

VEGETABLE PRODUCTION

Students in our Entrepreneurial Agriculture degree and certificate programs receive intensive hands-on training here on the farm, and those in our Horticulture program are also involved on site through class projects.

Our vegetable production beds are certified organic, and several other areas on the farm are managed organically but are not certified. We teach that soil health is the foundation for plant health, which is in turn the foundation for human health.

WE TEACH THESE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES:

Permanent beds are in the same place year after year to avoid soil compaction. Our beds are 30" wide and match the width of our walk-behind tillage equipment.

Transplants, or plugs, are utilized for slow growing crops like tomatoes and broccoli. We grow the plugs from seed in our greenhouse.

Succession planting ensures a constant supply of vegetables by planting fast growing crops like arugula and radish every 7-21 days. These crops are "direct-seeded" outdoors.

Crop rotation helps in managing soil health and decreases insect and disease pressure. We rotate crop families (ex: Brassica, Solanaceae) to different areas each year and consider which crops are "heavy feeders".

Regular scouting for pests and disease helps prevent severe infestations as you can catch them early and decide on a plan of action.

Hand tools are most effective for weed control at this scale. On a larger farm, mechanical cultivation is most efficient. Many labor hours are devoted to weed control on an organic farm no matter what size it is.

Cover crops like rye or tillage radish are used in between plantings of cash crops to build soil fertility, break up compaction, and for weed suppression.

WHERE DOES ALL THE FOOD GO?

Produce from the Student Farm is sold to our cafeteria and Culinary program. We have a pop-up farm stand for students and employees on campus July–October, and we stock "The Cooler" year-round with crops from our high tunnels and hydroponics systems. Additional produce is donated to the Crystal Lake Food Pantry and to PADS in McHenry.



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