



North Star Farm Marvin Baker, Carpio, ND

Just under an hour south of the Canadian Border, in Northwestern North Dakota, lies the little town of Carpio, population 157, give or take. Two of those residents, Marvin and Ilene Baker, not only live in town, but also have a thriving organic vegetable farm there too. Marvin, a retired military veteran, started growing organic vegetables in 2006; his field was an abandoned lot that he purchased from the town. As interest in his produce grew, so did his operation. By, 2008 he had entered into an agreement with the Entrepreneurial Center for Horticulture at Dakota College in Bottineau, and received grant money to build a passive solar greenhouse. In 2010, he expanded from one acre to 3 ½, all within the boundaries of town. He currently has a high tunnel as well.

Marvin does all of the physical part of the farming, while his wife, Ilene handles the bookwork. They sell their produce at the Kenmare Farms Market, 25 miles from Carpio North Prairie Farmers Market in Minot, about 26 miles east of Carpio and offer a CSA subscription service to Minot and the Minot Air Force Base. As Marvin continues to become more familiar with the idiosyncrasies of starting plants in a passive greenhouse, he has begun custom starting organic transplants for other growers. In 2016, he had orders for 10,000 onion starts. With the greenhouse and operation situated in town, Marvin feels comfortable offering organic plants and produce; seeing that it would be very difficult for chemical spray drift to reach his crops. That is a distinct advantage in North Dakota where traditional farming relies heavily on airborne chemical controls, which regularly drift onto other land owners' fields.



Analysis

The 2016 growing season brought a severe drought to the Northwestern part of North Dakota. Marvin had almost nothing to sell in June, and barely anything in July. He claims 2016 was his worst year ever for yield, but his best year for Farmers Market Sales. While other crops were failing, his garlic and onions did wonderful and sales were spectacular. Garlic has always been one of North Star's best sellers; Marvin shares that 50% of his farmers market sales are based on garlic, while the other crops just add variety to attract people to his booth.

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Marvin enjoys trying to grow items that are unique to the North Dakota. He has effectively grown tobacco, okra, peanuts, and cotton, to some degree. Each year he continues to experiment with seed he has saved from previous successes, hoping to breed up the genetics that will do best at the 49th parallel. He is particularly interested in peanuts and hopes to have a crop of them to add to his marketing mix in 2017.

While Marvin does have a high tunnel, it had sustained wind damage and was not repaired nor operational by the 2016 season. However, a soil test was conducted to see if any amendments were needed for the 2017 growing season.

Advice

Marvin has been actively involved in the North Dakota Farmers Market and Growers Association, previously serving on the Board for 10 years and as president for 4 of those years. He was also the market Manager for the North Prairie Farmers Market in Minot in 2016. He has seen a lot of failure in farm markets, due to personality clashes, weak rules, and poor management. His advice to vendors and market managers, “The market needs to make fair rules with clear penalties for breaking the rules. The manager needs to enforce the rules honestly and fairly. Vendors need to think about what is good for each of the other vendors, the customers, and the entire market. Everyone needs each other in order for the market to be successful. Managers and vendors should develop a team attitude to make the market the best it can be.”



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2016 Data

Harvest, Planting & Yield Data					
Outdoor Planting Began		1 May		Tomatoes, carrots, beets, cabbage, radishes	
Outdoor Harvest Began		22 June		Radishes	
Outdoor Harvest Ended		28 Sept			
Outdoor Harvest Period Lasted		14 weeks			
High Tunnel Soil Test					
	Actual	Recommended	Variance	Hi/Low/Avg	
<i>(0-6") depth</i>					
pH	7.7	-	-		
N lbs. per acre	55	60	-5	Avg	
P ppm	49	16	33	High	
K ppm	510	160	350	High	
Organic Matter	4.50%	-	-		
Soluble Salts (mmhos/cm)	1.22	< 1	-	High	
Notes:					
Nitrogen is optimal. Phosphorus and Potassium are high. Soluble salts are slightly up, they may need to be leached down through watering.					

Revenue			
Total Sales by Month			
April	\$	7,475	CSA sales
July	\$	2,055	Farmers Market
August	\$	1,929	Farmers Market
September	\$	1,791	Farmers Market
Total 2016 Sales	\$	13,250	
Expenses			
Total Expenses	\$	1,551	*potato and garlic seed carried over from last year
fuel		35%	of operating expenses
Marketing Channel			
Farmers Market		44%	
CSA		56%	

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