

Winter Sales at Farmer's Markets

Our stand at market

Our entire stand



Sweet potatoes on rack



Potatoes and dried goods



- For us winter sales consists of various root crops, dried goods, ginger and turmeric, some various greens. We will discuss the various root crops we grow and the dried goods (items that are dehydrated).

Dried Goods

- By dried goods we mean items that are dehydrated
- Here are some of the items we dehydrate: apples, garlic, herbs, okra, carrots, potatoes, eggplant, celery, peas, corn, green beans, ginger, turmeric, sweet potatoes, squash, tomatoes, peppers both sweet and hot, strawberries, peaches, cucumbers, swiss chard, kale, onions, leeks, daikon radishes.

Dried goods

- The benefits of dehydrating is you can use your excess produce and fruit from the summer and gives you another outlet for it instead of disposing of it. You get income from a source that you previously were not utilizing.
- You can combine items to create new products such as soup mixes or herb rubs.

Dried Goods

- You want to remove at least 95% of the moisture. Most bacteria, mold, and fungi can not grow and will die below 10% water content.
- Blanching carrots before dehydrating preserves Vitamin A (beta carotene).
- Vitamin B's are water soluble and can be lost if steamed or blanched
- Vitamin C is sensitive to light and air so seal bags and store in dark.

Dehydrators



Products to dehydrate

Apples, started as 2 bushel



Carrots, started as 8 cups



Products to dehydrate

Eggplant before



Eggplant after



Growing Root Crops

- The first decision to make is what to grow. For us that means we are trying to grow things that are not readily available at the grocery store. For example, for potatoes we grow a couple of varieties that are the normal white inside, but then we have blue potatoes, pink potatoes, fingerling potatoes, and several varieties of yellow waxy types.

- We grow the following root crops:
- Sweet Potatoes
- Potatoes
- Onions
- Garlic

Sweet Potatoes

- For Sweet Potatoes we grow in excess of 40 different varieties including those that are the normal orange inside, to ones that are purple inside, white inside (both sweet and not very sweet), yellow inside, and those that are very dark orange inside. The first year we buy from 3 to 12 slips of a new variety we want to try. These are then planted and most of the roots are kept for the second year to produce slips. In the spring we then grow all our own slips for production.

We pre-sprout most of the sweet potatoes by placing them in the greenhouse for about 4 weeks at 70-75 degrees F. The sweet potatoes are then put into a mixture of sand and perlite in shallow black plastics trays until they sprout, produce slips. These slips can then be removed and planted into the field. There are two methods of removing slips, the first is to pull the slip from the sweet potato. The second is to cut the slip above the soil line a couple of inches, this prevents the transfer of some diseases that may be on the sweet potato to the slip. We usually place these un-rooted cuttings in water a couple of days to start root growth before planting, but un-rooted slips are what large growers plant.

Sweet potato slips



Sweet potato slips



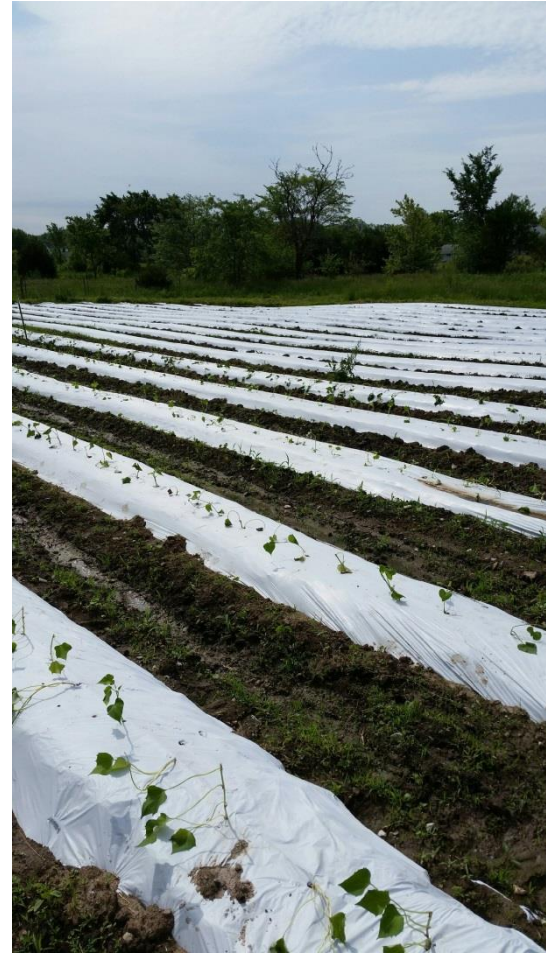
Planting time, we use beds and white plastic



Our field, mid summer



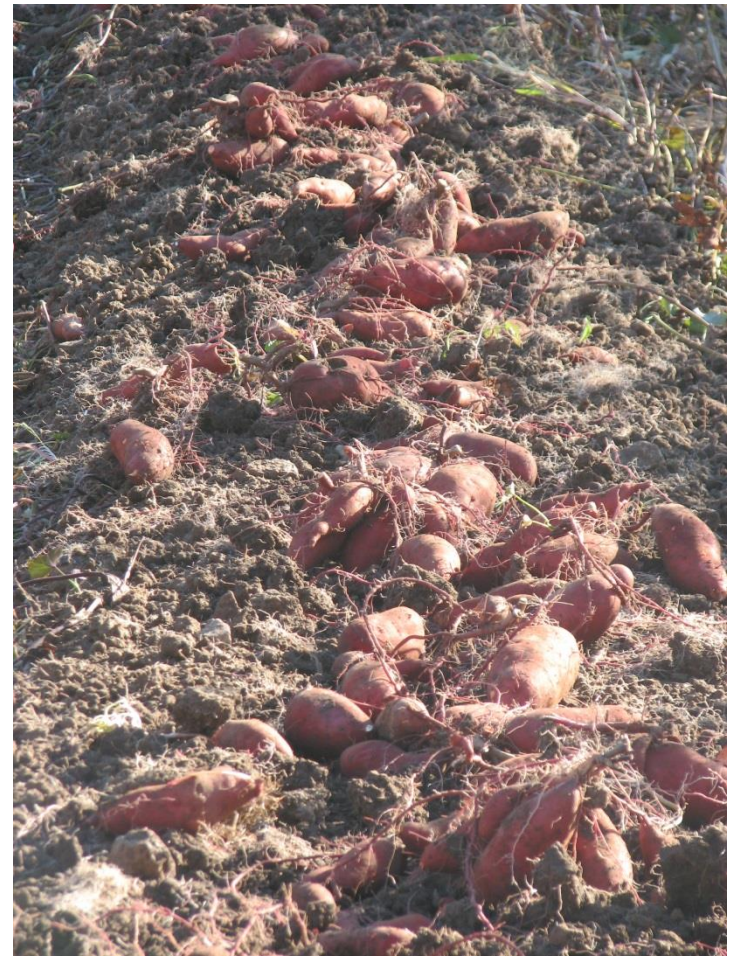
Sweet potato field



Sweet potato digger



After digging, sweet potatoes are left on top of the ground



Sweet potatoes in field



Being washed for market



Curing and storage

- After the sweet potatoes are dug, they are transported to the greenhouse where they stay for 7-10 days at 80-85 degrees F. This is called curing and it is essential for long term storage, it hardens the skin and any skin imperfections. Then they are moved to the coolers where they are stored at 55-60 degrees F.

Sweet potatoes curing



Potatoes

- For potatoes we grow a couple of varieties that are the normal white inside (both red and white skin), but then we have blue potatoes, pink potatoes, fingerling potatoes, and several varieties of yellow waxy types.

- We plant our potatoes with our transplanter in raised beds we have pre-made with our bedder. We don't use plastic for our potatoes. Potatoes are dug with the same digger as sweet potatoes. We then place them into our coolers for storage.

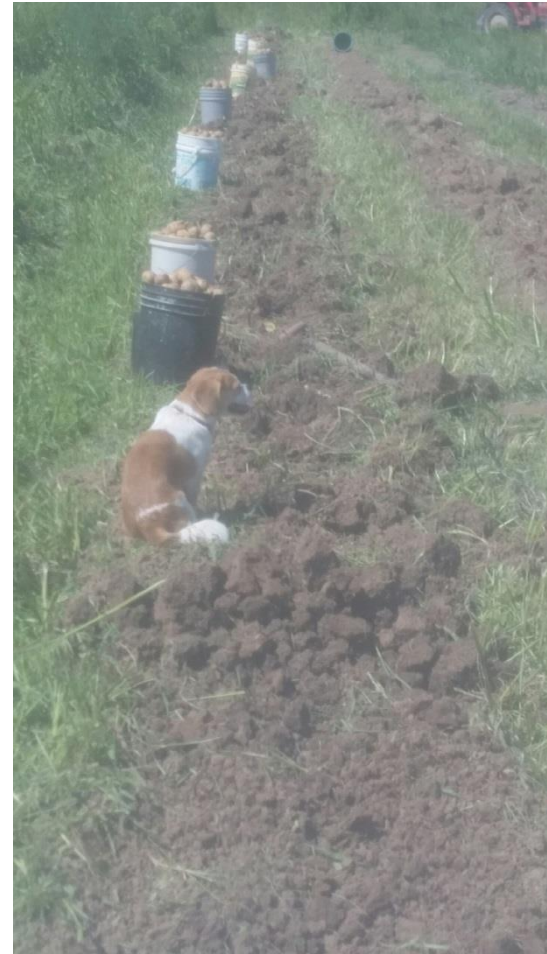
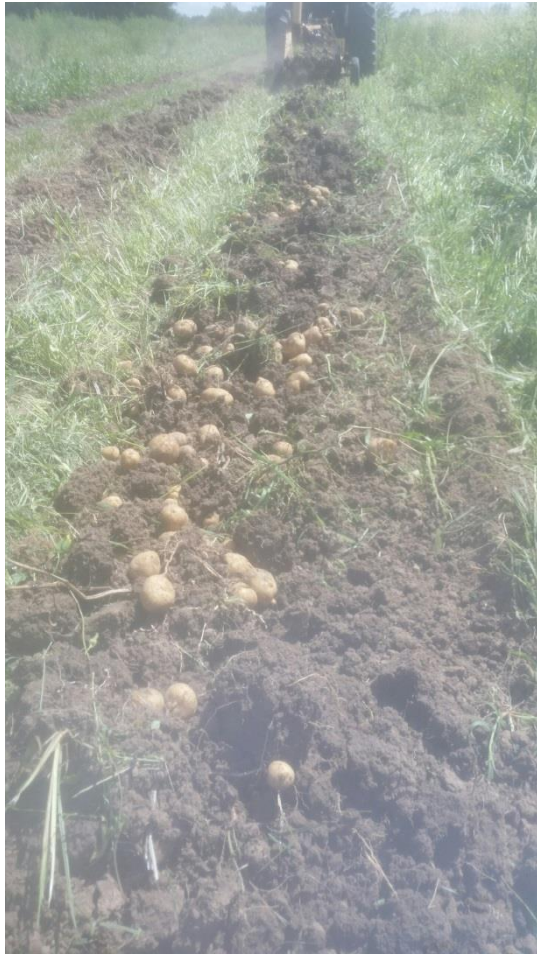
Potato field



Potato digger



Potatoes dug



- For garlic we grow both hard neck and soft neck garlic. There are those that are very robust and pungent to that that are very mild in nature. All our garlic is planted into raised beds, two rows per bed with 6 inch spacing. This then covered with straw to prevent weed growth and better control moisture, it acts like a mulch. We dig the garlic either by hand or with a large 16 inch cultivator.

Garlic



Garlic



Garlic



Garlic hanging in barn



Coolers

- We have two coolers both are cooled by air conditioners and heating the winter with electric heaters. The air conditioners have Cool Bot controllers on them that allows use to lower the temperatures to as low as we need to go for the particular crop. One thing to remember is to use as much insulation as possible, 4 inches seems to be ideal.

Coolers

Original cooler, old box truck

New cooler, best insulated



Cooler full of potatoes



Sources

- Sweet Potato Slips
- Duck Creek Farms, Mounds OK
- Sand Hill Preservation Center, Calamus, Iowa
- Cooler, Coolbot, storeitcold.com
- Seed Potatoes
- Moose Tubers, FEDCO, Waterville, ME
- Maine Potato Lady, Guilford, ME
- Potato Garden, Austin, CO

Sources

- Dehydrating books

The Ultimate Dehydrator Cookbook- Tammy Gangloff, Steven Gangloff, September Ferguson

The Dehydrator Bible- Jennifer Mackenzie, Jay Nutt, Don Mercer

- Sweet Potato Information

North Carolina Extension website

LSU Sweet Potato Extension website