

# Water, Water, Everywhere

Area farms assess the damage and begin to recover from Irene's lashing

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While the overall impact of Tropical Storm Irene on regional agriculture can't be measured yet, the blow the floods dealt to area farms is very apparent. The Farm Bureau is currently working with state and county officials to assess the situation. Some cooperative extension agents are encouraging farmers to report crop damage to the Farm Service Agency, even if they don't have insurance, so that emergency aid can be pursued.

The Farm Bureau reports that crop damage is severe in the Mohawk and Schoharie Valleys, and the Regional Farm and Food Project has set up a fund for farmers from Schoharie and Montgomery counties. The Schoharie Valley was dubbed the breadbasket of the American Revolution because its lush soil grew grain for colonial soldiers. Barber's Farm, which sells vegetables at Schenectady's Greenmarket, was underwater on Sunday, as were other big fruit and vegetable farms in the valley, Bohringer, and Shaul farms.

Closer to Albany, some farmers are facing flooded crops, too. Three farms that run CSA—community supported agriculture—programs with pickups in the area, Roxbury Farm, Kilpatrick Family Farms and Denison Farm, all were heavily hit. Another well-known CSA, Homestead Farms in Cropseyville, faced floods around its farmhouse, an extended power outage, and a tangled nest of irrigation lines, but its fields suffered minimal damage.

The financial model of community supported agriculture has been adopted by small-scale farms as a method of feeding capital to farmers at the beginning of the season so they can pay for the necessary inputs, such as staff, seeds, and equipment. The idea is that the consumer shares the risk of investing in the harvest. In exchange for their investment, CSA members enjoy weekly shares of food spread out over the season.

The extreme weather conditions are putting the ideology of this model to the test. Denison Farm in Schaghticoke has canceled CSA deliveries to its 500 members for the week. The fields that were not flooded by the Tomhannock Creek are impossible to reach. The Denisons hope the crops will be accessible by Friday so the farm can sell food at the Troy and Saratoga markets on Saturday.

The farm lost a tomato greenhouse, all of its peppers, eggplants and tomatillos, most of its summer squash and cucumbers and a third of its fall tomatoes, and broccoli-cabbage type crops. The Denisons assured members they would receive shares the following week.

Support for Denison Farm has been strong. One CSA member, Jillian Ehrenberg, emailed the farmers this message.

"I invest in you because I am investing in my food system (which is always better than conventional agriculture even when floods take over), I am investing in our local land, and I'm investing in you, and with all of this, I'm investing in our future. So that is why I do it."

Farmers are supporting each other in this hardship, too, offering tangible help when possible, and otherwise, calling each other to share stories and strategies. The Denisons have been in touch with Michael Kilpatrick and Jean-Paul Courtens of Roxbury Farm. These farms are not interrupting their delivery schedules, but each has lost a large amount of food. Lettuces and greens are off the list for the 250 CSA members of Kilpatrick Family Farms. Kilpatrick said the farm, which does two thirds of its business through retail, was facing \$125,000 to \$135,000 in lost revenue, with no crop insurance.

Floodwaters contaminate food with unknown but potentially harmful contents. Runoff to streams and rivers collects chemical and microbial contaminants from pesticides, manure and sewage, plus whatever else the water might encounter as it travels over roads and land.

However, not all the news is bad for farms after Irene. The Wednesday market in Troy boasted nearly a full list of farms and food. Berry Patch Farm and Slack Hollow Farm escaped the storm relatively unscathed, and have the food to show it.

Though Saratoga Apple lost approximately 10 percent of its crop to the winds and rain, which decimated the heavy, late-season fruit harvest, the orchard is opening its U-pick operations tomorrow (Friday). Plans are to harvest MacIntosh and honey crisp apples for sale at the Saturday Troy Waterfront Farmers Market.