

High Ledge Farm Paul Betz and Kate Camilletti

The Betz family started High Ledge Farm in 1999 and has been growing and selling produce at the Capital City Farmers' Market and in a CSA ever since. They grow Certified Organic Vegetables on 2.5 acres and manage 4100 sq. ft. of greenhouses for plant and tomato production.



Heavy Rains

The main climate change problem Paul is experiencing is “high caliber” rains that lift the fines in his soil and make the soil as hard as cement so it is very difficult for young plants to emerge. To work around this, he is planting seeded crops earlier in the spring. He used to start carrots on June 21. Then if they didn't take, he would plant again about two weeks later on July 1. He needs to plant these seeds for the last time on July 7 to give them enough time to mature for harvest. Now he plants fall carrots on May 31 so he has two opportunities to replant if he gets a heavy rain that cements them in.

He has also noticed that the opportunity for plants to be damaged has increased. In response, he has opened up spacing for more airflow between plants, and this changes the amount he

can grow on an acre. He constantly seeds plants so if something gets damaged, he has another plant to stick in the ground right away.

One of his fields is on a slope, and to avoid erosion there, he plants potatoes and winter squash in raised beds to slow water movement. He follows the contours of the land so the beds aren't funneling water but slowing it down and also leaves weeds and buffers in place to slow run off. The Agency of Natural Resources has looked at his field and feels it is not at high risk for erosion.

He has loamy soil that drains well, and he can usually get on his fields early in the spring as well as after heavy rains. In 2013, there was so much rain in June that he had standing water in his fields, something he had never seen before. If it had rained for one more week, he would have had to retille everything. He is doing better this year and is just a little behind.

Paul finds that he is relying more on his greenhouses for plant growth and income because he has a little more control over what happens in them. He sees himself growing more in his greenhouses in the future.

Higher Temperatures and Insects

Hot, humid days make it harder to work outside, and bring new insects to Vermont. High Ledge Farm doesn't have squash vine borers yet, and Paul would not want to have to battle with them since there is no practical organic control for them.

He keeps his squash plants covered with remay until they start to bloom and need to be uncovered for pollination. He plants the first week in June and just uncovered plants on July 9. He started using remay eight years ago. They had put all their squash out, and there was a frost warning so they covered. The remay ran out on one row, so 30 feet of plants were left uncovered. He noticed a big difference between covered and uncovered plants, and since then, he has always covered them. By using remay, he can get 6 weeks of growth in 3 weeks.

Benefits of Warming

Paul has noticed the growing season getting a lot longer, but he finds that this benefit is offset by new problems. Unpredictability is not worth four or five extra weeks of growing season. It was below zero in March, and they couldn't turn their greenhouses on when they normally do because it was too cold. He feels anxious about these changing weather patterns, and he worries for the indigenous creatures here. A few degrees warmer is not worth what comes with it.

Catherine Lowther
Goddard College
Faculty in the BA in Sustainability Program
Chair of the Sustainability Committee