



# A Year In The Life Of A Farm Manager...Trees of the Field LLC

## **SPRING...**

- Our Spring season starts in early March, when we start receiving both new starter trees as well as finished trees brought in for customers. It is not uncommon to be unloading 2-3 semi-trucks per week and putting trees away for later planting.
- Our two full-time and one part-time seasonal staff members return to work to help accomplish this, as well as check out equipment and make sure all is ready for the season.
- By mid-March through May, the owner, Dan Riddle, will be on site at least two days per week, assisting with loading and delivering trees.
- We also begin digging trees for customers requesting early deliveries. In a perfect world, bare root trees brought in this month will be planted ASAP in rows that were made ready the previous fall.
- New rows will be prepared, and pre-emergent herbicide will be placed on the established rows of trees. Irrigation will be fired up and checked for any repairs needed.
- Trailers will be loaded late March and early April for Garden Centers and Landscapers.
- By April, we are typically loading trucks two days a week. The rest of the week is spent preparing rows that have been emptied of trees for a new crop.
- Typically in May we are only loading one or two small loads per week outbound.
- As the trees put out their first leaves, we apply deer repellent to avoid browsing deer damage. Trees dug for delivery later in the year are heeled in.
- Container grown trees and liners in holding area are spaced at this time and fertilized. Our goal is to have all of the season's new trees planted by the end of May.

## EARLY SUMMER...

- June and July find us in staking and maintenance mode.
- We use a row mulcher to spread woodchips on the new rows, and place drip lines and emitters for each tree at the time of planting. New trees are then staked as needed with bamboo stakes to assure a straight leader.
- All grass between rows is mowed as needed and weeds in rows are managed with a combination of pre- and post-emergent herbicides.
- New trees get their first pruning.
- Irrigation management is also a summer issue. With 8,000 to 10,000 trees on drip irrigation it is CRITICAL that our system is monitored and properly maintained. Trees in the holding area and containers also need to be monitored daily to keep them healthy.

## SCOUTING

- Scouting is a huge part of this job. Awareness of potential threats from insects, deer, herbicide-resistant weeds, Ph and nutrient issues, as well as fungal and viral threats is key.
- We practice Integrated Pest Management. Catching threats before they become an economic issue is paramount. Understanding the life cycles of each pest and time to treat or prevent is critical.
- Our ideal manager will be a certified pesticide applicator or aspire to be.

## LATE SUMMER AND FALL...

- By the time late August and September roll around, it's time to measure and grade the trees. Each tree is then logged into a spreadsheet with size, name, block and row number to get an accurate inventory. This also makes finding requested trees easier at harvest time.
- All trees 1.5" and larger are tagged on trunks with color to reflect size. Smaller trees are measured to aid in forecasting future availability.
- We begin shipping trees from the holding area to our nonprofit and municipal customers in September, and typically finish deliveries by late October.

- The holding area is then cleaned up and readied for use the following year. Any container trees are condensed together for overwintering at this time.
- October and November is our second and smaller season for digging trees. We try to get the inventory sent out to our customers as early as possible in October to allow for fall sales as well as Spring orders.
- This inventory information is sent email by Dan Riddle with follow up calls and meetings. Dan also places orders for new liners from June to October.

## LATE FALL...

- Weather is always a factor. Pruning typically continues through mid-December. Clearing rows to make room for spring planting is a priority as well.
- It is a good time to inspect equipment and make or send out for repairs that could not be done in season.
- Seasonal staff is finished in mid-December and returns in March.

## JANUARY AND FEBRUARY...

- January is for relaxing, planning, education and sales! We exhibit at the Great Lakes Trade Expo (GLTE) in Grand Rapids in late There are occasional requests for a visit to tag or a picture of a tree to be sent.
- January and February are great months to plan some time away or enjoy winter sports in Michigan.
- Rest is important to get ready for March...when it all starts over again!

