



Dear CSA Members -

It's now the middle of a very cold and cloudy Michigan winter, just the time for a newsletter! And we have bad news and good news to share with you...

First, the good news. As many of you know, last winter was very difficult for us, mostly because we only had a furnace in our old greenhouse. One furnace just wasn't enough to keep the greenhouse warm enough for the lettuce to actually GROW, and we needed to get at least one furnace for the second greenhouse. Eventually, we got three more furnaces in January and had them working reliably by February, but we didn't have any lettuce to speak of for 3 months. Well, this year we had all the furnaces, so everything should grow wonderfully, right?



The good news is that while the lettuce hasn't grown as quickly as we'd like, we have been able to deliver at least HALF of what our customers want, and I suppose that's an improvement (I have to keep telling myself that!).

Now the bad news... Part of the challenge of heating with biomass is the process of getting the fuel (basically all corn this year due to cost and availability), moving it down to the greenhouses, loading furnaces, keeping furnaces running, cleaning them out, etc. But this past week we added a new challenge - chimney problems. It seems that the chimney pipe became disconnected from one of the furnaces in the new greenhouse, and proceeded to fill the greenhouse with smoke. I had checked on the furnaces around noon, and went back down to load them up for the night around 4pm, and when I opened the door all I could see was smoke! Steve ran in and turned off the furnace and put the pipe back together, but we had to get the smoke out. The only option we had at the time was to open up the greenhouse and turn on the fan, which we did, and we got most of the smoke out in about 5-10 minutes,

but we basically froze over half of the plants in the greenhouse in the process, and most plants suffered some damage. The lettuce had been growing slowly, we'd been picking a lot from the older greenhouse (basically nothing left there that's harvestable size right now), and now much of the lettuce in the new greenhouse is unusable. We did pick quite a bit and tried to salvage what we could, but were only able to keep the very inside leaves - basically a whole lot of labor for not much usable lettuce. So this week we'll be cleaning out at least the back four beds and starting over, as well as completing the electrical for the lighting, and fixing chimneys to avoid this issue in the future. **Plan on no lettuce for the rest of January...**



In other news, we also hosted a couple of events this fall. First was the CSA Member Pot-Luck the Friday night before deer season opened. We had a pretty good turnout, considering the short notice and cold weather, and all who came had a good time talking, roasting marshmallows, eating delicious burgers, and touring the greenhouses at night with the lights on (very cool!). Then in early December, we hosted a Saturday morning open house. Of course, it was snowy and roads were treacherous... Amazingly, people came! We gave several tours, some to members, and some to people we'd never met who had heard about us and braved the snow to come out.

If you didn't make it to either event, don't worry! We'll schedule more open house days in the spring, and hopefully the weather will cooperate with us then.

Remember that thaw we had in December? Well, take a look at some pictures of our farm... The whole valley was one big icy lake (just like last summer's flood!).



The water even came in the back corner of the new greenhouse...

Our pigs were butchered a few days before Christmas. They were processed at Byron



Center Meats, and I believe they've all been picked up by some very lucky customers. We've heard lots of great feedback so far, and everything we've sampled has been fabulous! If you're interested in purchasing a half-pig next

year, stay tuned for more info later in the spring...

We've set a butcher date (Feb 12) for a few roosters we hatched last summer, as well as some of the older hens who aren't laying anymore (perfect for soup). The roosters will be \$3/lb, and the stew hens will be \$3/bird. There are just a few of each available, so if you are interested in either (or both) please let me know as soon as possible. For this small batch, we'll just be selling them whole (no cut-ups). We'll keep you posted on pastured chickens available this coming summer when we have more details.



Stay warm!

Kris & Steve Van Haitsma
Mud Lake Farm, LLC

