

Happy Berry Newsletter

April 18 2021

We hate to start off with bad news, but Ann Passed on Feb 22, 2021. She is deeply missed by me, my daughters, our family and many others. Family and friends have been real troopers getting me through this difficult time. I wrote an obituary which is posted on Dignity Memorial's website. If you click on her name on the home page of our website, it will take you to its posting.

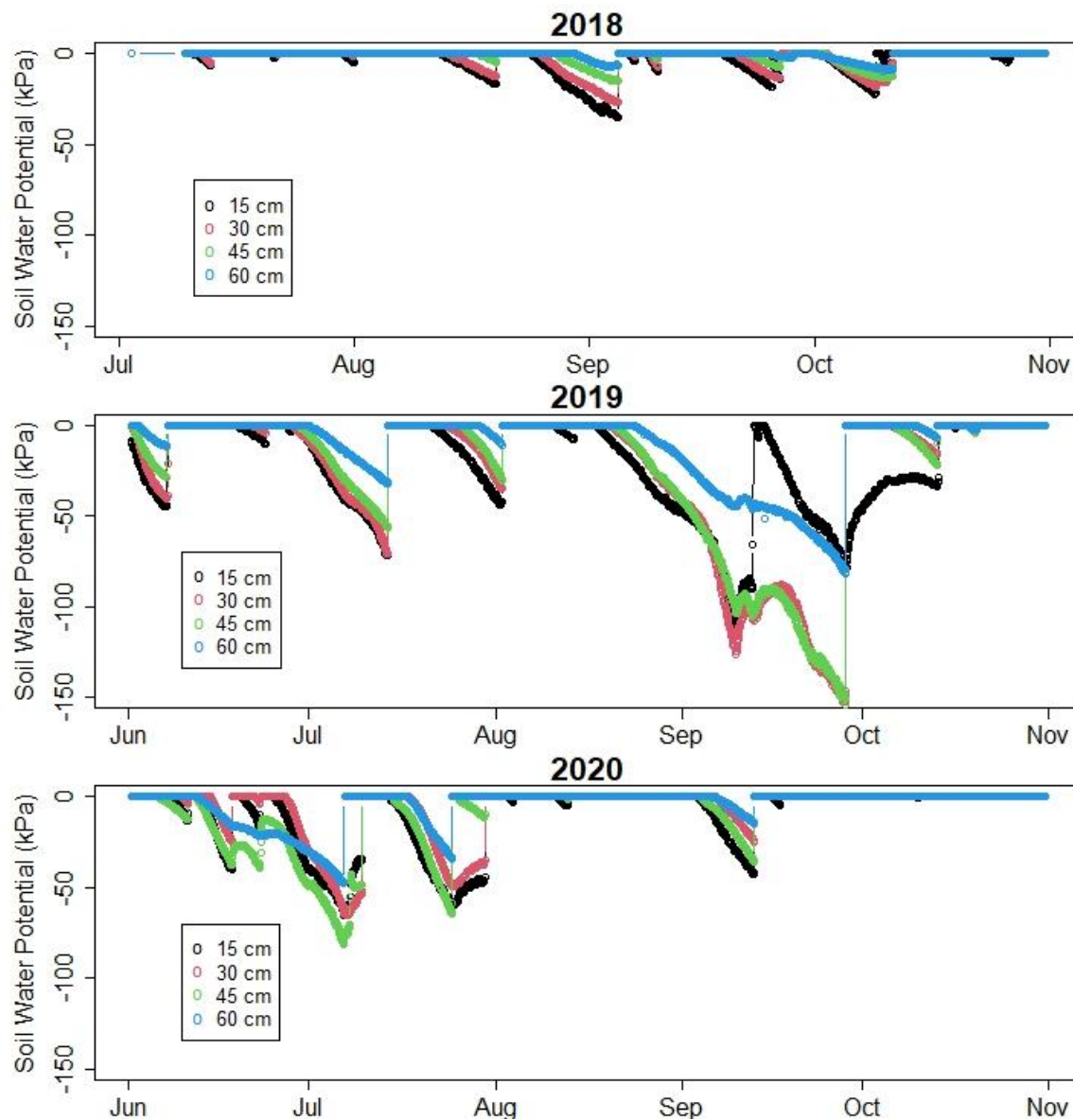
We are having a drop-in to honor Ann's life on Sunday May 2, 2021 from 2 - 4 PM at the farm. In addition to family, she treasured you, our customers, and we invite you to drop by. It will be an informal celebration, but we will also have a Celebrant to speak at 3. Any who wish to come are welcome to stop by at any time, and would also be welcome to join us with the Celebrant, if you would like.

Farm News

Despite our recent loss, we can look back at 2020 and count our blessings for time we had and for what turned out to be a bountiful harvest at The Happy Berry.

The 20 plus extra inches of rain this year was very beneficial. The plants loved it and grew very well. Here is a drought plot of the past three years. The moisture sensors are at 6, 12, 18, and 24 inches deep. As

drought intensifies the line dips down and the bigger the dip.



The black line represents close to the surface and the blue line two feet below the surface others are in between. The vertical lines indicate either a rain or irrigation event. The year 2018 is what I would call a typical summer pattern. The year 2019 started out typical spring summer pattern but had a very severe drought towards the end of the season. Flower formation occurs as the day's close in around 12 hour days. So we had to irrigate heavily in 2019 but not 2020.

Drought periods, like 2019, we typically have a lot of heavy persistent dews. The dews are favorable for leaf disease infection. Heavy leaf disease defoliates the bush and contributes further stress reducing flower bud formation. Therefore immediately after we stopped harvesting berries we initiated fungicide sprays to prevent leaf disease and thus defoliation. Bottom line we went into 2020 with a very good flower bud set.

We did not have many frosty days during bloom. Typically there can be as many as 15 frost days. During 2020 most were not too severe, ie low 20's. But, there were a few and they occurred early March 2, 7, and 22. Thanks to a heat unit accumulation APP by Eric Stafne in the Mississippi Extension Service we forecasted that our low chill varieties were at risk and we ran the wind machine. Just for the record it used to be that the first 2 weeks in April were the riskiest for frost damage. Climate is changing. Guess that comes with being an old timer. The Mississippi APP support went away because of Weather Underground not allowing us to access our own data. Fortunately Clemson has made an APP that works beautifully. ***Thank you Clemson and Dr. Payero!***

Lay-bye now complete. Lay-bye is an old cotton farming term. It occurred when the cotton leaves met in the row middle and shaded out the weeds, therefore you could finally put the hoe up and no more hoeing till the following year. For us lay-bye occurs after excessive growth is trimmed back and thus excessive shade and therefore reduced flower bud count and it must be done before we get to close to 12 hour day mark. We also include in lay-bye when we finally get all the weeds taken care of in all our crops. Perennial weeds are a real problem in perennial crops so we do "a-walk-about" and hand pull them if possible and if not possible we cut them off and individually

paint with a small paint brush each weed with a herbicide. The final part of lay-bye is getting Lime applied where appropriate and cover crops established in the row middles to fix carbon which we wind-row compost with side delivery mowers to feed microbes under the bush and it helps build the amount of carbon we sequester. Building carbon is important in increasing Cation exchange, Anion exchange, water holding capacity and water infiltration rate.

After lay-bye is project season - During project season we do all those things that did not get done, because we were busy harvesting etc., including implementing information we learned in the past year. This includes replanting plants that died of "tractor-itis," disease, weather extremes and insects and adding more production because we ran short of crop for you to harvest. Finally fixing the driveway entrance.

Plans are to add 150 feet of row of blackberry Von; continue our program of replacing another 500 ft of row of Chickasaw with Caddo (will Bring our total to 1000 ft of Caddo); replacing Izu and Fuyu Matsomoto that died of persimmon wilt and Adding Fuyu Gaki; adding a small planting of Ken's Red Kiwi; and expanding our OH Gosh and Razzmatazz seedless muscadines (For this we are using air layering so they won't go in the ground till next fall) and finally adding another 30 fig trees. On Cold rainy days we are insulating the old house. Any project ideas? Let us know we are interested.

Last comes pruning - We do the low chill (vernalization) plants first. So looking back: Blackberries were done the end of summer. Mulberries were done as of 12/1 20. Figs were done by Christmas. Blueberries take 10 weeks plus and we were done by 3-24-21 the day I went into the hospital for Hiatal Hernia (which turned out to be significant but I

am on the road to recovery). We are at the end of the pruning season, working in the seedless grapes and muscadines, and then pruning will be done until the end of this year's harvest. Then in the late summer/fall we begin again.

We had a frost April 2 and 3. So far only the blackberries have suffered frost damage. Blackberry harvest will be down perhaps 30 to 40%, but if we can escape further frost damage the rest of the harvests should be at full capacity.

The Financial Side of Things or The Farmer's Way

Farming is a labor of love. We are always at the mercy of Mother Nature, and even when we have a great season, that does not necessarily translate to great profits. The farm did perform well in 2019 and 2020 – by not taking on any additional debt. And while we are in the black both years, net profit was mere hundreds (\$830) in 2019 and only \$3,000 in 2020. But we keep our belts notched, rely on outside income to carry us and keep on because we are passionate about what we do, and its benefits to our community and the planet at large. I believe there is an urgency to capture carbon, and it takes profit to have the resources to invest in carbon neutralizing technology – like the Bio Char Kiln. We are not making enough to invest there yet, but its our hope, with your support, that we can get there!

Please come see us... Pruning lessons available in exchange for pruning help. And of course we are always willing to share our

knowledge with you. Also we are opening to new volunteer positions. Bird Manager and Bee Manger. Descriptions of these positions are on our web site. We are adding these volunteer positions because we want to do a better job ecologically.

Thank you! Thank you!! Thank you!!! for supporting our efforts.

Walker for The Happy Berry Bunch