

Connecticut Weekly AGRICULTURAL REPORT

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Connecticut Department of Agriculture
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THROWBACK ORGANIC FARMER SUCCEEDING WITH CUTTING-EDGE GROWING TECHNIQUES IN LEBANON

By Steve Jensen, Office of Commissioner Steven K. Reviczky

LEBANON - Bryan O'Hara keeps five tractors on his Tobacco Road Farm, but these days they don't get a whole lot of use.

As he puts it, "the iron is largely idle" not due to a lack of production, but because his no-till organic growing methods simply don't require much machinery.

"Humans do it better," he said with a slight grin while showing a group of visitors around the farm recently, where he was harvesting spinach, arugula and other leafy greens that he grows all winter under three acres of low tunnels.

Known for his innovative techniques such as introducing soil-enriching and hydrating forest microbes into his crop fields, O'Hara has gained a reputation as a sort of organic guru who gives regular presentations throughout the Northeast to various agricultural and academic groups.

He's an unabashed throwback who doesn't own a cell phone or have much use for a computer, refers to his parents as "Ma and Pa" and requests attendees of his lectures to contact him through the U.S. Mail.

But O'Hara says the growing methods he has developed or adapted from others are "like wildfire right now" in the organic farming world.

"They'd fly me all over to make presentations," he mused, "but I hate to fly."

Despite having no formal agricultural education, the depth and complexity of the knowledge O'Hara has attained in 25 years of farming is remarkable, and his low-key, earnest style makes it easy for the listener to grasp at least the framework of his approach.

In short, the foundation of his method involves layering soil and mulch and a specially-mixed compost to keep down weeds, help plants resist pests and disease, and draw moisture from the soil that he says all but eliminates the need for irrigation.

The driveway to the farm is lined with piles of woodchips and other materials used to make the approximately 100 tons of compost he spreads on the fields each year.

Woodchips make up about 40-percent of the mix, which also includes decomposed vegetables, coffee grounds and kiln-dried pine sawdust rich in carbon that he picks up at a coffin manufacturer in Willimantic.

He also adds granite quarry dust, which he says has a high content of silica that hardens the cell walls of plants, making them resistant to pests and disease without the use of chemicals.

"We all know how bad pesticides are," he said. "Why would
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LANCASTER, PA., LIVESTOCK SUMMARY

Avg. Dressing

	LOW	HIGH
SLAUGHTER COWS Avg. Dressing		
breakers 75-80% lean	75.00	79.50
boners 80-85% lean	75.00	79.00
lean 88-90% lean	70.00	75.50
SLAUGHTER STEERS		
Hi Ch/Prime 3-4	129.00	131.00
Choice 2-3	124.00	128.50
Sel 1-2	119.00	124.00
SLAUGHTER HOLSTEIN STEERS		
Hi Ch/Prime 3-4	108.00	115.00
Ch 2-3	102.00	108.00
SLAUGHTER HEIFERS		
Hi Ch/Prime 3-4	128.00	130.50
Ch 2-3	124.00	127.50
Select 1-2	118.00	120.00
CALVES - Graded bull		
No 1 120-128 lbs	220.00	220.00
No 1 94-108 lbs	240.00	250.00
SLAUGHTER LAMBS: Woolled & Shorn		
Markets: Choice and Prime 2-3		
40-50 lbs	300.00	300.00
60-70 lbs	270.00	280.00
50-60 lbs	290.00	305.00
70-80 lbs	285.00	285.00
80-90 lbs	295.00	295.00
90-110 lbs	247.00	260.00
110-130 lbs	222.00	222.00
SLAUGHTER EWES: Good 2-3		
80-120 lbs	85.00	92.00
120-160 lbs	80.00	110.00
160-200 lbs	77.00	105.00
200-300 lbs	40.00	65.00
BUCKS		
160-200 lbs	77.00	85.00
200-300 lbs	60.00	95.00
SLAUGHTER KIDS: Select 1, by head, est.		
40-60 lbs	162.00	195.00
60-80 lbs	230.00	240.00
80-100 lbs	240.00	250.00
SLAUGHTER NANNIES/DOES:		
Sel 1, by head, est.		
80-130 lbs	240.00	270.00
130-180 lbs	260.00	285.00
SLAUGHTER BUCKS/BILLIES: Select 1		
100-150 lbs	260.00	275.00
150-250 lbs	310.00	375.00

NEW HOLLAND, PA. HOG AUCTION

Per cwt.

52-56	200-300 lbs	45.00	49.00
	300-350 lbs	40.00	46.00
	350-400 lbs	34.00	34.00
48-52	200-300 lbs	40.00	45.00
	300-350 lbs	34.00	41.00
Sows, US 1-3			
	300-500 lbs	27.50	29.00
	500-800 lbs	28.00	32.00
Boars	200-300 lbs	30.00	36.00
	400-600 lbs	6.00	8.00

NORTHEAST RETAIL ORGANIC

CARROTS, LB	2.50	2.50
KALE, BUNCHED	3.00	3.00
LETTUCE, LB	3.00	3.00
TURNIPS, LB	2.50	2.50
WINTER SQUASH, LB	1.50	1.50

WHOLESALE FRUITS & VEGETABLES

Boston Terminal and Wholesale Grower Prices

NEW ENGLAND GROWN

	LOW	HIGH
ALFALFA SPROUTS, 12-4OZ	16.00	16.50
ALFALFA SPROUTS, 5 LBS	14.00	14.00
APPLES, EMPIRE, #1, 120, 140	15.00	16.00
APPLES, MACS, #1, 120, 140	15.00	16.00
APPLES, MACS, FCY, 120, 140	17.00	17.00
APPLE, MACS, FCY, 2-1/2", 12-3LB	15.00	16.00
BEAN SPROUTS, 10 LBS	5.00	6.00
BEAN SPROUTS, 12-12 OZ	12.00	15.00
BEET, CHIOGGA, LOOSE, 25LBS	14.00	14.00
BEETS, GOLD, LOOSE, 25 LBS	14.00	14.00
PARSNIPS, 18- 1 LB BAGS	23.00	23.00
TOMS, CHERRY, ONVINE, GH, 5 LB	16.00	18.00
TOMS, CHERRY, GHSE, 8-10 OZ	18.00	20.00
TOMS, GHSE, VINERIPE, 25 LBS	26.00	27.00
TOMS, GHSE, VINERIPE, 11 LBS	23.00	24.00
TOMATO, HEIRLM, GHSE, 10LBS	24.00	28.00

SHIPPED IN

ASPARAGUS, CA, LRG, 11LB	30.00	30.00
BOK CHOY, FL, 50 LBS	28.00	30.00
BOKCHOY, BABY, FL, 30 LBS	26.00	32.00
CABBAGE, RED, FL, 50 LBS	18.00	18.00
CARROTS, GA, JMBO, 50 LBS	17.00	18.00
CELERY, FL, 2 DOZ	18.00	18.00
CHINESE CELERY, CA, CTN	50.00	50.00
CHOY SUM, LONG, CA, 30 LBS	35.00	35.00
COLLARDS, GA, 24	13.00	13.00
CORN, BICOLOR, FL, 4-41/2 DZ	16.00	18.00
CUKE, LNG, GHSE, FLMWRP, 12	12.00	14.00
DANDELION, NJ, LOOSE, BU	18.00	19.00
EGPLNT, STRIPE, GHS, NL, 11LB	16.00	18.00
ENDIVE, FL, 24	18.00	20.00
ESCAROLE, FL, 1-1/9, 24	19.00	25.00
FRISEE, CA, 24	20.00	24.00
GAI CHOY, CA, 30 LBS	25.00	25.00
GARLIC, SUPR COL, CA, 30 LBS	68.00	70.00
GINGER ROOT, 10 LBS	45.00	55.00
KALE, CA, 12	20.00	24.00
LETT, BSTN, GHS, CAN, 12-4OZ	16.00	17.00
LET, OAK LEAF, AZ-CA, 2.2 LBS	11.00	13.00
LET, RED OAK LF, AZ-CA, 2.2LB	11.00	13.00
MACHE, GHSE, PA, 3LBS	12.00	12.00
MESCLUN MIX, CA, 3LBS	6.00	6.50
MESCLUN MIX, ORG, CA, 3LBS	8.00	8.00
MUSHRMS, SHITAKE, PA, 3 LBS	14.00	15.00
MSHRM, WHT, ORG, PA, 12-8OZ	17.00	17.00
MUSTARD, GA, BNCHED, 24	15.00	16.00
ONG CHOY, CA, 40 LBS	140.00	140.00
OPO SQUASH, CA, 35 LBS	42.00	42.00
PARSLEY, PLAIN, TX, 60	24.00	24.00
PARSLEY, CURLY, TX, 60	20.00	20.00
PARSNIPS, MI, MED, 20 LBS	20.00	20.00
PEAS, ENGLISH, CA, 30 LBS	54.00	56.00
RADICCHIO, CA, 9	11.00	13.00
RADISHES, FL, BNCH, 2 DOZ	14.00	14.00
RHUBARB, GHS, MI, 10 LBS	45.00	45.00
RHUBARB, OPN FLD, OR, 20LBS	42.00	42.00
SPINACH, FLAT, NJ, 24	16.00	17.00
SPINCH, SAVOY, CA, 8-10OZBAG	11.00	11.00
SQUASH, YEL, SM, FL, 1/2 BU	12.00	14.00
SWISS CHARD, RED, CA, 12	16.00	18.00
TURNIP TOPS, GA, 24	15.00	16.00
ZUCCHINI, FL, MED, 1/2 BU	8.00	10.00
YU CHOY, CA, 30 LBS	35.00	36.00

MIDDLESEX LIVESTOCK AUCTION

Middlefield, CT - April 18, 2016

	LOW	HIGH
Bob Calves:		
45-60 lbs.	50.00	55.00
61-75 lbs.	70.00	100.00
76-90 lbs.	192.50	190.00
91-105 lbs.	192.50	197.50
106 lbs. & up	200.00	202.50
Farm Calves	205.00	220.00
Starter Calves	65.00	70.00
Veal Calves	120.00	140.00
Open Heifers	115.00	160.00
Beef Heifers	100.00	116.50
Feeder Steers	93.00	180.00
Beef Steers	90.00	114.00
Stock Bulls	122.50	140.00
Beef Bulls	95.00	104.00
Replacement Cows	n/a	n/a
Replacement Heifers	n/a	n/a
Boars	n/a	n/a
Sows	n/a	n/a
Butcher Hogs	n/a	n/a
Feeder Pigs each	n/a	n/a
Sheep each	50.00	120.00
Lambs each	40.00	210.00
Goats each	70.00	250.00
Kid Goats each	40.00	117.50
Canners	up to	69.50
Cutters	70.00	73.00
Utility Grade Cows	74.00	77.00
Rabbits each	17.50	55.00
Chickens each	4.00	22.50
Ducks each	4.00	22.50

NORTHEAST EGGS/USDA

Per doz. Grade A and Grade A white in cartons to retailers (volume buyers)

XTRA LARGE	.65	.82
LARGE	.59	.73
MEDIUM	.42	.55

NEW ENGLAND SHELL EGGS

Per doz. Grade A brown in carton delivered store door. (Range)

XTRA LARGE	1.13	1.35
LARGE	1.05	1.25
MEDIUM	.65	.75
SMALL	.53	.63

LANCASTER, PA HAY REPORT

Small squares, each

TIMOTHY/ORCHARD		
PREMIUM:	280.00	330.00
GOOD:	200.00	265.00
FAIR:	135.00	200.00
UTILITY:	70.00	125.00
ALFALFA		
PREMIUM:	245.00	280.00
GOOD:	195.00	245.00
FAIR:	135.00	185.00
ALFALFA/GRASS		
PREMIUM:	280.00	310.00
GOOD:	195.00	250.00
FAIR:	165.00	200.00
STRAW	150.00	240.00
FODDER (LGE SQ)	90.00	120.00

FOR SALE

1-R. Blumenthal & Donahue is now Connecticut's first independent NATIONWIDE Agri-Business Insurance Agency. Christmas tree growers, beekeepers, sheep breeders, organic farmers and all others, call us for all your insurance needs. 800-554-8049 or www.bludon.com

2-R. Farm, homeowner and commercial insurance—we do it all. Call Blumenthal & Donahue 800-554-8049 or www.bludon.com

3-R. Gallagher electric fencing for farms, horses, deer control, gardens, & beehives. Sonpal's Power Fence 860-491-2290.

4-R. Packaging for egg sales. New egg cartons, flats, egg cases, 30 doz and 15 doz. Polinsky Farm 860-376-2227.

5-R. Nationwide Agribusiness Insurance Program, endorsed by the CT Farm Bureau, save up to 23% on your farm insurance and get better protection. References available from satisfied farmers. Call Marci today at 203-444-6553.

43-R. 72 x 30 x 12 (high) foot hoop house for sale. Lots of extra parts. 203-387-3055.

44-R. 2 row water wheel transplanter with 3 different size planting shoes. \$1,800.00. Call 860-786-7486.

45-R. Retiring from farming. Greenhouse and vegetable equipment for sale. www.wagonroadgreenhouse.com for pictures and details.

WANTED

36-R. Plastic mulch laying machine for 3 pt hitch. James A. Fazzone. 203-250-6677.

41-R. Searching for shelf stable products/formulations for products to sell with our current offerings at many major CT fairs/festivals. Contact beaconbrandsinc@aol.com

42-R. Looking for a Country/Farm Stand type store to operate. Contact sk617@aol.com to discuss.

MISCELLANEOUS

6-R. Farm/Land specializing in land, farms, and all types of Real Estate. Established Broker with a lifetime of agricultural experience and 40 years of finance. Representing both Buyers and Sellers. Call Clint Charter of Wallace-Tetreault Realty 860-644-5667.

24-R. The Connecticut Military Department has indoor stalls for lease at the Governor's Horse Guard facilities in Avon and Newtown. Monthly rate is \$350.00. For further information, please visit our website at www.ct.gov/mil/stall-lease or call 860-524-4968. Proceeds benefit Connecticut Governor's Horse Guards.

ATTENTION WHOLESALE FARMERS

The Department of Agriculture periodically receives requests from grocery stores and other retailers looking to connect with Connecticut farmers who can supply their stores.

If you are a Connecticut farmer interested in and capable of wholesaling your own products to Connecticut retailers and would like to be included in information we share with these buyers, please contact Elizabeth Aguilar at the Connecticut Department of Agriculture at Elizabeth.Aguilar@ct.gov or 860-713-2543.

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you want to spray anything if you don't have to?"

In the cooler months, the key to keeping his methods in use are the low tunnels, which provide a year-round supply of produce for his customers and income in his pocket.

"If it's 30-degrees out, it's 60-degrees under cover," he said as he walked through rows of spinach, pulling back a double-layer of plastic used in the winter and early spring. "We are in constant production one season to another - doesn't matter if it's winter or fall. As soon as a crop is done it's turned in and we plant another one, so we're getting three to four crops a year out of a piece of land. It's very intensive and we're getting very high yields."

A day earlier, he had cut a hundred pounds of spinach to supply the Willimantic Food Co-op, one of his longtime customers. He also sells at farmers markets in Tolland and Storrs, and

supplies restaurants through the CT Farm Fresh Express distribution facility in East Haddam.

At some of his presentations, O'Hara hands out a 4-page, single-spaced document simply titled "No-Till Vegetable Gardening at Tobacco Road Farm" that details his growing and soil-enrichment system.

One section describes what he calls "Korean Natural Farming" techniques that greatly enhance soil water content by introducing forest microbes into crop rows.

He says the method produces miles of underground "fungal mycelium," or masses of branching, threadlike fibers that spread deep into the soil and bring water back to the surface for the plants to absorb.

He creates the fungus by partially burying a cedar box filled with half-cooked rice in the leaf litter under deciduous trees on the edge of his farm. During the week or so the box is left there, fungal and other beneficial forest microbes move onto the rice.

The box is then brought back to the farm, where he adds soil, mulch and compost, as well as some sugar. That mixture is dumped onto a pile of bran, and after a few weeks becomes coated with a white fungus.

Clumps of the fungus are placed intermittently along the crop rows, and O'Hara says the "fungal matter just explodes into the soil," creating what he calls a "nutrient flush" of nitrogen, potassium, magnesium and calcium that is absorbed by the plants.

"It's the Holy Grail of organic farming," he said. "The savings on irrigation alone is phenomenal."

The final few paragraphs of his how-to document give an excellent summation of O'Hara's approach:

"Overall the system has greatly improved the biological activity and diversity of soil organisms. Higher worm populations are obvious, as well as a much improved crumb structure to the soil.

Fungal activity is obvious with lots of mycelium present, along with mushrooms. Vastly improved soil water characteristics include the great benefit of proper wicking from lower soil levels, which helps keep the soil life hydrated throughout the seasons, as well as better drainage, water retention, and in-soaking.

Soil air is also enhanced through the ability of the soil to breathe through the crumb structure, while excess oxygenation from tillage is avoided.

The soil structure is not pulverized through tillage, and erosion is decreased through mulching and constant vegetative cover. Theoretically, there is better nutrient retention and management.

There have been significant decreases in insects and diseases, including greatly reduced brassica flea beetle, absence of root maggot in rutabaga and turnip, no cabbage losses to black rot, and much less leek leaf disease, among many others.

Though a little more effort is required to prepare the beds and make the appropriate compost, overall there is great savings because of much higher yields, much less weed control, irrigation, and tillage requirements, as well as way less tractor time.

So the iron is largely idle, and thus the system can be utilized by farms without mechanization. There are very few culls, storage quality is enhanced, and the vibrancy of the crops is noted and appreciated by the customers."



Clockwise from above left: After broadcasting seed by hand, Bryan O'Hara works it into the soil with a "drag," a group of chain rings attached to a bar similar to a chain harrow; a bed of spinach planted last winter ready for harvest; a tree-cutting crew flagged down by O'Hara on a nearby street dumps a load of wood chips used for compost; O'Hara holding a handful of soil-enhancing material he creates using biological microbes collected in a wooded area of his farm using Korean Natural Farming techniques.

Page 1: O'Hara cutting arugula grown under his three acres of low tunnels.



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