Life on Woody's Stewardship Farm: The Signs and Rituals of Spring

By: Woody Woodruff

There is a fundamental cycle to life and the seasons form part of that cycle, creating a rhythm to which we orient ourselves naturally. Spring is the annual rebirth. The longer days seem to be one of the things that move us into action. It's a time of opportunity. But as a farmer, it can also be a time of uncertainty. It's the time that we orchestrate our planting season, and that season is riddled with questions. Is it time to start planting? Will it frost again? Can I get everything planted in time? Will extra seeds be needed in case of a replant?

I had a neighbor named Melvin that I always use to watch, and when he started planting, I started. Though Melvin has passed into eternal winter, I will always remember when I first asked him what it was on which he based the decision to start planting his corn. He was the type of farmer who was educated at a one-room school house and who never got off the farm much. What he learned about farming he learned from family. But I couldn't ignore the fact that his crops were always the best in the area. So one day I asked him when he knew it was time to plant. I can still see him asking his wife to bring us some ice tea and him having me sit down on his shaded park bench located by his wife's garden. He was never one to tell long stories; in fact most of the time he just seemed to always smile and enjoyed listening more that talking. But we were neighbors and I knew if he was sitting me down I had better just sit and listen.  

Read More
Time to Transition Your Farm to Organic

By: Woody Woodruff

Sales of organic food and non-food products in the United States broke through another record in 2014, totaling $39.1 billion, up 11.3 percent from the previous year, according to the latest survey on the organic industry from the Organic Trade Association (OTA). "On the heels of organic sales now nearing a milestone 5 percent share of the total food market, organic stakeholders have gathered in Washington to educate lawmakers and policymakers. Our latest industry data show robust demand and great opportunity for the organic sector," said Laura Batcha, CEO and Executive Director of OTA. Organic farmers have historically not received many benefits from farm bill programs, but more recent Farm Bills have begun to change that. Now, those organic farmers that want to can apply for federal crop insurance programs and take advantage of grant programs that assist with the costs of organic certification. Organic farmers can also receive technical assistance and funds for implementing organic practices in the Conservation Stewardship Program's contribution to organic transitioning - The Organic Crosswalk. All the technical support activities listed in the Organic Crosswalk section of the Conservation Stewardship Program can be viewed at: [http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/nrcs141p2_023801.pdf](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/nrcs141p2_023801.pdf) In addition, USDA research programs are now spending millions of dollars on methods to improve organic farming techniques. However, our federal and state governments are facing across the board reductions in spending, which means these existing programs are at risk to budget cuts. Now, while these programs still exist, seems to be a good opportunity to look into organic farming. [Read More]

Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy

The [Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy](https://ui.constantcontact.com/visualeditor/visual_editor_preview.jsp?agent.uid=1121210908732&format=html&printFrame=true), going into effect in June 2015, guides state efforts to improve water quality at home and downstream by reducing nitrogen and phosphorus levels in our lakes, streams, and rivers. This strategy has been going through a long process of development and will impact farming in such a way that all farmers will have to adapt their operations. Illinois Stewardship Alliance has spent much time and energy in developing a program that will help promote the release of the Illinois Nutrient
Loss Reduction Strategy and offer assistance to farmers. To find out more, click on the link to see what part of the strategy the Alliance has been involved in. ISA Nutrient Management Work

Featured Cover Crop: Spring Oats

Oats are a low-cost, reliable fall cover crop that winterkills. Few other species could be easier to fit into a cover cropping system than oats. Oats provide quick, weed-suppressing biomass, take up excess soil nutrients and can improve the productivity of legumes when planted in mixtures. The oat plant’s fibrous root system also holds soil during cool-weather gaps in rotations, and the ground cover provides an easy mulch before low-till or no-till planting. Oats take up excess N and small amounts of P and K when planted early enough.

MANAGEMENT

Time your seeding to allow at least six to 10 weeks of cool-season growth. Moderately fertile soil gives the best stands. For a winterkilled cover, spring oats usually are seeded in late summer or early fall. If seeding oats as a fall nurse crop for a legume, a low rate (1 to 2 bushels per acre) works well. If drilling oats, seed at 2 to 3 bushels per acre 1/2 to 1 inch deep. Shallow seeding in moist soil provides rapid emergence and reduces incidence of root rot disease. Timing is critical when you want plenty of biomass or a thick ground cover.
Oats are easy to kill. As a winterkilled cover, just light disking in spring will break up the brittle oat residue. That exposes enough soil for warming and timely planting. Or, no-till directly into the mulch, as the residue will decompose early in the season.

Spring Oats have a naturally occurring herbicidal compounds in their roots and this residue can hinder weed growth for a few weeks. These compounds also can slow germination or root growth of some subsequent crops, such as lettuce, cress, timothy, rice, wheat and peas. Minimize this effect by waiting three weeks after oat killing before seeding a susceptible crop, or by following with an alternate crop. Rotary hoeing or other pre-emerge mechanical weeding of solo-seeded oats can improve annual broadleaf control. Oats are less prone to insect problems than wheat or barley. If you're growing oats for grain or forage, armyworms, various grain aphids and mites, wireworms, cutworms, leafhoppers, and grubs could present occasional problems.

Oats make a great fall legume nurse crop or companion crop. They can increase the fertilizer replacement value of legumes. They also help to reduce fall weeds. The oats will winterkill in many areas while improving the legume's winter survival.

Source: Midwest Cover Crop Council

Upcoming Events!

6/8 - Farm Dreams Workshop - Decatur - 5-9pm
A short workshop at Good Samaritan Inn in Decatur, in which participants meet experienced sustainable farmers, tour a farm, learn about successful farm enterprises, and ask questions about local farm businesses. Farm Dreams covers resource assessment, goal setting, financial planning, and marketing options. New this year: each workshop will be held on a farm and include a farm tour. Learn More

6/10-11 - Quad Cities Pollinator Conference - Rock Island
Nahant Marsh, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Soil and Water Conservation Districts of Rock Island, Scott and Henry counties will host the inaugural Quad Cities Pollinator Conference. The conference features an outstanding lineup of speakers on topics such as: plant-pollinator relationships, pollinator decline, designing pollinator support plantings, land conservation practices, pollinator-friendly landscapes in agricultural and urban settings, and more. An optional pollinator truffle workshop and two post-conference tours are offered. Learn More

6/11 - Illinois Summer Horticulture Day - Granville
8:45 a.m. - 3:00 p.m. at Boggio's Orchard and Produce, 12087 IL Highway 71, Granville, IL 61326. Registration begins at 8:00 a.m. Advance registration is $25 and includes lunch. More information about Boggio's Orchard and Produce is available at www.boggiosorchardandproduce.com. For questions and reservations, email Rachel at ilsthortsoc@gmail.com or call 217-853-6048. Learn More

6/12 - Raising Pork in the Forest - Petersburg - 6-8pm
This class at Red Gate Farm is a great opportunity to really learn the details about raising pork in an unconventional manner! When most folks think of raising hogs, they often think of the overwhelming stink, flies, disease, pollution, and filth that accompanies it. This class proves that there is a better way, where raising hogs can actually be a very fun and enjoyable experience! $25 per person. Space is limited. Learn More

6/13 - Chicken Raising Class - Petersburg - 9am-11pm
If you've ever considered raising backyard laying hens, meat birds, or just a few fun pet chickens, this is the class at Red Gate Farm is for you. Even if you're already raising chickens, you will find all sorts of useful information and insights in this class. After
the class session, we'll take you on a first-hand tour of our chicken facilities, including our chick brooder, portable meat bird tractors, and portable layer coops. We will discuss the reasons and risks involved with the way we raise our chickens, and the many services and products that derive from home-raised chickens. $25 per person. Space is limited. Learn More

6/15 - Farm Dreams Workshop - Cornell - 5-9pm
A short workshop at Antiquity Oaks in Cornell in which participants meet experienced sustainable farmers, tour a farm, learn about successful farm enterprises, and ask questions about local farm businesses. Farm Dreams covers resource assessment, goal setting, financial planning, and marketing options. New this year: each workshop will be held on a farm and include a farm tour. Learn More

6/15 - Southern Illinois Summer Twilight Series Meeting - Pulaski
6:00 p.m. at Ridge Road Vineyard, 1653 Ridge Road, Pulaski, IL 62976. This program is provided at no cost but pre-registration is required no later than June 12. Learn more and register

6/18 - Local Flavors Farm-to-Table Event
Enjoy a locally sourced farm-fresh meal from your favorite restaurants.

- Champaign-Urbana: Dinner at Hudson Farm, hosted by Piao
- Bloomington-Normal: Dinner at Medici
- Springfield- Dinner at Augie's Front Burner

Visit www.buyfreshbuylocalcentralillinois for menus and a complete schedule of restaurants coming soon.

6/23 - Gray Farms Tour - Watskea
Free farm tour at Gray Farms in Watseka on Tuesday, June 23 from 9:00 a.m. to Noon. Learn about the sustainable agricultural practices that have made Gray Farms successful! Learn more here

6/25 - Monarch workshop - Springfield- 10am-12pm
Katie Hollenbeck, Water Quality Outreach Assistant for the IL-IN Sea Grant, will give a workshop on monarchs at the Adams Wildlife Sanctuary in Springfield. She will discuss their life cycle, and how to capture, handle and tag them. Katie will also discuss the program Monarch Watch. She may be able to bring a few monarchs with her so that participants can practice handling them. This summer will be Katie's seventh year tagging monarchs for Monarch Watch. In 2014, she established her first certified monarch way-station at Emiquon on behalf of UIS. Learn More

6/26 - Organic Grain Field Day at Janie's Farm - Danforth
Learn from a successful and visionary farmer who can help others create a more diverse, resilient, and profitable business model for their farms. Harold Wilken, his son Ross, and several employees work together to manage 2300 acres in Iroquois County, Illinois. After 23 years, they made the switch from conventional farming to organic in 2003, and are now moving to access local food-grade markets. Corn, Beans, Wheat, and Red Clover or Alfalfa are the basic rotations used on the farm. However, Harold is quick to point out that you must be flexible, and several other crops are used to adapt to the unpredictable nature of farming. Corn can be popcorn, seed corn or dent corn. The beans that are grown include clear-hilum soybeans and dry beans like Black Turtle Beans. Wheat includes spring and fall planted hard and soft varieties. Pumpkins, oats and ancient grains like Emmer and Einkorn are also part of the mix. Register online here

7/14 - Northwest Illinois Organic Transition Workshop - Hillsdale
Hosted by Keith Landis at the Prime Steakhouse in Hillsdale, Illinois on July 14th from 10:00 to 2:30. This workshop will have an Organic certifier, a soils specialist, a crop insurance agent, and an organic farmer round table. This will go with the list of workshops at the bottom of the Transition beginnings to Organics article. This workshop is free but please RSVP to Keith Landis at 815-499-4118.

7/16 - Illinois Renewable Energy Conference - Illinois State University
The conference will include plenary speakers on topics of interest to all areas of renewable energy, plus breakout sessions on renewable energy policy, technology, and case studies from around the state in the specific areas of wind, solar, biomass, geothermal and energy efficiency. Learn more

9/8 - PrairiEarth Farm Field Day - Atlanta
More details coming soon.

9/12 - Crop Cycle - Champaign
The Illinois Organic Growers Association will be hosting a bike-to-farm tour event this fall in Champaign County. Take a ride through 7 organic farms and experience the beautiful views of the countryside, enjoy fresh food and meet the farmers behind it all. Increasing your knowledge about organic and sustainable agricultural practices is just another added benefit. Mark your calendar and bring the whole family. Learn More

For a complete listing of upcoming events, please checkout our Events Calendar on the ISA website.

Have an event that should be included in our line-up? Email Molly at molly@ilstewards.org

Get Involved

**Donate**
ISA is a non-profit organization. Your donations help us to continue our work in promoting local foods, fair policies, and conservation agriculture. Donate Now

**Become a Member**
Be part of an Alliance of consumers, farmers and other local food system stakeholders working to increase production and consumption of local foods in Illinois Learn More

**Spread the word!**
When you send this email to a friend, like us on Facebook, follow us on Twitter, or connect with us on LinkedIn, you are helping to increase awareness about local food causes in your community. Be a part of the movement and spread the word!