

VEGETABLE CROPS HOTLINE

A newsletter for commercial vegetable growers prepared by the Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service.

In This Issue

- [From The Editor's Desk](#)
- [Common Foliar Diseases Observed in Indiana Watermelon Fields This Season](#)
- [Cyclospora Resources for Consumers and Produce Growers](#)
- [Pumpkin Insect Observations](#)
- [Dry Conditions in the Forecast – Drought Developing?](#)
- [Purdue Fruit and Vegetable Field Day Draws Strong Crowd to Meigs/Throckmorton](#)
- [Purdue Student Farm Hosts a Full House for Small Farm Education Field Day](#)

From The Editor's Desk

(Petrus Langenhoven, plangenh@purdue.edu, (765) 496-7955)

Dear Valued Vegetable Crops Hotline Readers,

Welcome to issue 775 of the Vegetable Crops Hotline newsletter! Our mission remains steadfast: to deliver crucial updates on pest management, production practices, food safety, and marketing opportunities that directly impact your farming operations.

Growers and Purdue Extension Educators, your input and expertise make this newsletter a truly useful resource. If you have hot topics you'd like us to cover, success stories to share, or questions for our Extension specialists, please email [Petrus langenhoven](mailto:Petrus.langenhoven@purdue.edu) or reach out to the [specialist](#) directly. We also welcome high-quality photos of pest issues, unusual symptoms, or innovative production practices you've implemented on your farm.

What's Inside This Issue

This has been a busy few weeks for Indiana's specialty crop community. Both of our summer field days drew strong crowds — 58 attendees at the Purdue Fruit and Vegetable Field Day at Meigs/Throckmorton on July 16, including a large contingent from Corteva, and 48 growers from across the state at the Purdue Small Farm Education Field Day at the Student Farm on July 23. We're grateful to everyone who presented, volunteered, and attended, and we're already looking ahead: mark your calendars for next year's events, with the Purdue Fruit and Vegetable Field Day set for July 15, 2027, and the Purdue Small Farm Education Field Day for July 22, 2027. In this issue, you'll also find updates

on foliar diseases in Indiana watermelon fields, resources on the ongoing Cyclospora outbreak, a look at developing dry conditions across the state, and the latest pumpkin insect observations from Pinney Purdue Ag Center.

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In addition, digital subscribers receive emails with information about articles or announcements that need your immediate attention. These articles will be posted under Hot Topics on the VCH webpage and will be included in the next issue. All previous articles published in the VCH newsletter are available on the [Vegetable Crops Hotline website](#).

Website Links in Newsletter Articles

We frequently include links to websites or online publications. If you can't access these resources, don't hesitate to contact your local Purdue Extension office or us to request a hard copy of the information.

Midwest Vegetable Production Guide

The [2026 Midwest Vegetable Production Guide](#) is now available for growers, or you can [download and print a guide from your computer](#). The guide is also available for \$20 per copy. Contact your Extension Office or [Stephen Meyers](#) directly to buy a copy.

Midwest Vegetable Trial Reports

Are you still considering purchasing vegetable seeds? The [Midwest Vegetable Trial Report](#) features many articles to help you

make an informed decision. The resource also hosts production-related research results.

As always, thank you for reading, and happy growing!

Petrus Langenhoven, Editor

Clinical Assistant Professor and Vegetable Extension Specialist
Department of Horticulture and Landscape Architecture
Purdue University

Common Foliar Diseases Observed in Indiana Watermelon Fields This Season

(Cesar Escalante, escalac@purdue.edu)

As we move through the growing season, several foliar diseases continue to be observed in watermelon fields across Indiana. The most common diseases this year have been *Alternaria* leaf blight and gummy stem blight, while anthracnose has been detected less frequently than in previous seasons. Because these diseases can cause similar symptoms in the field, accurate diagnosis and timely management are critical to protecting plant health and fruit quality.

Alternaria leaf blight

Although this is not a very common disease of watermelon in Indiana, *Alternaria* leaf blight is one of the most frequently observed foliar diseases this season. Symptoms typically begin as small brown lesions on older leaves. As lesions expand, they often develop characteristic concentric rings, giving them a “target spot” appearance. This disease is more common on cantaloupes (Figure 1). Under favorable conditions, lesions can merge, resulting in extensive blighting and premature leaf loss.



Figure 1. Cantaloupe leaf infected with *Alternaria* (Photo by Cesar Escalante).

Unlike gummy stem blight, *Alternaria* primarily affects leaf tissue and rarely causes significant stem lesions. Disease development is favored by warm temperatures, prolonged leaf wetness, and frequent rainfall or overhead irrigation.

Anthracnose

Anthracnose has been relatively uncommon in Indiana watermelon fields this year, although isolated cases have been identified. Foliar symptoms appear as irregular brown to black lesions that may become angular when restricted by leaf veins. The disease can also affect stems and fruit, where sunken lesions may develop (Figure 2). Anthracnose is favored by warm, wet weather and can spread rapidly during periods of frequent rainfall. Although less prevalent this season, growers should remain vigilant because outbreaks can develop quickly when environmental conditions become favorable.



Figure 2. Mature watermelon fruit affected by anthracnose. Notice the sunken, circular lesions. Anthracnose can also affect leaves, which may later infect fruits in the same field (Photo by Cesar Escalante).

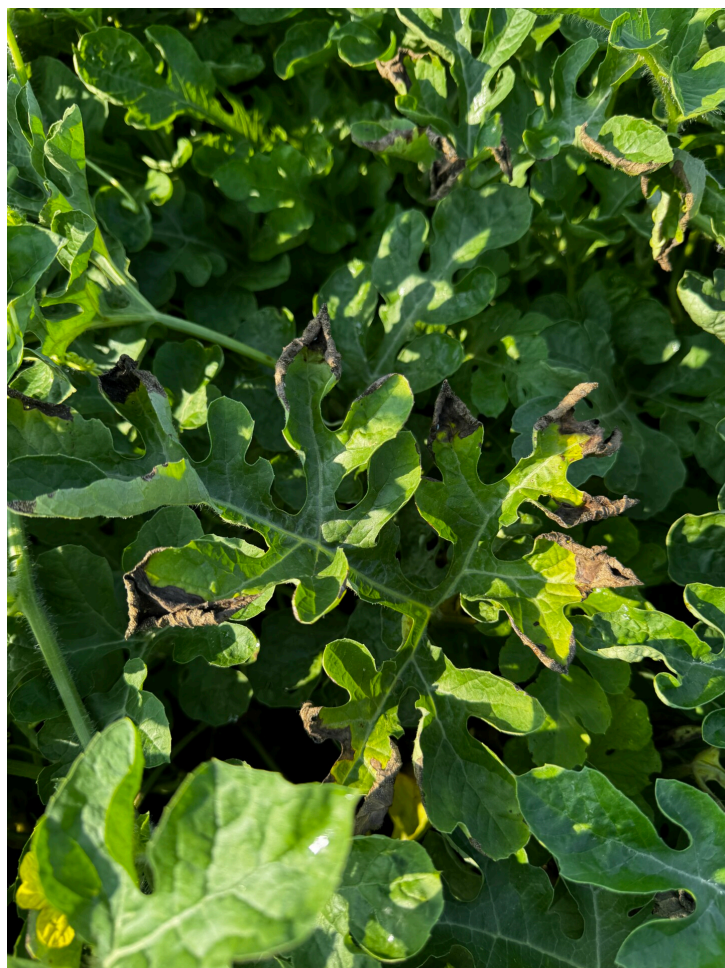


Figure 3. Early symptoms of gummy stem blight in watermelons. The fungus also affects vines and leaf petioles (Photo by Cesar Escalante).

Gummy stem blight

I have recently observed gummy stem blight in watermelon sentinel plots at the Southwest Purdue Agricultural Center (SWPAC). Growers should begin scouting fields carefully for symptoms, which may include blighting along leaf margins (Figure 3), brown and decayed leaf petioles, tan to brown lesions on stems and vines, and amber-colored gummy exudates on infected tissues. One of the challenges with gummy stem blight is that the disease may primarily affect vines, making symptoms difficult to detect in fields with dense canopies. As vine growth increases, regular scouting becomes increasingly important.

Management considerations

Fortunately, management recommendations for *Alternaria* leaf blight, anthracnose, and gummy stem blight are generally similar. All three diseases are favored by extended periods of leaf wetness and can be managed through a combination of field scouting, crop rotation, residue management, and timely fungicide applications.

Many fungicides used for gummy stem blight also provide activity against *Alternaria* and anthracnose. Products such as Inspire Super®, Miravis®, Monsoon®, Quadris Top®, and Switch® can be valuable components of a disease management program when applied preventively or at the first signs of disease. However, growers should be aware that there are important exceptions. Certain products may provide better control of one disease than another, and fungicide efficacy can vary depending on pathogen, disease pressure, and resistance concerns. For specific fungicide recommendations and efficacy ratings for each disease, growers are encouraged to consult the [Midwest Vegetable Production Guide](#) or contact me directly to discuss management options for their fields.

As always, fungicides should be rotated among FRAC groups to help reduce the risk of fungicide resistance and preserve the effectiveness of available products.

Stay informed throughout the season

I encourage growers to regularly visit the [MELCAST](#) website and review the weekly disease updates posted throughout the growing season. These updates provide current observations from Indiana watermelon production regions, disease forecasts, and timely management recommendations to support informed fungicide decisions.

Finally, if you suspect gummy stem blight in your field, I would appreciate the opportunity to visit and collect samples as part of an ongoing study evaluating the genomic diversity and fungicide resistance of gummy stem blight populations in Indiana. Grower participation is essential for improving our understanding of this important disease and developing effective management strategies for the future. For questions regarding disease identification or management options, please feel free to contact me.

Cyclospora Resources for Consumers and Produce Growers

(Tari Gary) & (Amanda J Deering, adeering@purdue.edu)

Cyclospora has been making headlines recently as a multistate outbreak of cyclosporiasis continues to grow. The illness, caused by the parasite *Cyclospora*, can lead to severe diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, fatigue and body aches. You can read more about *Cyclospora* from the [International Fresh Produce Association](#).

Based on traceback information, investigators recently identified shredded iceberg lettuce from Taylor Farms de Mexico as the source of the outbreak. The lettuce was grown at a farm in Central Mexico, and a large percentage of the lettuce was supplied to Taco Bell and other food establishments across the country. Taylor Farms voluntarily recalled iceberg lettuce grown in Central Mexico on July 17, and Taco Bell has removed implicated lettuce from its restaurants. As of July 20, no lettuce samples have tested positive for *Cyclospora*.



Figure 1: Iceberg lettuce (Image source: Pixabay).

What can consumers do to reduce their risk of cyclosporiasis?

1. Wash fresh produce under cool, running water following [FDA produce preparation guidelines](#).
2. When using head lettuce, remove the outer 2-3 leaves before preparing it.
3. At this time, avoid eating lettuce served at Taco Bell restaurants in Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Ohio, and West Virginia, per a [CDC alert](#) issued on July 17.
4. Stay informed on the latest updates from public health officials as the investigation continues, and avoid eating any produce that is known to be implicated in the outbreak. Pay attention to the produce type, supplier, country of origin, lot code, and expiration date as appropriate. Visit the [CDC website](#) for more information on the outbreak, and check [the FDA investigation webpage](#) for the latest investigation findings.
5. If you develop severe symptoms or symptoms that persist for several days, contact your healthcare provider.

How can growers prevent *Cyclospora* contamination?

Cyclospora contamination can happen on a farm if growers use contaminated water or if workers do not follow good agricultural practices. Here are a few quick tips growers can use to prevent produce contamination with *Cyclospora* and other pathogens:

1. Workers must follow good hygiene practices by washing their hands thoroughly and often, especially after using the toilet. Urination and defecation must be in a toilet facility, never in or near the field.
2. Workers must never handle fresh produce on the farm if they are exhibiting symptoms of illness, including diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, or fever.
3. Farms should monitor their water quality throughout the growing season and avoid using contaminated water on fresh produce during growing or postharvest operations.
4. Clean and sanitize food-contact surfaces regularly with clean, potable water.

Our partners at Michigan State Extension have created videos and resources to help growers reduce the risk of *Cyclospora* contamination on the farm. For more information, visit the [Michigan State *Cyclospora* webpage](#).

Pumpkin Insect Observations

(Liz Maynard, emaynard@purdue.edu, (219) 548-3674)

Have you taken a close look at pumpkin or squash fields recently? In June and early July, pumpkin plantings at Pinney Purdue Ag Center in Northwest Indiana, the following insects were observed this week. See the [Midwest Vegetable Production Guide](#) for management recommendations.

Squash Bee

Squash bees collecting nectar from a female pumpkin flower. These native ground-dwelling bees are important pollinators for squash and pumpkin.

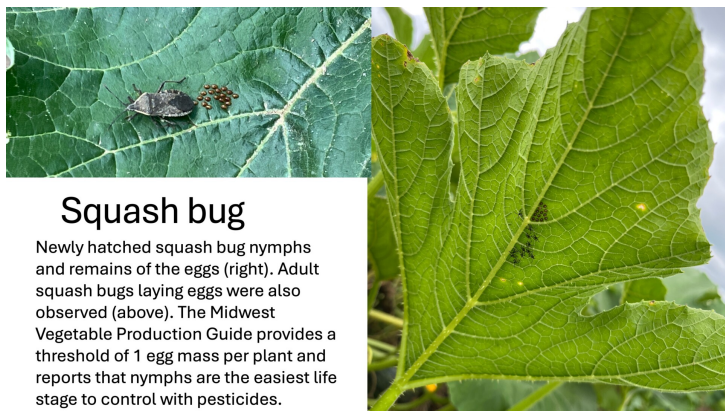


Squash bee

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Squash Bug

Newly hatched squash bug nymphs and remains of the eggs (right). Adult squash bugs laying eggs were also observed (top left). The Midwest Vegetable Production Guide provides a threshold of 1 egg mass per plant and reports that nymphs are the easiest life stage to control with pesticides.



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Squash Vine Borer

A wilting plant with premature orange fruit (top left) is a common symptom of squash vine borer larva feeding in the stem at the base of the plant (right). At this stage, treatment will not save the plant. Control measures are needed earlier, before larva enters the stem. At this location, adult moths usually lay eggs by early July, and treatment at that time has reduced damage. See the Midwest Vegetable Production Guide for recommendations.



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A wilting plant with premature orange fruit (above) is a common symptom of squash vine borer larva feeding in the stem at base of the plant (right). At this stage treatment will not save the plant. Control measures are needed earlier, before larva enters the stem. At this location adults moths usually lay eggs by early July and treatment at that time has reduced damage. See the Midwest Vegetable Production Guide for recommendations.



Striped Cucumber Beetle

Striped cucumber beetle feeding injury was observed last week on pumpkins with 2 to 4 true leaves (top left to right) that were planted July 2. The cotyledons showed extensive feeding injury. This week, a few plants continue to show extensive new feeding injury (right, small plant), but most plants have little or no feeding on new leaves. The Midwest Vegetable Production Guide suggests a treatment threshold of 1 beetle per plant when plants have fewer than 4 leaves, and 5 beetles per plant for plants with more than 4 leaves.



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Dry Conditions in the Forecast – Drought Developing?

(Beth Hall, hall556@purdue.edu)

Aside from southern and far northern Indiana, the rest of the state has generally received below-normal precipitation over the past 30 days (Figure 1). While only a few localized areas show percentages below the 30 percent-of-normal level (one of the factors considered to recommend the *Abnormally Dry* (D0) classification to the U.S. Drought Monitor authors), other factors are suggesting something may be developing. A challenge has been the very spotty nature of heavy precipitation events in the broad region, which has caused localized flooding in nearby areas while others seem to keep missing out. The Indiana state drought monitoring team has also been looking at other factors such as evapotranspiration, soil moisture, stream and lake levels, and groundwater levels. Several of those factors did suggest the area was already abnormally dry, so without significant additional

precipitation, most of Indiana is likely to enter the D0 category soon. Rumors will start to spread about a possible “flash drought” (i.e., a rapid intensification of drought). It is too soon to say if this will be imminent. To be strongly considered for this, a 2-category drop of the U.S. Drought Monitor should be justifiable over a two- to three-week period. Indiana currently has only a small area of D0 classification around DeKalb County (Figure 2), so conditions across Indiana would have to deteriorate quickly.

Accumulated Precipitation: Percent of 1991-2020 Normals

June 23, 2026 to July 22, 2026

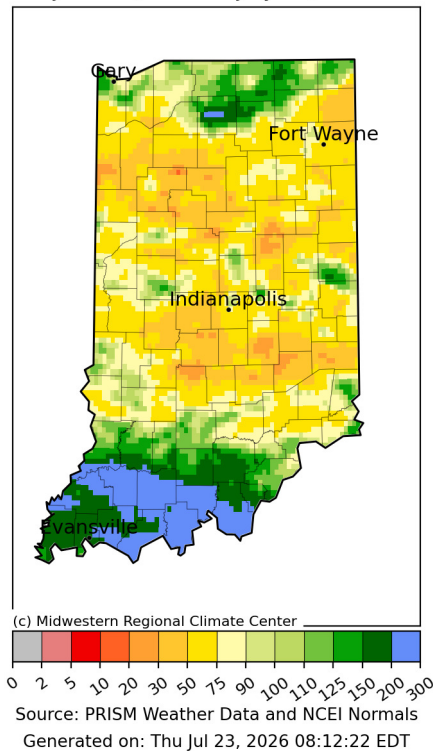


Figure 1. Accumulated precipitation from June 23 through July 22, 2026, represented as the percent of normal amounts that occurred during that same period from 1991-2020. A percent of normal value equal to 100 would indicate precipitation totals equal to that 30-year average.

U.S. Drought Monitor Indiana

July 14, 2026
(Released Thursday, Jul. 16, 2026)
Valid 8 a.m. EDT



Intensity:
None
D0 Abnormally Dry
D1 Moderate Drought
D2 Severe Drought
D3 Extreme Drought
D4 Exceptional Drought

The Drought Monitor focuses on broad-scale conditions. Local conditions may vary. For more information on the Drought Monitor, go to <https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/about.aspx>

Author:
Curtis Riganiti
National Drought Mitigation Center



Unfortunately, the 7-day precipitation forecast as well as the 6- to-10-day and 8-to-14-day climate outlooks are not looking particularly wet. Figure 3 presents the amount of rain expected through July 30th, with most of that falling in very localized areas sporadically over that period. Combine that with expected clear skies and high evapotranspiration rates and the moisture on the ground and within plants could be depleted quickly. Beyond a week, climate outlook models are slightly favoring below-normal precipitation. This does not necessarily mean no precipitation, but how might this impact crops and other environmental conditions over the next several weeks?

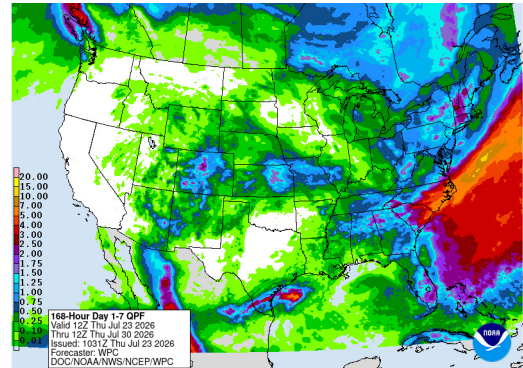


Figure 3. Seven-day precipitation accumulation (inches) for July 23-30, 2026.

Modified growing degree-day accumulations since April 15th continue to stay 1-3 days ahead of average (Figure 4), with totals ranging from YY to ZZ units (Figure 5).

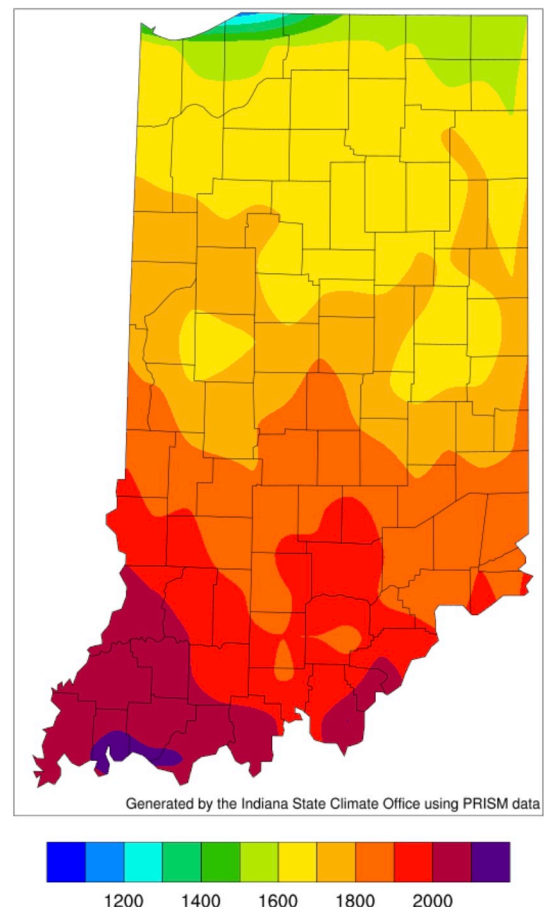


Figure 4. Modified growing degree-day (50°F / 86°F) accumulations from April 15 through July 21, 2026.

Figure 2. Drought status in Indiana according to the U.S. Drought Monitor that considered conditions through 8 AM EDT on July 14, 2026.

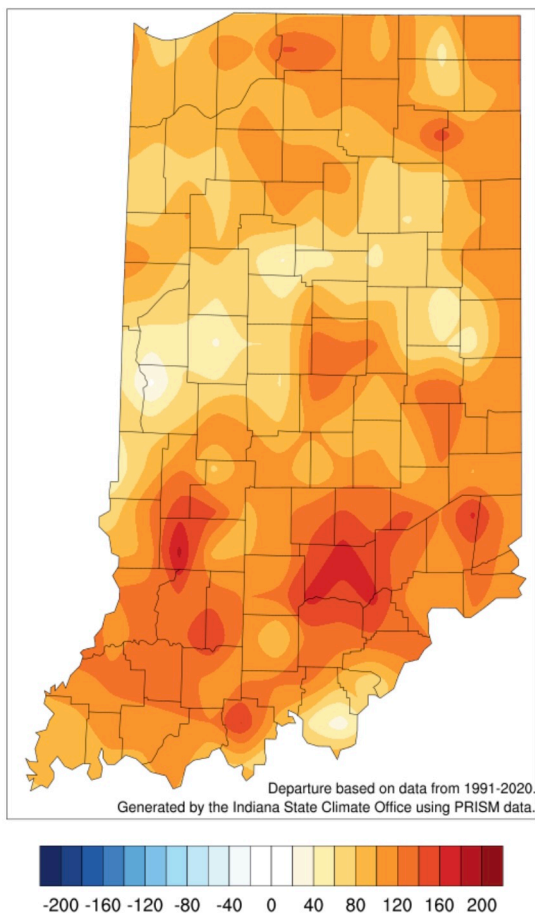


Figure 5. Modified growing degree-day (50°F / 86°F) departures from April 15 through July 21, 2026. For most Indiana locations, July daily accumulations are approximately 25 units. This can be used to estimate how many days ahead or behind average a location is from normal.

Purdue Fruit and Vegetable Field Day Draws Strong Crowd to Meigs/Throckmorton

(Petrus Langenhoven, plangenh@purdue.edu, (765) 496-7955)

The 2026 Purdue Fruit and Vegetable Field Day, held July 16 at the Meigs/Throckmorton Purdue Agriculture Center, brought together 58 attendees for a full afternoon of hands-on demonstrations spanning entomology, plant pathology, horticulture, and specialty crop research. The turnout included a large contingent from Corteva, alongside growers, Extension educators, and researchers from across the region — a strong showing that reflects the growing interest in the applied, field-based research being conducted at the site.

Attendees moved through six demonstration stations, each led by Purdue faculty, staff, and graduate students, covering topics ranging from pollinator-friendly companion planting to smart-trap technology for pest monitoring. A recap of each stop is below.



Figure 1. Attendees at the Fruit and Vegetable field day listen to Sydney Territo and Tucker LaRue talk about pollination and pest management in high tunnel tomato (Photo by Petrus Langenhoven).

Pollination and Pest Management in High Tunnel Tomato Production

Laura Ingwell, Sydney Territo, and Tucker LaRue, Entomology

Growing tomatoes in an enclosed high tunnel comes with real advantages, but it also complicates pollination and pest management. This station highlighted companion cut flower plantings as a biologically based strategy for attracting pollinators and beneficial insects into the tunnel environment. Attendees saw firsthand how integrating flowering species alongside tomato production can support both fruit quality and overall tunnel ecology.



Figure 2. Attendees at the Fruit and Vegetable field day listen to Sydney Territo and Tucker LaRue talk about the role of cutflower plantings as a strategy to attract pollinators and support natural enemies of common pests (Photo by Petrus Langenhoven).

Dogwood Borer Management in Apples

Elizabeth Y. Long, Entomology, and Brian Schilling, Purdue Agricultural Center

The dogwood borer, a native clear-wing moth, continues to be a persistent threat to apple trees, particularly in U-pick orchards across the north-central region, where injury has been on the rise. This demonstration walked attendees through the insect's life cycle, identification, and — most practically — how to assemble and deploy pheromone monitoring and mating disruption tools to better time management decisions.

Introduction to the Long-Term Resilient Agriculture Research Trial

Laura Ingwell, Entomology; Jack Howard, Petrus Langenhoven, and Steve Meyers, Horticulture and Landscape Architecture

This 9-acre trial is one of the most ambitious long-term comparisons of resilient versus conventional specialty crop production practices underway in the region. Attendees got an early look at the study design and preliminary findings on weed and insect community dynamics, as well as initial crop performance data for paste tomato and watermelon. As a multi-year effort, this trial will continue to be a focal point of future field days.

Scotch Bonnet Peppers in the Midwest: Variety Performance and Mechanical Harvest Potential

Alexandria Snabes, Petrus Langenhoven, Kranthi Varala, and Brian Schilling

Scotch bonnet peppers have surged in demand alongside the craft hot sauce market, but growers have lacked regional variety data to guide production decisions. This demonstration shared results from an evaluation of 21 Scotch bonnet varieties across two growing seasons, with total yields ranging from roughly 4,000 to 24,000 lb/A and heat levels spanning 5,000 to 500,000 SHU. Fruit detachment force also varied considerably among varieties, with several showing promising potential for mechanical harvest — a key consideration for growers looking to scale up specialty pepper production.

Smart Trap for Cucumber Beetle Monitoring and Management

Ian Kaplan, Grace Wang, and Amy Bagby, Entomology

Consistent pest scouting is one of the toughest parts of IPM to implement in practice. This NSF-funded station showcased a prototype automated camera trap, developed in collaboration with a team of engineers and computer scientists, designed to deliver real-time pest density data for cucumber beetle management in watermelon and other cucurbits.

Cut Flower Production

Laura Ingwell and Charlie Fox, Entomology

The final stop featured a demonstration plot of cut flower species well-suited to Midwest production, including Dianthus, Lisianthus, Snapdragon, Stock, Centaurea, Zinnia, Celosia, Amaranth, Marigold, and Strawflower. Attendees explored cultivar selection for regional markets and saw how cultural practices like pinching and planting density affect stem quality, flower timing, and marketable yield, along with common pest challenges in cut flower systems.

Thank you to all the presenters, staff, and volunteers who made this year's Field Day possible, and to everyone who joined us at Meigs/Throckmorton. Stay tuned to future issues of the *Vegetable Crops Hotline* for updates from the Long-Term Resilient Agriculture Research Trial and other ongoing work highlighted this year.



Figure 3. Attendees listen to Laura Ingwell and Charlie Fox talk about how cultural practices influence flower timing and marketable yield (Photo by Petrus Langenhoven).

Purdue Student Farm Hosts a Full House for Small Farm Education Field Day

(Petrus Langenhoven, plangenh@purdue.edu, (765) 496-7955)

The Purdue Small Farm Education Field Day was held July 23 at the Purdue Student Farm in West Lafayette, drawing 48 attendees from across Indiana for a day of hands-on demonstrations tailored to small-scale and diversified growers. Topics ranged from cut flower production and season extension to nematode management, postharvest sanitation, and mushroom cultivation, with several on-demand sessions offered after lunch.

Flower Production

Laura Ingwell, Entomology; Wenjing Guan, Horticulture & Landscape Architecture; Jayde Grisham, Purdue Extension

A team of Extension educators and specialists walked attendees

through the full arc of cut flower production, from seed to sale. Using several demonstration species, the session covered seeding strategies, planting density, the benefits of protected culture, insect and disease management, and harvesting, marketing, and sales — a practical primer for growers considering cut flowers as a profitable addition to their operation.



Figure 1. Small Farm Education field day attendees listen to Laura Ingwell, Wenjing Guan and Jayde Grisham talk about flower production in between rows of grapevines (Photo by Petrus Langenhoven).



Figure 2. Small Farm Education field day attendees listen to Chris Adair talk about flower production in raised beds (Photo by Petrus Langenhoven).

Managing Root-Knot Nematodes in High-Tunnel Tomato Production Using Microbial Approaches

Vijay Kunwar, Chenmi Mo, and Lei Zhang, Botany and Plant Pathology; Wenjing Guan, Horticulture & Landscape Architecture

High tunnels extend the season and improve tomato quality, but the warm, consistently moist soil and repeated tomato plantings they favor can also allow root-knot nematodes to build up over

time. This session examined how RKNs damage tomato roots — causing galls that reduce water and nutrient uptake and lead to stunting, chlorosis, and yield loss — and explored microbial approaches for managing them.

Grow Longer, Grow Smarter: Choosing, Building, and Managing Season Extension Structures for Small Farms

Petrus Langenhoven and Alex Snabes, Horticulture & Landscape Architecture

This demonstration covered practical options for low tunnel construction and management, from bending your own hoops with hardware-store materials to commercially available wire systems like the Lowcat tunnel. Attendees saw the tools and materials needed, watched structures assembled in the field, and learned strategies for maintaining and extending the life of season-extension systems — whether the goal is earlier transplanting, frost and insect protection, or a longer fall harvest.

Scouting: An Essential Part of an IPM Program

Laura Ingwell, Entomology

Focused on high tunnel production systems, this session reviewed tools and technology platforms for insect scouting, what to watch for in terms of both pests and beneficials, and how to integrate iNaturalist as a digital record book and diagnostic assistant.

Tarpin' Taters

Steve Meyers, Horticulture & Landscape Architecture

Silage tarps are a familiar weed management tool on small farms, but their potential for early-season weed suppression in potatoes is less well understood. This stop shared four growing seasons of data on the best ways to use silage tarps for early-season weed management in potato production.



Figure 3. Small Farm Education field day attendees listen to Steve Meyers talk about weed management techniques in potato production (Photo by

Rinse for Results: Cleaner Produce, Longer Shelf-Life

Amanda Deering and Scott Monroe, Entomology; Chris Adair, Horticulture & Landscape Architecture

Fresh produce can carry surface bacteria that shorten shelf life and raise safety concerns. This demonstration showed how a vegetable washing system paired with an approved sanitizer removes dirt, debris, and harmful microorganisms like *E. coli* and *Salmonella* — reducing contamination, slowing spoilage, and helping growers maintain quality and extend shelf-life during storage.

After-Lunch On-Demand Demonstrations

Building Ag Resources through Black Soldier Fly Rearing — *Laura Ingwell, Entomology*. Attendees learned how black soldier flies can be integrated into a small farm operation to recycle organic waste into two valuable agricultural resources: fertilizer and feed.

From Field to Vase: Market Morning Blooms — *Karen Mitchell, Horticulture & Landscape Architecture*. A relaxed, hands-on session using freshly cut, field-grown flowers, where attendees learned to arrange simple stems into natural bouquets while picking up tips on post-harvest stem care and sustainable approaches to seasonal blooms.

Choosing the Right Sweet Pepper Varieties for High

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Tunnel Success in Indiana — *Petrus Langenhoven and Alexandria Snabes, Horticulture & Landscape Architecture*.

Drawing on evaluations of more than forty sweet bell and tapered pepper varieties conducted since 2018, this session presented 2025 performance data from the Purdue Student Farm, covering production metrics, disease resistance, yield potential, and quality for colored bell and tapered types. Attendees also got a first look at the varieties selected for the 2026 trials and the reasoning behind those choices.

Thank you to all of the presenters and volunteers who made this year's Small Farm Education Field Day possible, and to the 48 growers and Extension partners who joined us at the Student Farm.



Figure 4. Attendees networking at the 2026 Small Farm Education field day (Photo by Petrus Langenhoven).

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