish a marketing relationship with Farm to Folk (F2F). F2F is a marketing coordination effort that connects local consumers and local producers of produce and other foods. We were able to sell through them both green beans and cucumbers. Harvest and transport became an issue that prevented further marketing. We plan to continue to work with F2F and they will be a great connection to the larger community for future seasons.

During the season, we were able to host two groups of visitors. We had a group of Iowa high school students looking at a spectrum of opportunities in agriculture visit in late May. It was a great chance to show prospective students a hands-on opportunity at ISU to participate in a student run garden. We also had a group from the Sustainable Agriculture Educators Association Conference that was held in Ames in July. Both students and instructors from other universities and colleges that have sustainable agriculture classes or programs visited the farm and the responses were positive.

Overall, the season can be considered a success. Major points of success that will help enable future activities include 1) successfully managing cover crops for fertility and ground cover, 2) a refurbished sickle bar mower that enables hay to be cut for mulch, 3) addition of compost to beds from new ISU compost facility, and 4) new involvement from students.

Plans for next season include a new produce washing and handling area, integrating the community plotters into more farm activities, a volunteer share CSA, improved recordkeeping, increased cooperation with other ISU clubs and departments, expanded membership, and a more cooperative relationship with other researchers and staff at the horticulture station. We are blessed with a wonderful location and continue to pursue a functional garden that produces bountiful and diverse produce while providing ample opportunity for hands on experience and outdoor activity. We are well aware of our shortcomings and limitations, though; we are always looking for and finding new people to contribute their knowledge, time, and energy.