

Branch Creek Farm, Perkasi PA**Insect Management**

Mark and Judy Dornstreich have been farming for over 30 years in beautiful Bucks County, PA. They produce baby greens, specialty vegetables and edible flowers year round in 3 greenhouses. Come summer they shift their attention out to the field where they grow unique vegetable varieties on about 5 acres. They provide Philadelphia and New York City restaurants with only the highest quality, mouth-watering produce.

Greenhouses

There are several pests that have made quite a comfortable home in the greenhouses on Branch Creek. Slugs, sowbugs and aphids are the biggest problems. The slugs hide in the dark, damp crevices between the wooden beds. They are an issue because they occasionally get into the beds so you have to be careful when harvesting the baby greens because they can easily be missed... and end up in someone's salad mix.



The same thing goes for the sowbugs. The bed frames are made of untreated wood and they are relatively old at this point, so they are beginning to break down. The sowbugs like the moist, dark environment of the decaying beds. They occasionally will take a bite out of the young plants but, like the slugs, they are more of a nuisance.

Aphids cause the most damage in the greenhouses. They vector diseases, cause the foliage to curl and may also cause plant death. They are mostly a problem on the baby vegetables because those remain in the beds longer than the baby greens.

Also, it takes more time to harvest the baby

vegetables because they have to be thoroughly washed before going to the customer. When a bed with aphids is found it is promptly removed from the house.

Control Measures

“We control insects in the way we grow the baby greens and vegetables” begins Mark. “The greens are maybe 10 days old when we harvest them. So we’re constantly interrupting the pest’s life cycle. Ten days isn’t enough time for them to go through all their maturation stages and reproduce. We really only have pest problems on our longer term (1 month) crops.”

Pest Pointers from Mark

- Properly identify insects because the majority of them are beneficial.
- Spread out. Pests can move fast and far. Because Mark and Judy only use about 5 for production of the 20 acres they own, they have a unique garden set-up. The individual

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“gardens” (a few rows of a singular crop) are spaced anywhere from 200 to 1,000 feet apart. This makes it difficult for insects to jump from one desirable food source to the next.

- Stop growing a crop if you know there it has a particular pest issue. For a long time, Branch Creek Farm dealt with gray aphids on their fall crop of Brussels sprouts. This became such a nuisance that they chose to stop growing Brussels sprouts in the fall altogether.

Greenhouse Set-Up

Doors to the greenhouse are kept shut at all times to prevent insects from entering. Scouting is also part of the routine. Going to and from each greenhouse to do inventory of the week’s harvest makes it easy to spot issues or changes in plant health. The floor of the greenhouse is covered with stone to prevent weeds from coming up. But, in the areas where the stone is thinly layered weeds do occur. It’s important to set time aside during the busy growing season to consistently do some weeding since weeds are the perfect habitat for insects. Moving and cleaning between the beds removes a large number of pests and eggs. This is another frequent sanitation practice at BCF.



Farm Profiles are designed to give new producers ideas and advice from experienced producers. Individual products are mentioned as examples not as an endorsement. Prepared by Aston Ward, Penn State Extension. Photos taken by Aston Ward, courtesy of Branch Creek Farm. Last updated May 2011.