

# Farm Aid 2011

Organizations, concerned individuals and other farmers band together to support the growers who were swamped by Irene

Published by [Metroland](#) on September 22, 2011

Farmers are still coping with the aftermath of Tropical Storm Irene, clearing debris and reorganizing greenhouses cluttered by floods—if the greenhouse didn't wash away altogether. Many farmers have documented crop losses with pictures, and brought records to the Farm Service Agency, even if they didn't have insurance. Some farmers are tilling under flooded fields and getting ready for the next season, planting greens in high tunnels (low-tech greenhouse structures that allow farmers to extend the growing season) for winter harvest.

Fifth generation farmer Jim Barber of Barber's Farm in Middleburgh did all of these things. The family operation sells produce in New York City and upstate, and lost a lot of food they'd harvested before the storm. Barber plans to be back at the Schenectady Greenmarket once the high tunnels start producing food. For now, the stand on Route 30 is open, stocking produce from other farms and a larger selection of eggs, milk and cheese than usual to serve locals who need a place to shop.

"We're searching for produce from area farmers that were not affected by the flood, to keep our employees working retail," Barber says. "The folks working the field have been cleaning up debris," but the fieldwork won't last.

Barber's Farm is among many farms, homes and businesses in the Schoharie Valley that sat under water in the dramatic, mile-wide flood caused by Irene's soaking rains. Tom Della Rocco, county executive director for the USDA's Farm Service Agency, estimates that 15,000 acres were flooded.

"A lot of crops, a lot of people, a lot of farm families. Farms on the hillsides also sustained significant losses. A lot of the corn is blown down, or the hay gets too wet for tractor traffic," says Della Rocco.

The USDA has a number of programs available for farmers who have losses, but farmers had to have been signed up for some kind of insurance program to utilize them. Many vegetable farmers do not insure their crops because private and governmental insurance is geared toward commodity crops, such as feed corn, sweet corn, and apples, not the diversified vegetable line people grow to entice customers at a farmers' market. There has been some political effort on the part of state senators trying to get federal money for uninsured farmers through existing programs. Other federal programs of use to farmers include a livestock indemnity program that assists farmers who lost livestock and a tree assistance program that helps vineyards, blueberry farms, and orchardists.

County by county, town by town, officials from FSA and other agencies are holding meetings to consolidate info shopping for affected farmers. One was held recently in Brunswick. About 100 people came to a meeting at the Best Western in Schoharie last week, and learned about the resources available to them.

"This about recovery resources, not rescue resources," clarifies David Cox of Schoharie County Cornell Cooperative Extension, which helped organize the event at the hotel. "We're trying to provide the ag community with as much access to resources that might help them rebuild their farms."

Cooperative Extension is a technical resource, he noted, and other agencies assembled spoke about financial resources, for things such as site rebuilding with the help of the state's \$15 million Agricultural and Community Recovery Fund. Soil and water conservation districts will soon be distributing these monies to help rebuild the agricultural industry.

The Farm Bureau and Cooperative Extension in Schoharie are putting together a feed-and-forage exchange to help farmers with livestock or dairy operations find feed to replace hay and silage lost during or after the flood.

“For the dairy cows, they need a much better quality mix than what would be needed for horses or grazing livestock,” says Cox. “That will be a great deal more difficult to accomplish this season, because of the second round of damage from Hurricane Lee. They lost more crops than we did down in the Southern Tier.”

Michael Kilpatrick of Kilpatrick Family Farm in Granville is also cleaning fields, and still trying to calculate how things will play out for the fall and winter CSAs.

“We called John Deere credit [and] asked them to defer payment a little bit longer,” says Kilpatrick, noting that he wasn’t pursuing emergency loans since he considered the CSA model, where customers invest in the harvest before it’s even planted, as a kind of loan.

The farm is the subject of a fundraising effort established by From Scratch Club, a group of women food bloggers in the region. Many of the people who write for the blog are members of this CSA, or belong to a CSA at Denison Farm. The money raised by donations for gift baskets will go directly to these two farms, and gift baskets include treats like 30 pounds of vegetables from Capital District Community Gardens, or dinner for four at Beekman Street Bistro. (Disclosure: The author donated two kinds of homemade pancake mix to a gift basket.)

Cookbook author Molly O’Neil saw the storm firsthand in Rensselaerville. During the week that she and so many others were without electricity, she cooked food that needed cooking (from power-free refrigerators and freezers) and fed people who sorely needed eating. The author, most recently, of *One Big Table*, which celebrates American cooks and cooking, is exploring the possibility of a cookbook to benefit farms hit by the floods. Watch for a series of fundraising dinners she is arranging.

Honest Weight Food Co-op considers the farmers who sell them food their kin. Soon after word of farm damages hit, the management team decided to match donations for flood relief. Their goal was to raise \$10,000 in donations, and they’re close to halfway there.

“Within our bylaws we donate a certain percentage of our profits each year to nonprofit organizations,” says Jennifer Grainer, Honest Weight’s marketing and merchandising coordinator. The management team is still deciding how to donate the money they collect; the goal is to get the funds directed toward the farms, such as Burger Farms and Schoharie Valley Farms, that sell at the co-op. The National Cooperative Grocery Association and the Regional Farm and Food Project are candidates for distributing the funds.

The Regional Farm and Food Project (RFFP) is part of another, separate fundraising effort. FarmieMarket, a marketing service that links customers with area farmers through online ordering and at-home delivery, and All Good Bakers are teaming up with RFFP to collect money for farmers through the month of September.

Sarah Gordon of FarmieMarket is from a farming family in Middleburgh. Her family’s farms were minimally affected, but she could readily empathize with the horror stories she was hearing, and was eager to do something to help. One of the farmer vendors she represents, Green Spiral Herbs, had to drop out for the season. Other farmers in FarmieMarket, however, were not as heavily impacted and decided to donate 10 percent of the sales they made through the business directly to the fund. This generosity is all the more notable because many of these farmers were without power and running generators to keep their products, like chicken and meat, frozen. Gordon’s father donated a huge pumpkin to raffle. The pumpkin swelled 40 pounds with the rains of Irene.

Britin Foster of All Good Bakers was also eager to help. The bakery folks pride themselves on producing ultra local food, making butter in their shop from Meadowbrook Farms cream, and harvesting vegetables

themselves at Farmer Jon's Produce in Selkirk. Foster organized a collection at the Delmar Farmers' Market that netted more than \$3,000. Together with online donations to RFFP through Causes.com, this effort is approaching \$11,000. Organizers are still gathering information on how to best get money to the farms, and are happy to take suggestions from the farming community. People should contact Sarah Gordon through her website.

While the damage wrought by Irene tremendous, don't think that all the local food got whisked away by the water. If you're taking the Locavore Challenge this month, you know that.

"Don't think we're all gone," cautions Jim Barber from Barber's Farm. "We're here trying to get back on our feet, and we need folks to come visit the area. Some businesses are open and some will be open soon."