

# **The Vegetable & Small Fruit Gazette**

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## **In This Issue**

**Schedule for Articles**

**Quote for Thought from Pete Ferretti**

**Sweet Corn Production and Harvesting**

**Cover Crops for Early Summer**

**Upcoming Meetings**

## Schedule for Articles

May – Tom Butzler	June – Eric Oesterling
July – Emelie Swackhamer	August – Steve Bogash
September – Lee Young	October – John Esslinger
November – Mena Hautau	December – John Berry

## Quote for Thought from **Pete Ferretti**

*The trouble with doing something right the first time is that nobody appreciates how difficult it was.*

~ The Lion, May 2007

## Sweet Corn Production and Harvesting

Submitted by [John Berry](#), Agricultural Marketing Educator, Penn State Cooperative Extension – Lehigh County

The Education Committee of the Kutztown Produce Auction and Penn State Cooperative Extension are hosting a summer twilight meeting from 4:00 - 8:30 pm on Wednesday, July 25, 2007 in Berks County. This highly anticipated, annual event typically attracts 60-90 growers and a large number of young farmers from surrounding counties. A feature of this meeting is an all-you-can-eat dinner with local sweet corn, lopes and melons.

This year's educational topic is *Sweet Corn* and we are especially excited because of the depth of education available.

OxBoCorp of Byron, New York will be demonstrating a single row fresh market sweet corn puller. We are using a participating farmer's sweet corn plots to not only demonstrate this mechanized harvesting system, but are also demonstrating an experienced seven-person hand harvesting crew system. We will be discussing speed, ease, quality, labor, timeliness and costs of both methods of harvesting.

In addition to this piece of the evening, Emelie Swackhamer, Scott Guiser and Dr. Shelby Fleischer will give presentations on Insect Monitoring, Weed Identification, Converting Pesticide Rates to Useable Quantities, and a Bt sweet corn update. One core and one category pesticide update credits will be available.

Pre-Registration is \$6.00, and walk-ins the afternoon of the meeting are \$9.00. Contact Dawn at 610-378-1327 for registration, or John Berry at 610-391-9840 for additional information

## Cover Crops for Early Summer

Thomas Björkman, Department of Horticultural Sciences, NYS Agricultural Experiment Station  
Cornell University

Summer may seem an odd time to use cover crops, because that is the time when the *real* crops are growing. But summer may be the right opportunity to improve fields with a cover crop. If the soil is wearing out, summer is when a soil-building crop can do a lot more work. Also, if the rotation leaves an opening in the summer, a short cycle cover crop will be much better than leaving the field open, to suffer erosion from rain and have weeds to go to seed. Buckwheat sown in late May or early June can be used before vegetables such as pumpkins, broccoli and late cucumbers. There is another opportunity for summer cover crops after lettuce, peas, early beans, spinach or small grains.

For planting in June, there are really only two choices. One is sudangrass, or sorghum-sudangrass, and the other is buckwheat. Both grow rapidly in the summer warmth. The two cover crops have different properties, so the management goal and field condition will determine which is the right one.

Sudangrass is often chosen for improving soil organic matter. It produces a strong root system and lots of biomass. The deep root system is helpful for reducing subsurface hardness. It is also a good choice for reducing root-knot nematode pressure.

Buckwheat is best known for weed suppression and mellowing the soil.

If weed suppression is the main purpose, buckwheat is preferred. It covers the ground earlier than sudangrass, especially in early June, and out competes weeds that may establish in sudangrass. Sudangrass requires a higher seeding rate for effective weed suppression.

The amount of time until the fall crop is to be planted is a significant decision factor. Buckwheat is in the ground for 35 to 40 days when used as a cover crop. It can be sown as early as May 20<sup>th</sup>. Sudangrass needs 60 to 70 days to be effective, and is best planted once June has become thoroughly warm. Both of these cover crops should be mowed after about 40 days. That is the end of the season for buckwheat, but the beginning of major root growth for sudangrass. Sudangrass needs a final flail mowing and immediate incorporation to suppress nematodes.

The condition of the field will determine which crop is suitable. If the soil is hard, or the field is prone to standing water, sudangrass is a good choice, while buckwheat will do poorly. However, if the field is low in nitrogen and phosphorous, buckwheat will do well without additional fertilizer, while sudangrass needs about 40 lb of N to give satisfactory performance.

If the crop to follow needs a fine seedbed, that will be easier to produce after buckwheat. It mellows the soil for easy working, and decomposes quickly after incorporation. Sudangrass crowns take some time to break down, so the following crop needs to be one that can be sown in a somewhat lumpy field.

The main production risks with buckwheat are a failed stand and letting it go to seed. The failed stand usually follows a heavy rain around emergence. It will be obvious two weeks after planting. If the seedlings are not doing well then, till them in and plant again. To avoid volunteer buckwheat seed, kill

the crop before there are filled green seeds on the plant. That takes about 40 days from a July planting or 50 days from a June planting.

The main production risk with sudangrass is that the crop gets too big to mow, or to incorporate after frost has killed it. This crop grows very fast, so keep an eye on it. Mow the first time at about 3 feet and the second time while the flail mower can still chop it well. If sudangrass gets too big to control, it will be killed by frost and make a nice winter mulch. However the biofumigant effect will be lost.

Buckwheat is available from some local farm seed retailers. The variety does not matter, and many suppliers don't identify any variety. A short crop in 2006 has raised the seed cost for this season, with prices ranging from \$15 to \$25 per 50 lb bag. A bag is enough to seed an acre.

Sorghum and sorghum-sudangrass are widely available. Varieties suitable for cover crops must be selected carefully. Grain types are inappropriate and some new forage varieties, described as sweet or with brown midrib are low in dhurrin, which is the biofumigant in sudangrass. Piper sudangrass is readily available, and has a similar composition to Trudan 8, the classic sudangrass for biofumigation. Sorghum-sudangrass hybrids are more vigorous, and will produce more biomass than sudangrass, but the seed is also more expensive. Appropriate varieties that are available locally include Sordan 79, Green Grazer and Special Effort. With a modest seeding rate of 30 lb/ac, sudangrass can cost as little as \$10 to \$20 per acre. Weed suppression requires 50 lb/ac.

## Upcoming Meetings

If you have a meeting you would like to announce, please send the meeting title, date, location and contact information to [esanchez@psu.edu](mailto:esanchez@psu.edu).

### Local

- ✓ June 5, 2007. **PASA Field Day – Cover Crop Research and Management Summit.** Penn State Rock Springs Agronomy Farm, Centre County. You must pre register with Lisa Crytser at Penn State by May 30 by phone (814) 865-2543 or email [lac8@psu.edu](mailto:lac8@psu.edu).
- ✓ June 13, 2007. **PASA Field Day – Managing Weeds and Soil Quality Organically.** Russell E. Larson Research Center, Centre County. For More information call (814) 349-9856 or visit [www.pasafarming.org](http://www.pasafarming.org).
- ✓ June 23, 2007. **Summer Solstice Sustainable Farming & Energy Celebration.** 4-9pm, Wilson College, Chambersburg, PA. Includes farm tour of Fulton Farm, renewable energy demonstrations, music, food & fun! Contact Matt Steiman for more information, 717-264-4141 x3247.
- ✓ July 14, 2007. **PASA Field Day – Living on Your Land, Leaving a Small Footprint.** Matre Manoeuvre Farm, Fulton County. For More information call (814) 349-9856 or visit [www.pasafarming.org](http://www.pasafarming.org).
- ✓ July 25, 2007. **Kutztown Produce Auction Meeting,** Fleetwood, PA. For more information contact John Berry at (610) 391-9840 or [jberry@psu.edu](mailto:jberry@psu.edu) or Mena Hautau at (610) 378-1327 or [mmh10@psu.edu](mailto:mmh10@psu.edu).
- ✓ Aug 1, 2007. **PASA Field Day – The Impact of Soil Quality on Productivity.** Ran Gargasz Farm, Lawrence County. For More information call (814) 349-9856 or visit [www.pasafarming.org](http://www.pasafarming.org).
- ✓ Aug 23, 2007. **PASA Field Day – Small Scale Sustainable Farming.** Fresh From the Vines, Crawford County. For More information call (814) 349-9856 or visit [www.pasafarming.org](http://www.pasafarming.org).
- ✓ Sept 6, 2007. **PASA Field Day – Science-Based Organic Grape Production.** Penn State Grape Center, Erie County. For More information call (814) 349-9856 or visit [www.pasafarming.org](http://www.pasafarming.org).
- ✓ Sept 15, 2007. **PASA Field Day – Urban Farming.** Greensgrow, Philadelphia County. For More information call (814) 349-9856 or visit [www.pasafarming.org](http://www.pasafarming.org).
- ✓ Sept 22 and 23, 2007. **Mother Earth Harvest Fair.** Spoutwood Farm, Glen Rock, PA. For more information call 717-235-6610 or visit [www.spoutwood@supernet.com](http://www.spoutwood@supernet.com).

- ✓ Sept 28, 2007. **PASA Field Day – Bio-Diesel & Compost on the Farm.** Briar Patch Organic Farms, Union County. For More information call (814) 349-9856 or visit [www.pasafarming.org](http://www.pasafarming.org).
- ✓ Oct 3, 2007. **PASA Field Day – The Nuts and Bolts of Organizing and Packing a Choice CSA.** Red Earth Farm, Schuylkill County. For More information call (814) 349-9856 or visit [www.pasafarming.org](http://www.pasafarming.org).
- ✓ Oct 8, 2007. **PASA Field Day – New and Beginning Farmers: Small Group Tour with the Nordells.** For More information call (814) 349-9856 or visit [www.pasafarming.org](http://www.pasafarming.org).

## Regional

- ✓ July 11-14, 2007. **The Second National Conference on Facilitating Sustainable Agriculture Education.** Cornell University's Alice Cook House, Ithaca, NY. Contact Kathi Colen Peck, Conference Coordinator at [kscp@turbonet.com](mailto:kscp@turbonet.com) for more information.
- ✓ Aug 6-18, 2007. **Permaculture Design Course.** Three Sisters Farm, Sandy Lake, PA. For more information, call Darrell Frey at 724-376-2797.
- ✓ August 14-16, 2007. **Ag Progress Days,** Rock Springs, PA. For more information call (814) 865-2071 or visit <http://apd.cas.psu.edu>.
- ✓ Nov 8-11, 2007. **Farm Education Symposium.** Shelburne Farms, Shelburne, VT. For more information visit [www.farmbasededucation.org](http://www.farmbasededucation.org) or call Brooke Redmond at 617-306-0090.
- ✓ Feb 7-9, 2008. **Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture (PASA) 17<sup>th</sup> Annual Farming for the Future Conference.** Penn Stater Conference Center, State College, PA. For more information visit [www.pasafarming.org](http://www.pasafarming.org).

## National

- ✓ June 18 – Aug 10, 2007. **Ecovillage & Permaculture Certificate Program.** Lost Valley Educational Center, Eugene, OR. For more information, call 541-937-3351 x112 or visit [www.lostvalley.org/epcp](http://www.lostvalley.org/epcp).
- ✓ August 14-15, 2007. **North American Strawberry Growers Associations (NASGA) Summer Tour.** For more information contact Kevin Schooley at [kconsult@allstream.net](mailto:kconsult@allstream.net) or visit [www.nasga.org](http://www.nasga.org).

## International

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Again, no subject or message text is required.

The newsletter is also posted within three days on the Department of Horticulture Vegetable program website at: <http://hortweb.cas.psu.edu/extension/veg crops/newsletterlist.html>.

Where trade names appear, no discrimination is intended, and no endorsement by Penn State Cooperative Extension is implied.

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