

WEED MANAGEMENT IN VEGETABLES – FARMER TO FARMER

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Weeds are incredibly adaptive. We're all well-aware of the increasing problem of herbicide resistance, but there's more to it than that. If you rely on plastic mulch year-after-year and you'll wind up with weeds that can find holes or even make their own holes through the mulch. Rely on cultivation and you'll get a population of sturdy weeds that are hard to mechanically damage. Integrating all of these tactics along with cover cropping in a diverse crop rotation is key to keeping weeds off-balance. But how do you actually do that?

This session aims to host an informal farmer-to-farmer discussion on what has worked and what hasn't in efforts to keep weeds at bay. Several grower panelists will highlight some of their experiences to prompt further discussion:

Brian Reeves is a partner in Reeves Farms LLC., a fresh market vegetable and berry farm in Baldwinsville, New York. He and his brothers are the fourth generation to run the farm, which has operated in the central New York area since the late 1800's. Reeves Farms currently grows about 350 acres of vegetables and berries in rotation with rye and various cover crops on about 450 acres of land and rents another 800 acres of ground to neighbors who grow field corn and soybeans. 95% of the produce grown is sold wholesale along with a fruit stand and pick your own berry business. About 88% of Reeves Farms LLC production is through conventional methods and about 12% is Certified Organic. Most of the produce grown at the farm is sold in the central New York area within one hour of the farm, with some being shipped elsewhere. Brian says "our weed control involves cover crops, cultivation, broadcast herbicides, shielded sprayer herbicides, tillage, and hand weeding. Each depends on the crop, timing, weather, etc."

John Altobelli is a third-generation farmer at Altobelli Family Farm in Kinderhook, NY. John is known for his innovation with cover crops and strip tillage. Field Goods LLC had this to say about Altobelli Family Farm: "Founded as an apple orchard in the middle of the last century, the farm diversified into vegetables about twenty-five years ago and now produces a virtual cornucopia of produce, including squash, peppers, tomatoes, eggplant and the family's prized sweet corn. The relatively small size of the operation allows the family to be nimble and experiment with the varieties they grow, taking the best possible advantage of their sandy, loamy soil and finding the most suitable selection of crops to raise, resulting in produce of exceptional quality."

Gary Mahany of Mahany Potato Farms says, "I'm a farmer, which involves more areas of expertise than probably any other profession. Our farm comprises 2360 acres of crops including potatoes, grain corn, wheat, oats, clover, alfalfa, and snap beans for processing. I scout all of our crops. No one loads a sprayer unless I give them a list of what, where, and how much per acre. Our weed control practices vary for each crop depending on products available. We do

not just depend on Roundup in corn. Roundup is cheap, but if you are delayed applying it for two weeks because of rain, the effects can be very expensive. I always think ahead about what crop will be grown on each field the following year. Sometimes thinning out the weeds this year will have a huge effect on next year's crop. I rotate or add modes of action as much as possible to lengthen the usable life of the products we have."

Austin Pelyak is the Beet Crop Manager at Krehers Family Farms. He says "at Krehers we grow about 5400 acres of organic crops. Our main crops include corn, soybeans, and wheat. We grow about 150 acres of table beets and 500 acres of snap beans. Weed control organically requires careful attention to detail and thinking outside the box. We rely on 6 and 12 row cultivators, hand labor, tine weeders, cover crops, and flaming. All of these weed management tactics help in overall crop health and yield."

David Votypka of Votypka Farms says "I live and work in Springwater at an elevation of 1500-2100 feet. We own 900 acres and have 650 acres of tillable land. All of my land is highly erodible (HEL). We are a vegetable and grain farm. My dad came from long Island and started growing potatoes in 1946. I earned a degree in Vegetable Crops in 1985 from Cornell University. I also have an agricultural business called "Springwater Ag Products". We sell any material a grower can put into their sprayers and SeedWay products too (forages, small grains, corn & soybean seeds). We now grow soybeans, wheat, clover hay, snap beans and peas. We have also grown in the past: potatoes (56 years), beets, sweet corn, field corn, silage corn, alfalfa and oats. I started practicing IPM in 1985. I was the first person to input data into the blight cast computer system by Professor Fry. I also won the "Excellence in IPM" award in 2003."