

WINTER 2014

SMALL FARM QUARTERLY

Good Living and Good Farming – Connecting People, Land, and Communities



Feature Articles

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Farm Credit East Congratulates Family Farm On the Road to Organic Cobblestone Valley Farm: 2012 NOFA-NY Farmers of the Year



Maureen Knapp of Cobblestone Valley Farm

Last year, NOFA-NY recognized Cobblestone Valley Farm as a state leader in organic farming. However, for the Knapp family, reaching that status was a long row to hoe — so to speak — and required a financial partner like Farm Credit East.

Given the three-year process required to get their farm certified, the transition was far from easy. "It takes three years for the land and three for the herd," said Maureen, acknowledging the challenge of paying organic feed prices for several years without the benefits of being certified organic.

Throughout the transition process, the Knapp family relied on their partnership with

Farm Credit East to bridge the financial gap. "I look at Farm Credit East as farmers themselves," said Maureen. "They have the same attitude as a farmer would have, and never pushed us with a hard sell." Farm Credit East loan officer Jay Bana shares Maureen's enthusiasm for their work together. "We really respect what the Knapps do," said Jay. "And we love working with farms that are committed to running unique, successful operations."

During a period of drought, the Knapps found themselves facing a cash crush. In addition to providing them the lending assistance that they needed, Jay helped the family think strategically while navigating lean times. "Jay was very consultative," said Maureen. "He asked us questions that got us thinking along different lines, which was incredibly helpful in our overall approach."

In addition to lending needs, Maureen and her family rely on Farm Credit East for their appraisal and tax preparation services. "Anytime I have tax questions, I pick up the phone and give Farm Credit East a call," said Maureen. "Every time I work with them, I get the sense that they're in this with us. It's nice to have a partner like that."



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GRAZING

March is Frost Seeding Time

Spring may seem far away as winter winds and snows blow, but start planning now for pasture improvement

by Nancy Glazier

March is a great time of the year to add some legumes into your pastures or hayfields. It is a way to improve pastures without losing a production year. Added legumes will boost production and fill in thin patches or bare spots; they will provide needed nitrogen to the grasses already growing, and provide protein for the livestock. Little or no tillage is involved which reduces the potential for soil erosion. Hopefully, you did your homework last fall by checking the forage quantity, types and groundcover. If not, take a walk!

Frost seeding is the same as any other type of seeding or planting — seed-to-soil contact is critical. What works with this technique is the freeze-thaw process in late winter/early spring. As the days get above freezing and nights are below freezing, this action works the seeds down into the soil in preparation for germination. Your best option is to spread seed on frozen ground to reduce the potential to rut up the pasture.

Legumes work best for frost seeding due to seed shape. Success will vary farm to farm, but clovers will establish better, especially red clover. They are shorter-lived in a pasture; a way to offset that would be to frost seed red clover with slower-establishing birdsfoot trefoil. By the time the clover dies out, the trefoil will be growing well. Another way would be to routinely frost seed half of your pastures every year. It can be an inexpensive improvement. Alfalfa can be frost seeded, but don't try to seed into a field with alfalfa (even a thin stand) growing. The existing plants have an allelopathic effect on alfalfa seedlings; they won't let them grow and become established. Suggested rates are below. The price of seed is relatively low, so don't skimp.

Lbs/Ac

Red Clover - 6 to 10

Ladino Clover - 2 to 5

Birdsfoot Trefoil - 5 to 8

Alfalfa - 6 to 10

Frost seeding grasses may have limited

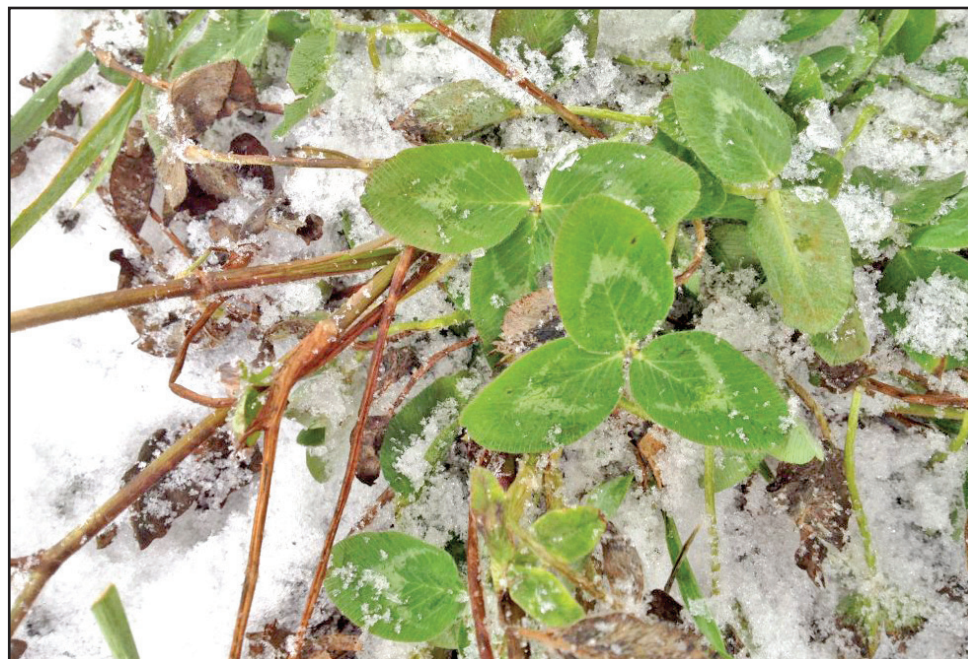
results, but is more successful with bunch type grasses like orchardgrass. Try seeding some on a small scale. If the pasture is tall or matted, your success with grasses or legumes may be limited. An option to try is to broadcast the seed and let livestock in — carefully — for a flash or quick grazing. Between their minor munching and hoof action, the seed will have a better chance of reaching the soil. Also, a light disking or harrowing could scratch the ground enough to let the seed get down the soil to grow. You may need to frost seed grasses and legumes separately due to the seeds' differing shapes.

Equipment for frost seeding can be as little or as big as needed. The size of the pasture or field will dictate what's needed, unless you have time to walk a large field with a small cyclone spreader. A broadcaster can be mounted on the back of an ATV or small tractor. Fertilization will help seedlings get established as well as existing grasses. Wait til late summer if a soil test shows phosphorous or potassium is needed.

Sometimes overgrazing or continuously grazing will leave bare or thin spots, or kill the existing legumes. Frost seedings can be done to improve the stand, but this will only be a short term fix. Rotationally grazing is the best way to improve a stand for the long term. Frost seeding will return legumes to the pastures; dividing the pasture into at least four paddocks will provide forages time to rest and regrow through the growing season. Grazing needs to be carefully managed early season to prevent damage to the tender seedlings, yet allow light to reach them.

Who can predict what this spring will be like? Dry spring conditions will discourage seed germination. Unfortunately, there is no way to control this. With the seed in place, there is a chance that it will germinate and grow when sufficient moisture is there.

Nancy Glazier is Small Farms Specialist with the NWN Dairy, Livestock and Field Crops Team, Cornell Cooperative Extension. She can be reached at her office in Penn Yan at 315.536.5123 or nig3@cornell.edu.



Clover is peeking through the ice and snow.

Photo by Bill Verbeten

Cornell Small Farms Program Update

Small Farms Program Hosts Training for Beginning Farmer Educators

What new research and tools can we incorporate in our beginning farmer training services? What are the most effective methods for training these new farmers?

How do we reach diverse and underserved beginning farmer communities? Beginning farmer service providers from across the NE gathered in Albany, NY in early November to tackle these issues in a 3 day professional development training. Over 50

beginning farmer service providers representing extension services, organizations, and government agencies across 8 states joined invited speakers to focus on improving training skills in Organic Vegetable Production and Farm Financial and Business Management. Conference workshops brought creative teaching methods that will translate into new knowledge and skills for beginning farmers as they build their farm enterprise. Participants were also challenged to think about how they can effectively reach veterans, african americans, latinos, recent immigrants, women and other underserved groups in their community. The conference was hosted by the Cornell Small Farms Program through funding from NE SARE. More information can be found in the Trainers Toolbox on the Northeast Beginning Farmers Project website: <http://nebeginningfarmers.org/trainers/>

Beginning Farmer Project are designed to be completed at your own pace with recorded lessons you can refer back to all year long and the opportunity to discuss each week's lesson and readings with teachers and fellow students alike. Among the interactive six week courses offered by the Beginning Farmer Project this winter is BF 104: Financial Records – Setting Up Systems to Track Your Profitability, which runs Monday, Jan. 13 – Feb. 17. After this course, you will be able to set up a simple spread sheet (MS Excel) and software program (QuickBooks Pro) to start financial data collection. You will learn to calculate simple business ratios to assist in management decisions and discover requirements used by lending institutions to make loan determinations.

Additional courses currently open for registration include BF 106: Organic Certification – What, How, and Why (or Why Not), BF 120: Vegetable Farming – From Planning to Planting, BF 201: Effective Marketing for the Busy Farmer – Work Smarter, Not Harder, and more! Visit <http://nebeginningfarmers.org/online-courses/> for the full listing of classes and to register.

Message from the Editor

Happy 2014! I've been advised by older relatives that as we age, time speeds up, and the years pass more quickly. This was especially true for me last August when our first child, Julian, was born. I thought nearly three months of being disconnected from work and the outside world would seem like an eternity, but it only took an instant to realize that caring for a newborn is so completely consuming that you don't have time to check the clock! Still, I tried to be present for the peaceful fall moments sitting on our porch with Julian sleeping in my lap, witnessing the yard grow quiet as the song birds and their noisy fledglings departed for their winter homes. As Julian grew before our eyes, I watched the apples blush and drop from the tree and the garden frost over and turn brown. The aroma of sweet warm grass in the wind turned to the fermented smell of fall foliage.

These moments of connection with the turning world are only possible when we are outside, observing and interacting with the land. Experiencing the vitality of the earth around us is one of many rewards that the lifestyle of farming and gardening brings. Now that my own nestling is bright-eyed and eager to explore, I'm planning to do my best to slow down and enjoy introducing him to the fleeting gifts of the moment.

Whatever patch of ground you steward in the year ahead, I hope it brings many rewards.

Best wishes,

Violet
Managing Editor



Violet Stone with Julian at six weeks old

Winter Online Courses for Aspiring, New, & Experienced Farmers

As the intensity of the growing season winds down and you begin to organize for spring, consider the option of learning alongside fellow farmers and experts to make the most of your downtime this winter! The online courses offered by the

Readers Write

Welcome to our new "Readers Write" column where we feature a few of the questions and comments we receive about Small Farm Quarterly articles.

Article: The Case for Regional Seed, by Petra Page-Mann

Q: What resources are available for local commercial growers that need to acquire seed in more economically priced formats at larger volumes than what is customary for retail buyers? We've been looking at both the Fruition and HSL websites and the maximums are still thousands of seeds smaller than what we would normally plant. Our farm is interested in planting regional seeds, and will plant in smaller patches to make it work, but we aren't sure who can supply enough quantity to even accommodate a smaller operation that still needs to be sufficiently large for a commercial operation. We can't bring a tomato to an NYC farmer's market just once no matter how cool it is!
-Jennifer

A: Dear Jennifer, Market growers' ability to sow local, high quality and organic seed is indeed a huge gap at present. It is exciting to know there is the demand awaiting supply! Regional seed companies are just starting to offer bulk seeds, so check back with them soon! Fruition Seeds is now able to offer 30+ varieties. High Mowing Seeds grows about 60 varieties of seed in Vermont that are well adapted to the NY bioregion. The Hudson Valley Seed Library is now offering about 20-25 locally grown varieties in bulk. Happy Planting!

Article: Quinoa Curiosity, by Abigail Woughter

Q: Thanks for posting this story and link to the Project Report. We grew quinoa here in Dutchess County NY in 2013 and would like to network with NY farmers growing and processing quinoa. I'd also like to find Cornell students to work with in analyzing our saponin rinse wash in the lab for antifungal and antipest foliar spray value. Can you help me find such people at Cornell?
- David

A: Dear David, I suggest contacting David and Meiling, the growers that are featured in this story, directly, so that you can find out who their other quinoa contacts are. Regarding your question about finding students to participate in your research, I suggest you reach out to the Cornell Department of Horticulture Undergraduate Coordinator, Leah Cook. Her email is lcc2@cornell.edu.

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You can now receive small farm news, events and much more on Facebook! This venue will help us to continue providing great resources to the Northeast community without cluttering your email inbox! Visit Cornell Small Farms Program on Facebook and click the "Like" button to see our resources pop up in your newsfeed.

SMALL FARM QUARTERLY - FALL 2013

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Cover photo:
Jillian Rizzo of Blue Oyster Cultivation.

Photo by Joe Rizzo

SMALL FARM QUARTERLY

Good Farming and Good Living —
Connecting People, Land, and Communities

Small Farm Quarterly is for farmers and farm families — including spouses and children - who value the quality of life that smaller farms provide.

OUR GOALS ARE TO:

- Celebrate the Northeast region's smaller farms;
- Inspire and inform farm families and their supporters;
- Help farmers share expertise and opinions with each other;
- Increase awareness of the benefits that small farms contribute to society and the environment;
- Share important research, extension, and other resources.

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A black and white photograph showing a group of approximately 15 sheep gathered in a wooden-fenced enclosure. Each sheep has a large, dark, handwritten identification number painted on its back. The numbers are various, including 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15. The sheep are standing on a ground covered with straw or hay. The enclosure is made of wooden posts and rails, with a chain-link fence visible in the background.

Photo by Ulf Kintzel

At about 80 to 90 pounds I have a lamb that is exactly as it should be: the bone, meat, and fat ratio is exactly right. The lamb is meaty and it is 'finished' — meaning it has just the right fat cover. Fast growing animals put a bit more growth into meat a while longer. So they might be finished at 90 pounds or slightly above. However, once the lamb reaches a weight well above 90 pounds and starts reaching 100 pounds, that ratio starts changing. The lamb now starts putting more nutrients into producing fat and less into muscle growth. They also grow slower. So while I need to have more input for the same growth, I also have the input turned into more fat. You are not getting bonus points or premium prices for more fat last time I checked. So it

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ENERGY ON THE FARM

Local Compost Materials Heat Community Greenhouse

Jesica Clark trials compost substrates to find a sustainable way to heat an urban greenhouse

by Abigail Woughter

From Empty Space to Green Space

When farming a quarter-acre community garden on a city block, it is easy to feel as if everyone is watching. Jesica Clark of South Pine Street City Farm in Kingston, NY had to learn to grow efficiently under the watchful eye of the community.

Having seven years of growing experience on different rural farms, Clark noticed, "I felt a little more pressure in an urban setting when my neighbors were 20 feet away from the garden to make it look as nice as possible. If it didn't look good, the neighbors would be calling."

South Pine Street City Farm is located in downtown Kingston, though off a main road on a quiet dead end street. The farm's plot of land was once just an empty house lot, then a lawn turned community garden, and finally became South Pine Street City Farm in 2011. In addition to growing vegetables on permanent raised beds and operating a farm stand for local consumers, the farm is home to several youth organizations, such as Dig Kids, a program for summer employment that gives students hands-on urban farming experience. Clark and fellow South Pine Street City farmer KayCee Wimbish also support their community by donating one-quarter of the farm's harvest to local food pantry, Queen's Galley.

Designing a Compost Heated Greenhouse

When it came time to grow seedlings, Clark drew on her experience and her local farming contacts to rent space in an off-site greenhouse. But small-scale farming had made her especially attuned to sourcing local, and her daily 30-40 minute commute across the county to check on the seedlings

made Clark worry about sustainability.

She determined that South Pine Street City Farm needed a greenhouse of its own, but knew the greenhouse site had no source of electricity. The idea for a low-energy-input greenhouse came from a friend who used animal manure from his livestock farm as the composting base to heat his greenhouse.

Composting was no novel concept for South Pine Street City Farm, and Clark wondered if the mixes she used in the garden could be an effective passive heat source in the greenhouse.

"When I was managing the compost at the garden, I sourced coffee grounds from a couple of local cafes in Kingston. I noticed that the coffee grounds were getting up to 125, 130 degrees. So I figured that was probably warm enough to work for a small sized greenhouse."

Clark received SARE funding to test the performance of three locally sourced compost mixes. The first mix was made up of half coffee grounds, half chipped city mulch, by volume. The second mix was comprised of double the amount of coffee grounds by volume than mulch, and the third mix used a 2:1 ratio of coffee grounds to dry leaves, making it the most finely textured mix of the three.

The compost mixes served as a direct heat source and were located inside the greenhouse. Clark used concrete blocks to form a container that neatly held the compost mixtures. This table-like structure is called a compost bay, and is central to the functionality of the greenhouse.

"The concrete blocks make a nice little heat sink, and they're sturdy so I'm able to put a frame on top of them for seedlings."

Extending Fall Production

When Clark began the compost-heated greenhouse project, her main objectives were to grow high-quality seedlings and experiment with extending the spring and fall growing seasons in an effort to produce local vegetables longer for her community. "In this whole urban farming movement," she considered, "I think one thing that has been neglected is the idea of a community greenhouse, especially when it comes to growing in the wintertime and being a resource for different community gardens."

In terms of South Pine Street City Farm production, the greenhouse helped Clark extend the season of her plants, but not in the way she originally planned. "What I was thinking when I proposed the project," she remembered, "was taking plants from the garden and transplanting them to the greenhouse as it started to get colder."

But there were problems with



South Pine Street City Farm at harvest time 2012.

this approach, mainly the cooling down of the compost mixes, which by late January were maxing out at 105 degrees, instead of the 125-130 degree range she observed in the fall.

"What I ended up doing," said Clark, "was a lot more direct seeding in the greenhouse. I direct seeded radishes, spinach, and salad greens in the fall."

Clark was very pleased with the fall season extension of her greens. She continued to experiment with winter production of sunflower sprouts and pea shoots, but the cold temperatures hampered a significant harvest. "It worked," Clark explained, "there was totally stuff growing there in the winter, but it wasn't enough production to be anything more than for personal use. It wasn't really enough to sell."

This season, South Pine Street City Farm will focus more on direct seeding greens in the fall.

season.

"Something about that plastic covering," she laughed, "must have just said 'Rip me!' because I had to repair several holes over the winter time."

She conceded that this was frustrating, and not in keeping with her thoroughly positive experiences with community members in her time at South Pine Street City Farm. When it comes time for greenhouse renovations, polycarbonate covering will be installed, hopefully deterring any greenhouse vandals.

Producing Food and Possibility

Clark was satisfied to achieve her goals of seedling production and season extension, but the greenhouse also represented community independence and sustainability.

"It was so important," she assessed, "to be able to have a greenhouse in the city that did not run on fossil fuels and could really be put anywhere."

In a city, the availability of space is often limited, but Clark insists this should not be a deterrent to projects like the compost-heated greenhouse. "You just need an open space," she pointed out. "It could be put in an old parking lot, on a lawn."

South Pine Street City Farm, itself once just a lawn, speaks to Clark's ability to work efficiently within the parameters provided. Small-scale farming allows her to more creatively use the resources Kingston has to offer—be it coffee grounds or yard waste—to sustainably serve the community.

To learn more about South Pine Street City farm, visit the website southpinestreetcityfarm.org. To learn more about SARE project FNE12-739, view the summary at sare.org. Click on Project Reports > Search the Database.

South Pine Street City Farm operates in partnership with Binnewater Ice Company, Kingston Land Trust and The Queens Galley.

Abigail Woughter is a junior Agricultural Sciences Major at Cornell University and served as the Cornell Small Farms Program summer intern in 2013.



Compost bays.

Photos by Jesica Clark

Invest in Your Farm Education this Winter

Evaluation Shows Online Courses Inspire Action

by Erica Frenay

Too busy to travel to a workshop or conference? Have you ever thought of taking an online course to advance your farming education? Whether you are a new, aspiring or experienced farmer, the Northeast Beginning Farmers Project offers interactive 6-week courses that connect you to the information and people you need to start or diversify your farm. The courses consist of weekly webinars with presentations by experienced educators and farmers and allow for readings and discussion

on your own time. The cost is \$200 per farm to attend.

Evaluation polls from the 2012-2013 season show that students that complete courses are inspired to take action! Seventy five of students that completed last season's online courses intend to further develop their business plans; fifty-one will invest in farm infrastructure; thirty-seven will expand or improve their marketing; and 99 of them will improve their farm financial management or take other measures to improve farm profitability.

Students that have taken the classes say:

"As a city dweller looking to move to a farm, all the information was very eye opening. I can plan properly now that I have concrete information. I have a clearer idea of what is involved and I am still excited to try."

"The most valuable thing about this course was that it made me hash out and put on paper each section of my business plan. It is so easy to put business plan writing on the back burner, and this course made it move to the top of my to-do list and allowed me to get all my ideas and financials into one organized document."

"While there is no 'by the numbers' guide to farming, this course has provided me what I think of as mental infrastructure to organize and move forward, access to great resources both online and human. In addition, the discussion forums allows me to connect with so many enthusiastic people who share a common thread to make their small (or not so small) farm a reality."

See <http://nebeginningfarmers.org/online-courses> for more details.



Online courses can be taken from the comfort of your own home or barn!

Winter 2014 Course Catalogue

The following online courses are starting soon! Tips for choosing the best course for you are available at <http://nebeginningfarmers.org/online-courses>

Organize Your Farm Business Records with Financial Record-Keeping, BF 104
Jan 13 - Feb 17, 2014

Plan for Profit, Reduce Stress with Holistic Financial Planning, BF 203
Jan. 14 - Feb. 18, 2014

Understand Organic Requirements with Organic Certification, BF 106

Feb. 4 - March 4, 2014

Get Introduced to Marketing & Feasibility with entry-level course Markets & Profits, BF 102

Jan. 16 - Feb 20, 2014

Grow Vegetables with Vegetable Production, part II, BF 121
Feb. 26 - April 2, 2014

Learn About Taxes, Regulations, and More with Taking Care of Business, BF 103

March 10 - April 14, 2014

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My Ole Dad

Memoirs of a 78 year old Vermont farmer

by Stuart Cheney

My Dad was a big muscular fella about six foot with heavy broad shoulders. His arms were huge, and he had hands more like paws. It has been said that he and Bob Henry who was even bigger (Bob used to be the milkman back in the '40s) once picked up the front end of a Chevrolet car six inches off the ground. But that was before my time, I only know what I've been told.

About 1945 or '46 we were sugaring and it was the end of the season. We had a lot of sap and it was a real warm day and Dad was in the sugarhouse boiling. Gramp and I were outside working up some wood when I heard Dad holler. I ran in and saw Dad slumped over the pan like he was trying to hold himself up and I yelled to Gramp to come help. Dad's face was beet red and Gramp and I tried to get him straightened up so we could walk him outside.

I know I was awful scared and didn't exactly understand what was happening. Well, we finally got him over by the wood pile and quickly made a place so he could sit down. Lord, his face was so red. Gramp mentioned that he might be having a heat stroke. Well, I went over to the little stream that runs by and got him a nice glass of cold water and he chug-a-lugged it right down. I brought the horses and sap sled around and we loaded him on and took him up to the house. I took off his boots and he went and laid on the couch.

The next day, my mother made an appointment at the doctor's office and my father was a little better and was able to drive them both. Well, the outcome was she (lady doctor) said my father had a bad heart and lots of eremitism and he should give up farming. (I think my mother and the doctor were in cahoots).

The upshot of the whole thing was that they had an auction and sold off the cows (all 10) and the young stock, half of all the sugar buckets, and a couple of small portable buildings, but they kept all the haying equipment and the horses. Dad took a job downtown at a huge furniture shop and moved right up to be foreman and worked there until they closed up about 1955.



My Grandpa Fred.

Meanwhile back at the farm, I done all the haying every summer and there was a boy down the road who would come up and help put the hay in the horsebarn for the horses.

Before my mother and father sold the cows, I thought a lot about asking if we could keep them and I could do the chores before and after school. I thought about it a lot but I never said anything to them about it. They never talked about

money matters in front of me and I knew nothing about money matters myself, absolutely nothing. Inside I knew, too, that getting up early and doing the milking and feeding and cleaning for the cows and feeding and watering the horses, all in time to get a ride at 6:30 with my father into town where my high school was, just wouldn't work. So really I was smart enough to know that, especially in the winter. As much as I loved the farm, getting up at 3:30 a.m. in the winter was out. So I never mentioned it.

As soon as spring came when I was a freshman, I asked Dad if I could sugar and he said, go ahead. I made about 74 gallons that year but it tested a bit light, so one Saturday Dad helped boil it all over and we ran water in behind it so the pan wouldn't burn down. We lost a little when it mixed with water, but I guess you can't help it.

As soon as I got my license in 1951, I got a job hauling bagged chicken feed for a large poultry farm in town. We'd go to the railroad siding and find the car and get the door open and back up to the door with the truck and load on about 120 bags and deliver it around to all the different chicken farms — they farm out broilers for other farmers to raise. I also hauled chickens to Manhattan Poultry in Upper Manhattan where they were slaughtered. I

made three trips down there. There wasn't any throughway back then. I was only 17 years old, but I had another boy with me.

On my first trip my boss went with me to show me the way. Somewhere down in Connecticut we came to an underpass and I started slowing down. My boss started hollering, "Keep going, keep going!" (He was kind of a nervous cuss sometimes.) I tried to tell him that on top of the seven tiers of chicken crates there were four more roped on top in the middle. He said, "No, no, you don't need to slow down. I know it fits, I been there myself with seven tiers. Keep going, keep going."

CRASH. The truck went under but the four crates on top didn't quite make it. Well, the cops came from nowhere. They got out and paid no attention to us but grabbed those chickens and wrung their necks so fast, opened the car trunk and threw them in. They must have gotten a dozen or so. The officers got back in the car and said, "We'll leave it up to you to tell the owner of the chickens what happened." That sure was no fun.

After I got the job in school driving the truck, Dad sold the horses and the equipment, and in 1950 he and my mother sold the farm. They bought a house in West Brattleboro and I lived with them until November 1956 when I got married.

My dad worked around a bit at woodworking shops and then had a stroke and died in the middle seventies. Mom kept teaching for quite a while and retired in the eighties. She received a large silver tray for her good teaching efforts.

Stuart Cheney grew up on a 145 acre diversified farm near Brattleboro, VT. He resides in a small five room house built by his grandfather in 1940.



Stuart and his wife Angie.

Photos courtesy of Stuart Cheney



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SEED STORIES**Seeds, Chefs, and Sustainable Agriculture**

What sows local food? Seeds
by Petra Page-Mann

Most of the seed sown in the Northeast is grown in arid climates, often thousands of miles away. However, a burgeoning awareness that local food starts with local seed has come to the table, with passionate voices joining the conversation.

"Food is life," says Scott Signori, head chef and owner of Stonecat Cafe in Hector, NY. "Food is a reflection of how you live. We have phenomenal soils and fantastic farmers here in the Finger Lakes. Now we have the seeds to sow."

Chefs play a key role in our food system, connecting farmer and eater as they craft the leading edge of food and culture. Increasingly, chefs are asking how and where food is grown and some of their choices are beginning to influence the very DNA of their ingredients.

This is not new. For the last 14 millennia, seeds have been selected and saved, flavor and regional resilience the key selections. Those who selected the seeds (breeders) and those who those crops sustained (eaters) have often been one and the same. By contrast, the focus of crop breeding for the last several decades has been yield, uniformity, and shelf-stability, guided almost entirely by the interests of multinational corporations rather than public interest. Modern breeders and eaters are as removed from conversations and collaborations with one another, often thousands of miles apart both literally and figuratively.

However, breeders, farmers, chefs and eaters are now collaborating to cultivate crops with increasing public interest, flavor and regional resilience back at the forefront. Nathaniel Thompson owns and operates Remembrance Farm in Trumansburg, NY. He cultivates 100 acres, focusing on greens and root crops. He is excited to be growing seed for many of these crops in collaboration with Fruition Seeds, a company in the Finger Lakes customizing certified organic regionally adapted seed. Thompson plants and cultivates the seed crops and Fruition Seeds selects, harvest and cleans the crop. "Regional and on-farm seed production develops quality, stable genetics for our farm," remarks Thompson. "A single generation of well-selected seed makes an astonishing difference."



Kale seed drying at Fruition Seeds Farm.
All photos by Petra Page-Mann



Kale, second generation of seed production.

"There is no replacing seed customized to your particular soils, climate, harvest and market needs," agrees Matthew Goldfarb, co-founder of Fruition Seeds. "Working with Remembrance offers the opportunity to select from large crop populations, allowing for greater diversity, specificity and resilience simultaneously in the seeds produced."

Thompson, in partnership with Fruition, grows seed for nearly a dozen varieties of greens, from kale to lettuce. "We are interested in salad mixes with interesting colors, textures, flavors with uniform maturity to make harvest practical," says Thompson. On-farm breeding offers him the visual and gastronomic diversity he is after while ensuring only the uniformly maturing plants seeds are saved. With each generation these seeds are becoming more and more customized to his soils, climate, cultivation practices and taste. His own taste as well as his community.

Thompson appreciates being a part of a collective CSA where he is able to hear, first-hand, how people enjoy his produce. Increasingly, the personal relationships he is building with local chefs are deepening his interest in food, culture and seed. "Chefs understand the subtle qualities of food," observes Thompson, "I love to work with chefs willing to make the effort."

"Such incredible local food, readily available, is a dream come true," says Justin Paterson of Hazelnut Kitchen in Trumansburg, one of two restaurants within 10 miles of Remembrance Farm that are truly "making local mean local," as Thompson put it. Offering menus almost exclusively from what is regionally and seasonally available, Hazelnut Kitchen and Stonecat Cafe are playing a significant role in shaping food in the Finger Lakes. Local, regionally adapted seed sends those roots even deeper. "We are fortunate to be so spoiled," explains Scott Signori. "Our local flavors are full of life and come from a world of inspiration." Signori is the head chef of Stonecat Cafe, tucked among vineyards above Seneca Lake in Hector. Seed is the next level of connection that Scott is exploring. "Heirloom varieties are being brought again to life and new varieties are being created. Food is a reflection of life itself. And life here is good."

Both Stonecat and Hazelnut Kitchen tuck Remembrance Farm's salad mix into everything they can. 'Flower Power,' Thompson's

signature blend of lettuces, mustard greens, herbs and flowers is a perennial favorite. "It is just amazing, absolutely delicious," exclaims Signori. Paterson loves the flavors and textures so much he decided to put an undressed salad on the menu. "People regularly say this is the best salad they've ever had," says Signori.

The seeds of almost every element in Remembrance Farm's salad mix is produced on the farm. "We are so thrilled to be growing seed with Remembrance," shares Goldfarb. "Each selection is made with the insight of local breeders, growers, chefs and eaters who are committed to flavor, resilience and beauty. And the difference is already on the plate."

"Farm to table is here to stay," observes Paterson. "As chefs, we find ways to go deeper, more intimate, more connected. Local seed is the next level."

Each of us play a significant role in our food system: we eat every day. Whether you sow the seeds, prepare the meal or simply sit down to the table, you are influencing the seeds being selected and sown around the world. Seeds are the small, unassuming heart of resilience. Join the conversation!

Petra Page-Mann is the co-owner of Fruition Seeds in Naples, NY, customizing organic seed to thrive in the Northeast! Her website is fruitionseeds.com and she may be contacted at petra@fruitionseeds.com.



Screening kale seed at Fruition Seeds Farm.



Nathaniel Thompson, Remembrance Farm, Trumansburg, NY.

PHOTO FEATURE**Postal Peepers**

Photo by John Suscovich

This winter photo feature comes to us from FoodCyclist.com, a resource and blog following Kate and John Suscovich's journey toward a sustainable and happy farm. Their definition of a FoodCyclist is a person who adheres to the belief that healthy food, active living, and pursuing one's passions are the keys to a happy life. The FoodCyclist Farm operates a pastured chicken and herbs CSA out of Kent, CT.

Here's the story of how these chicks came to FoodCyclist Farm:

It's 6:30 in the morning, the phone rings. It's the Post Office. "Umm hello, is this FoodCyclist Farm? We have your baby chickens here, please get them out of here." We drive to the Post Office and see why they are annoyed. There sits several cardboard boxes of incessantly peeping little chicks. They're super cute, super loud, and ready for a drink (of water).

For more photos and stories, follow John and Kate's blog at <http://foodcyclist.com>.

Blue Oyster Cultivation

Producing mushrooms is not easy, but with the right growing conditions, a harvest can be both profitable and beautiful

by Patricia Brhel

Mushroom farming, like any other agricultural enterprise, requires study, experience, controlling the growing environment as best you can, a certain amount of intuition and some luck. Edible mushrooms are the fruit of certain kinds of fungus. To grow edible mushrooms profitably isn't all that easy, nor is it overnight success. It takes about 15 to 16 weeks to produce most varieties as a crop, with only the last three weeks or so dedicated to sowing the seed and the actual growth of the mushrooms. Most of that time involves a lot of hard work up front. Compost must be made, the beds prepared, spawn (seed) ordered, the growing medium (compost) seeded, and then there's the patient wait for the first signs of growth. All the while the temperature and humidity of the compost and the growing room must be maintained as close as possible to that preferred by the mushroom. The national average for mushroom growers in 1980 was 3.12 pounds per square foot. Depending on the type of mushroom, that's not bad, but it's not a get rich quick scheme.

Even before you create that first compost pile, it's best to have your potential customers in mind. Will you be selling to restaurants, to stores, at farmers markets or directly from your farm? Is this going to supplement the income from your other crops or will it be your main focus?

Blue Oyster Cultivation, owned by Joe Rizzo, his wife Wendy and their children, is a small farm near Ithaca. Right now they use the mushrooms to supplement their income, though they hope that it will eventually evolve and become more than that. Currently they sell mushrooms and vegetables at the Ithaca Farmers Market, other markets and from their farm. They also sell mushrooms to seasonal restaurant, the Copper Oven, which specializes in wood fired pizzas topped with hyper-local meats, cheeses and produce.

Rizzo grew up working on the family farm and selling at the New York City Greenmarkets. After col-

lege he taught botany and life sciences to inner city school children in Brooklyn. Switching from public

school teaching to raising his own children and growing oyster mushrooms in a sustainable, environmen-

tally conscientious way shows his willingness to accept challenges.

Right now the farm produces shiitakes, blue oyster mushrooms, golden oyster mushrooms, phoenix oyster



The New York Crop Grower

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Country Folks is partnering with New York State Corn and Soybean Growers Association for the advertising year 2014. We will be continuing the insert in Country Folks East and West four times through out the year. The newsletter will also be mailed to all of the members of the associations and to prospective members.

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mushrooms, turkey tails, white elm mushrooms (*Hypiszygus ulmarius*) and horse mushrooms. In addition to selling the mushrooms fresh they also sell them dried and in gourmet products such as teas. They also sell mushroom kits to those interested in growing their own. Rizzo and family have teamed up with experienced mushroom hunter Carl Whittaker to found the Finger Lakes Mushroom Consortium, an organization that will warm the hearts of all

mycophiles. The organization is planning to offer a 2014 CSA to those who enjoy dining on these delectable fungi.

Mushroom growing is a family affair on the Blue Oyster farm, with all hands at work turning compost, pasteurizing straw, manning the booth at farmers markets or posing for pictures, a special job for daughter Jillian, who is featured on the website along with the crop. Each variety of mushrooms needs its

own growing medium. Shiitake, for instance, grow on blocks of oak that have been soaked in water, whereas oyster mushrooms are much less picky, any form or cellulous will do. Both mushroom varieties take matter indigestible by humans and turn it into protein and one of the ingredients for a very good meal or an interesting drink. Still, there is temperature and humidity that needs to be attended to, no matter what the growing medium or variety of fungus it is. Too hot a temperature will kill the spawn, and too cold a temperature can slow the mushroom growth to a halt. If the growing medium dries out, that too, can kill the spawn.

Wendy says, "Our mushrooms are almost too pretty to eat and our customers keep coming back for more. We pride ourselves on customer service and on offering the best product available that money can buy."

Blue Oyster Cultivation recommends that people buy mushrooms from an experienced grower or harvester.



Blue Oyster Mushrooms.



Golden Oyster mushrooms at the Ithaca Farmers Market.

Photos courtesy of blueoystercultivation.com

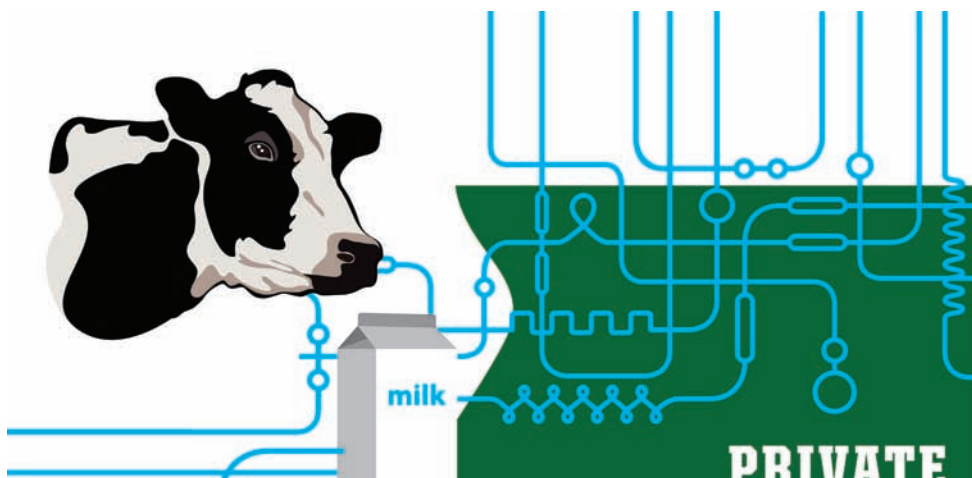
If you want to grow your own, buy spawn from a reliable source. If you harvest mushrooms in the wild, make sure that you have a very good guidebook and some training with an experienced mushroom hunter. Some poisonous mush-

rooms look almost exactly like the edible varieties.

For more information e-mail fingerlakesmushrooms@yahoo.com or go to the Blue Oyster Farm web site which features mushroom pictures, more information and

several recipes, blueoystercultivation.com.


The Copper Oven, 6800 Route 89 in Ovid, just north of Ithaca, will reopen on May 10th, 2014. Call them at 607-220-8794 or e-mail mj@slowfoodonthego.com.



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NEW & BEGINNING FARMERS**One Solution for Farmland Access**

Organic dairy farm family expands by partnering with socially responsible farmland company

by Kevin Egolf

As of October 15, 2013, the Richards family now has room to expand their organic Holstein herd after teaming up with Iroquois Valley Farms. Iroquois Valley Farms, a socially responsible farmland company that started in 2007 in Iroquois County, IL purchased 163 acres in Washington County, NY through the Company's Young Farmer Land Access program to support Erin and Dan's growing heifer and dairy business. The farm, which will be named Taconic Ridge Farm highlighting the picturesque location in the Taconic Mountains between the Green Mountains of Vermont and Adirondack Mountain range in New York, represents Iroquois Valley Farms' first entry into the Northeast and brings the total funds committed to the Young Farmer Land Access Program to over \$7 million.

Erin and Dan Richards, now with the help of their one-year old son Mason and recently born twins boys, Jack and Randy, operate an organic dairy in Washington County, NY. They started farming in 2003 on leased land and switched to organic in 2007, but really established themselves with the 2008 purchase of their main farm, 110 acres in Argyle, NY, approximately one hour northeast of Albany. At the

time, they were the only organic dairy farmers in the area, but they viewed that as an opportunity rather than a

challenge. Their dedication to sustainable operations and quality milk paid off and has allowed them to grow

their farming operations over the last several years. In addition to the owned land, the Richards grow feedstock

Erin and Dan Richards in front of Taconic Ridge Farmhouse.



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Iroquois Valley Farms' Young Farmer Land Access Program is dedicated to providing long-term land access solutions to young farmers looking to grow more nutritious, healthy and local foods. Access to farmland is increasingly expensive and difficult and the Young Farmer Land Access Program was established to specifically address this problem among young farmers. Since 2012, Iroquois Valley Farms has purchased over 1,000 acres that have gone into the program. For more information on Iroquois Valley Farms or the Young Farmer Land Access Program visit Iroquois Valley Farms' website, www.iroquois-valleyfarms.com.



Taconic Ridge barn and silos. Photos courtesy of Iroquois Valley Farms, LLC

on another 200 leased acres in the area to support the growing organic Holstein herd. For the past year, the Richards had been reviewing options to further expand the existing business while still maintaining their high operating standards-plenty of pasture and quality feed-stock.

That is where Iroquois Valley Farms was able to step-in. Iroquois Valley Farms uses private capital to buy farmland that is then leased to local and organic farmers. Iroquois Valley Farms, as a socially responsible farmland company, adheres to a buy and hold strategy and a vision statement to 'Never

sell the land, except to the farmer' and 'Keep the farmers, mostly young, on the land and indefinitely renew their leases.' Early this year, Dan Richards was able to connect with Iroquois Valley Farms and learn about the company's sustainable farmland ownership model. When asked to comment on

Iroquois Valley Farms, Dan highlighted the importance of having the right partner. "If I do not own the land, it is extremely important that the owner has the same values and goals as my family and it is even better when I know the owner is 100 percent committed to supporting my farm business," he stated. After reviewing several farms for sale in the area, the Richards and Iroquois Valley Farms were able to strike a deal on an under-utilized old farmstead in Cossayuna, NY, 10 minutes down the road from the Richards' main farm. The Taconic Ridge Farm will provide the Richards new barns for the young heifers, more pasture, and good crops fields which are often difficult to find in the area. David M. Miller, the CEO and co-founder of Iroquois Valley Farms, commented on the process by saying, "We are extremely excited to have Erin, Dan, and family join the Iroquois Valley Farms family. We wanted to impact young farmers in the Northeast and we could not have a better farm family this land."

A side benefit of the farm purchase, the Taconic Ridge Farm has an old farmhouse that the Richards will purchase from Iroquois Valley Farms in two years, providing plenty of space on which the three Richards boys can GRAZE around.

Kevin Egolf is the Director of Business Development at Iroquois Valley Farms and is an advocate for supporting local and organic farmers. He can be reached at kegolf@iroquoisvalley-farms.com.

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TITLE:

- 1 ☐ Owner
- 2 ☐ Manager
- 3 ☐ Other

ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP:

- 1 ☐ NYSVGA
- 2 ☐ Hort Society
- 3 ☐ Potato Growers
- 4 ☐ NYS Flower
- 5 ☐ NYS Berry Growers
- 6 ☐ NYS Farmers' Direct Marketing
- 7 ☐ Farmers' Market Federation of NY
- 8 ☐ Other

PRIMARY FOCUS:

- 1 ☐ Tree Fruit
- 2 ☐ Berry
- 3 ☐ Potatoes
- 4 ☐ Vine Crops
- 5 ☐ Row Crops
- 6 ☐ Peas/Beans
- 7 ☐ Cabbage
- 8 ☐ Flower/Nursery
- 9 ☐ Direct Marketing
- 10 ☐ Agritainment
- 11 ☐ Livestock
- 12 ☐ Other

BEST FARM TIP:

NEW & BEGINNING FARMERS**How to Love a Farmland Lease*****Strengthening the landowner-farmer relationship with leasing and stewardship***

by Rachel Carter

Sustainability, simply stated, is the capacity to endure. But the high cost of land in Vermont, combined with the financial challenges of owning land, are threatening the sustainability of local agriculture. According to Vermont's Farm to Plate Strategic Plan to strengthen the food system, "Affordable access to farmland was described [by stakeholders] as a serious barrier for new farmers or those seeking to grow and expand." In other words, productive farmland is imperative if Vermont is to increase its local food access and consumption.

"It could appear there is plenty of rural land in Vermont, but the agricultural land is largely inaccessible to new farmers," says Garland Mason, the new farmer coordinator at Rutland Area Food and Farm Link (RAFFL). "The price of land is often prohibitive and the difficulty in finding a piece of land that fits farming needs can stop new farmers in their tracks. For these reasons, leasing farmland is often the best option for start-up farms."

Happily, more and more farmers are leasing land from second home owners, retired farmers, and family-owned farm partnerships. And organizations have sprouted up to help foster and manage these relationships. Landowners who, a decade ago, might have looked out onto a fallow field now have the opportunity to see an active farm from their windows.

"There are many non-farming landowners who have inherited or purchased Vermont farmland without intentions of farming on their own," Garland says. "These landowners may find that it becomes expensive and inconvenient to have the land hayed or brush hogged each year, and instead may

consider leasing land to new farmers who work to keep the land open and the soils in good health."

Carol Tashie and Dennis Duhaime of Radical Roots Farm, an organic vegetable farm located in Rutland, have leased two acres of land from Mary Ashcroft since 2010. Originally sub-leasing, Carol and Dennis transitioned into a direct lease with Mary and her now late husband, Harold Billings, a former dairy farmer who was glad to see his land being repurposed.

"Our farm has been in the Billings family since 1817," Mary says. "We respect the relationship between people and the land. By leasing out different parts of the land for farming — both organic and conventional — and for other compatible uses, I hope to encourage balance and stewardship."

The lease relationship was informal at first but easily moved into a formal agreement, thanks in part to Mary's background as a lawyer. Both casual on-the-farm conversations and formal meetings structured the relationship. "Good communication among those farming and those leasing is important — we stay in touch regularly," Mary notes. The lease includes cash payments and a CSA share for Mary.

"To grow local food access in the state we need more land, and landowners leasing to farmers is one of the best ways to ensure food sovereignty," Carol says. "Dennis and I made a conscious decision to not buy land and to be better stewards by putting money into the land rather than a mortgage." Radical Roots Farm sells veggies at the downtown Rutland Farmers' Market, the Rutland Winter Farmers' Market, and through CSA farm shares.

Mary also has lease arrangements with



Mary Ashcroft and Carol Tashie at Radical Roots Farm.

Photo by Radical Roots Farm

other agriculture businesses, including a conventional corn farm, a sugarbush, a horse farm, a nursery, and a developing forestry product business — all viable solutions to keeping an old dairy farm active in a working agricultural landscape.

Mary and Carol recently shared their story at a "Lease Your Land to a Farmer" workshop presented by Land For Good, the UVM Center for Sustainable Agriculture, and the Vermont Land Trust.

Mike Ghia, the Land For Good field agent for Vermont, says farmer-landowner matchmaking is not unlike the process of dating before getting married. "Exploratory relationships teach about what each party is looking for before entering into a marriage. Likewise, a property owner may interview and meet with a number of farmers before they find someone who shares the same goals, with whom they are compatible, and helps determine if each want to pursue the lease relationship. Property owners shouldn't be discouraged if some of the farmers they connect with don't meet their expectations or even if a past leasing relationship with a farmer didn't work out. Instead, it's important to look at these interactions as learning experiences that can help inform a better, successful relationship in the future when the right farmer comes along. The same can be said for farmers looking to find the right property owner from whom to lease." Land For Good is a New Hampshire-based nonprofit that educates and assists people throughout New England on farmland access, tenure, and transfer.

Matchmaking between farmers and landowners can begin informally or by completing an online profile and searching applicable websites like VermontLandLink.org in Vermont or NewEnglandFarmlandFinder.org for New England.

Landowners interested in exploring lease arrangements also need to obtain baseline knowledge of their property in order to provide the necessary details in a matchmaking description. They must know their land's soil type, consider housing options for a leasing farmer, evaluate barns and out-buildings, and estimate water availability.

Land For Good highly encourages mutually beneficial, written lease agreements. Stewardship clauses that state expectations around the care and management of natural resources over a long period of time are strongly advised, as are leases sustained over a broader time frame than just a few years. It's also recommended to have a dispute clause that requires disputes to be handled through mediation, including through services such as the Vermont Agricultural Mediation Program, or similar programs found in other states. Include who's responsible for property repairs, alterations, and improvements to structures, and state that insurance liability is maintained by the farmer and includes property owners in the policy. (Standard homeowner insurance policies do not cover leased farming.) Land For Good provides direct technical assistance to both property owners and to farmers on working through and understanding these and other farm leasing issues.

Benefits should also be clearly understood. Property owners benefit by receiving land maintenance and stewardship, lease payments, business partnerships, and potential property tax discounts. Farmers benefit by having workable land and clear expectations.

Sally Mole owns Cedar Hill Farm, a 350-acre, family-owned farm partnership in Pownal which encompasses tenants Mighty Food Farm and Quarry Hill Farm.



Ariel Dunn, farm manager of Mighty Food Farm in Pownal.

Photo by Mighty Food Farm

RESOURCE SPOTLIGHT**Stress Free Chicken Tractor Plans**

by John Suscovich

Looking to raise broilers on pasture? "Stress Free Chicken Tractor Plans" is a new e-Guide to building your own chicken tractors. The designs provided solve the common issues related to pastured poultry: predation, ease of daily moves, walking inside the coop, serving more than one purpose, and keeping birds safe and happy.

The eBook contains detailed 2D and 3D drafting combined with detailed step by step instructions on building and moving these chicken tractors around your fields. In addition to that, author John Suscovich (the "FoodCyclist") includes videos, materials lists, cost break-down,

50+ color photos, and information on his inexpensive custom waterers and feeders.

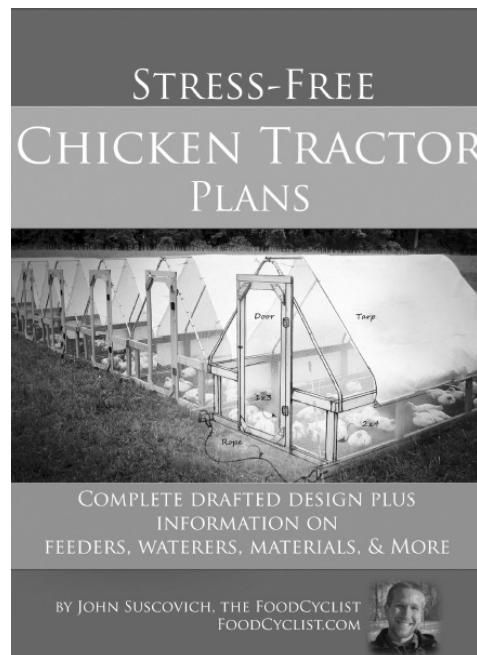
FoodCyclist Farm operates as a Pastured Chicken and Herb CSA in Western Connecticut. Every week members receive one whole chicken and a small bunch of culinary herbs. The chickens are raised in John's chicken tractors out on pasture and moved once daily.

With 12 chicken tractors on pasture, John has taken raising chickens to a production level. That does not mean you have to. These chicken tractor designs work well for the backyard grower as well as the production farmer. Having sustained 50+ mph winds, driving rains, and just

about every predator known to Connecticut, these chicken tractors have proven their worth.

Troy Bishopp, the 'Grass Whisperer', says, "I liked John's style because it had enough rugged features in construction without being too heavy. The simple wheel design and portability of one set of tires made it cost effective and easy to move, even through taller swards. The high ceiling made for good ventilation and easy access for bringing in grain and water and removing birds. A plus on those hot humid days."

The eBook is available as a digital download. Visit <http://FoodCyclist.com/chickentractor>

**How to Love from page 14**

Sally grew up on the farm when it was raising beefalo in the 1950s and '60s, but challenges bringing beef to market led Sally's father to quit farming. She eventually faced the reality that money could not be made farming in her situation, so she began promoting small farms and farm products while exploring new avenues of entrepreneurship.

Sally now partners with Quarry Hill Farm to raise sheep, sold through Vermont Lamb Company. Quarry Hill also taps the sugarbush and, as longtime tenants, have created a home-school enrichment program on the property. Mighty Food Farm rents farmhouse space and grows organic produce for 250 CSA shareholders; they also sell at local farmers' markets. Echoing Carol Tashie's reasoning for leasing, Sally says her farm tenants find leasing appealing because it's more about "building cash equity and not putting all that money into land ownership costs."

"Our nine shareholders [in the farm partnership] have talked about selling to current lessees," Sally says, "but in all reality, that asset split really doesn't amount to much — and at what cost to local land access for our future generations? We had to look at the possibilities of what could

happen to the land if a new owner sells. We began to consider the longevity of land access to pass on to future generations as a family-run real estate leasing operation, instead of a family farm.

"Our farming model has helped encourage other small farms along the road," she continues, "making this valley into a vibrant farm community — a fabric of life unraveling a new farming pattern based on food access for future generations, not simply monetizing the land. This model took work, time, and cost to repair buildings and prepare the land, but this year we plan to pay out a dividend [to partnership shareholders], and hopefully for subsequent years to follow."

Sustainability is the capacity to endure. And food access is critical to our ability to endure. Yet as Rutland landown-

er Mary Ashcroft says, "The pressure is on prime farmland. Farmers want to use it, as do developers for housing and solar projects, and transportation planners for road projects." Hope lies with the multiple organizations addressing this pressing issue, and with all the landowners willing to work with farmers to help Vermont achieve the twin goals of preserving land and growing more local food.

Rachel Carter is the communications director at the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund, a non-profit organization created by the State of Vermont to help develop Vermont's sustainable agriculture, renewable energy, and forest product businesses. Visit <http://www.vsjf.org> and www.vtfoodatlas.com for more details.



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To learn about farmland leasing, to attend a workshop, or to obtain a copy of "A Landowner's Guide to Leasing Land for Farming" visit landforgood.org. To find a farmer or farmland visit newenglandfarmlandfinder.org and vermontlandlink.org. To learn more about Vermont's 10 year food system plan, visit vtfoodatlas.com. Additional article mentions include RAFFL: rutlandareafarmand-food.org; Radical Roots Farm: radicalrootsvt.com; Mighty Food Farm: mightyfoodfarm.com; and Quarry Hill Farm: quarryhillfarm.wordpress.com.



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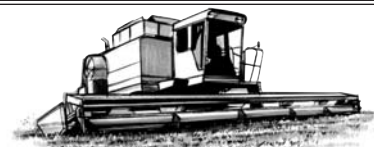
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NORTHEAST SARE SPOTLIGHT

Welcome to the Northeast SARE Spotlight! SARE (Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education) offers grants to farmers, educators, universities and communities that are working to make agriculture more sustainable — economically, environmentally, and socially. Learn about whether a SARE grant would be a good fit for you.

Taking a Butter Knife to Kefir Cheese

Rose Belforti of Finger Lakes Dexter Creamery received a second SARE grant to make her newly perfected kefir cheese recipe spreadable.

by Rachel Whiteheart

After Rose Marie Belforti's four daughters took off for college, she was left with an empty nest and an emerging interest in raising cattle in the countryside. Rose researched breeds and finally landed on the Dexter cow, a mini-cattle breed that can be used both for milk and meat. Out of this, the Finger Lakes Dexter Creamery was born.

Rose started out as a subsistence farmer, using Dexter cattle to generate only enough milk and meat to support her family. But, as the years passed and the farm grew (Rose jokes that "it seems like we put up a new barn every year"), Rose wanted to expand her farm's focus. She had always been a proponent of utilizing raw milk as much as possible. She had been producing kefir - a fermented drink made with raw milk and kefir grains which contains 30-50 varieties of living bacteria - since she brought home her

first cow. When Rose started to notice a surge of consumer interest in the positive health benefits of probiotic products, like kefir, inspiration took hold. In 2006, she received a SARE 'Farmer Grant' which supported the process of scaling up a home kefir recipe to a commercial cheese prototype (see article in Spring 2010 Small Farms Quarterly).

Kefir cheese also uses kefir grains to ferment milk, creating a probiotic "living" cheese. Rose says, "Kefir grains propagate naturally when immersed in milk, making them an ideal sustainable natural resource. As they propagate, one can either give them away, save them for later by freezing or drying, or simply eat them!" With the funding Rose received from SARE and the help of a Cornell faculty member, she developed a commercial kefir cheese recipe which she marketed to local stores and at the farmers market.

But Rose still wasn't satisfied; she wanted to expand her kefir cheese line with a new product. She decided to pursue another SARE grant, this time to refine her existing recipe to develop a recipe for a spreadable kefir cheese that adhered to USDA standards.

Healthy, Spreadable & Delicious

For her second SARE grant, Rose experimented with two main methods of creating a spreadable kefir cheese. While developing both of the methods, Rose had to adhere to USDA requirements that raw milk cheese must age for 60 days and that, at the end of that aging period, the cheese has a moisture content of 44 percent.



Rose's original kefir cheese, seen here, is a hit at the Ithaca Farmer's Market.

The first of Rose's methods involved using the recipe for kefir cheese that she had created for her first SARE grant, but instead of aging the cheese naturally, she vacuum-packed it (which helps keep the moisture content of the cheese as high as possible). After the required 60 days of aging, Rose blended together the vacuum-packed cheese and some natural rind-aged cheese to make the cheese as flavorful as possible.

The second method that Rose employed was much more hands-on; she started with a cheese making vat full of a raw milk and kefir culture brewed from kefir grains, and adjusted her recipe for a spreadable cheese as the cheese aged. Throughout the 60 days of aging, Rose carefully monitored the pH and moisture content of the cheese, adding ingredients such as Holbac (to encourage bacterial growth) and rennet (to acidify) as needed. She created several batches of cheese, tinkering around with the recipe each time, until she had a cheese that both adhered to the USDA's standards and tasted delectable.

Since developing the spreadable cheese, Rose has continued to craft her cheese line to perfection. She now offers a range of aged cheeses, including kefir Italian pasta cheese, kefir blue, peppercorn cheese, kefir tomato-garlic, kefir salad cheese and kefir wine companion. All offer a different combination of flavors and textures, but whatever the variety, Rose guarantees you'll taste a pleasant combination of pungent & tangy. The cheeses also can be fancied up for a gourmet meal or eaten as a plain snack. Rose advises, "eat them with fruit, melted on bread, grated, or take them on long walks or commutes for a wholesome uplifting snack!"

Meanwhile, Rose continues using her cheese and dairy practices to



challenge the dairy status quo and highlight the health value of raw unadulterated milk. Rose feels that the best outreach she can do to propagate the usage of raw milk is to, in her words, "put a product out there that other dairy producers can make too." She has already managed to spread word about how useful raw milk can be through customer interactions at the Ithaca Farmer's Market and through an open house she hosted at her farm to discuss the basics of kefir cheese and her newest kefir cheese recipe.

For more information, the exact recipe and process of both cheese making methods are available in Rose Belforti's final report, posted on the SARE website at <http://mysare.sare.org/mySARE/ProjectReport.aspx?do=viewRept&pn=FNE10-679&y=2010&t=1> (sare.org Project Reports Search Database project number "FNE10-679").

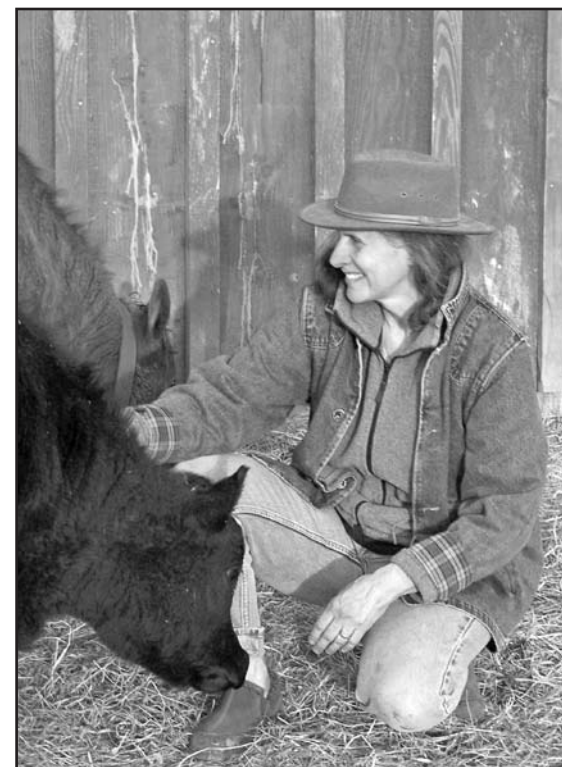
Rachel Whiteheart was a summer intern at the Cornell Small Farms Program during Summer 2012 and is now a senior Environmental Engineering major at Cornell University. She may be reached at rmw95@cornell.edu.



Dexter calves. Dexters are a very small breed of cattle originally from Ireland. They are tri-purpose, great for meat, milk and draft.



After starting the Finger Lakes Dexter Creamery, Rose Belforti decided she wanted to promote the usage of raw milk by generating kefir cheese recipes.



Rose is equally enthusiastic about Dexter cattle and the health benefits of kefir culture.

Photos by Rose Belforti

SARE offers sustainable agriculture grants, bulletins, books, an online events calendar and many other resources. Learn more about the Northeast SARE program by visiting www.nesare.org or by contacting Northeast SARE 655 Spear Street University of Vermont, Burlington VT 05405 Phone: 802-656-0471 Fax: 802-656-0500 E-mail: nesare@uvm.edu.

LOCAL FOODS & MARKETiNG**Cross Marketing****Enhance Your Business While Promoting Others**

by Melody Reynolds

Farmers Markets and Community Supported Agriculture are spreading like wild fire across the country. With so many small farms competing for the same direct marketing dollar, many farmers find themselves looking for something to distinguish them, to stand apart from the competition. Steven Carlson, from Fully Rooted in Rhode Island, suggests just the opposite. "Do not try to set yourself apart from others: include others and cross market." Carlson explains that Fully Rooted, a business that produces raw, cold-pressed juice from local fruits and vegetables, tries to tie farmers together with his product. He openly displays the farm names of products he has purchased from

other farmers to cross market. Carlson states, "This relationship between vendors has been what has made us successful."

Andrew Barden, from Barden's Family Orchard, has the booth directly across from Fully Rooted. As I was asking Barden how cross marketing is working for him, a customer came over who was directed from Fully Rooted. The customer had just tasted the juice and was told the Crispin Apple provided by Barden gave it the amazing taste. Barden just smiled and said, "I guess the question has been answered. Cross marketing works for everyone!"

Donnie Reynolds from Reynolds Barn encourages cross marketing by distributing recipes to customers that not only use his cheese but incorporate as many other ingredients found at the market as possible. Reynolds states, "If I give the customers more ideas on how to cook and use my product, the more I sell and the more others around me succeed."

Sampling is another great way to cross market, and is also a sure way to attract customers. Offering easy pick-up food often convinces the customer to stop, take a sample and give the vendor an opportunity to explain what they are tasting and how they can get more. Simple, quick techniques for cross marketing can include signage stating, "The bread we have sampled our cheese on comes from Seven Stars."

Lynn Williams from Seven Stars Bakery smiles and states, "The most wonderful thing about being a vendor at a farmers market is the camaraderie between vendors. Cross marketing only enhances the experience for everyone, customers and vendors alike." Seven Stars Bakery produces Artisan breads and happily offers their product to other vendors to use for sampling. They do not charge for this and only ask that the vendor displays a small sign letting the customer know where the bread came from. In return, Seven Stars uses many local products in their breads and not only states the ingredients but what farm the ingredient came from.

"We are featured in all of Seven Stars products," states Bonnie S. Kavanagh, RN/herbalist for Fairland Farm. Fairland Farm is a cranberry bog in Massachusetts that relies on cross marketing for their success. "I am proud to say we are on the menu in many Providence restaurants and the only cranberry that Providence Granola uses," states Kavanagh. "We give a shout out to all our customers on our website with links to their farms and businesses. Cross marketing works for me when customers walk by with a sample of Providence Granola and tell me how delicious my cranberries are," states Kavanagh.

Mary Haney, a volunteer at the Coastal Growers Market, states "Whatever we sample we sell more of. We get creative and combine the unusual for different tastes and find products that compliment each other. Products we would only sell a few of, sell out when we sample."

In the eat local promotions that are taking place, restaurants have also come full circle. Most restaurants now purchase local prod-

ucts and highlight the farm's name on the menu. Customers read the menu and then conversation starts about each farm. This menu, for the farmers and producers, serves as a form of free advertising and the restaurant gets noticed for using as many local producers as possible.

Small grocery stores have also started cross marketing and place signage near a product. Often times they also have a photo of the farm or farmer so the customer feels a solid connection to the locally sourced food. This once again creates conversation among customers and encourages them to seek out the farm for more products or to visit a farmers market and meet the farmer in person.

"The more we all cross market, the further our own advertising dollars go and the better our chances of survival in farming and markets will be," said Reynolds.

Melody Reynolds is Food and Marketing editor for Cornell Small Farms Program and Freelance Agricultural writer for Lee Publications and RI Farm Bureau. For more information on Cross Marketing, she can be reached at melodyreynoldsauthor@cox.net.



Andrew Barden from Barden Family Orchard selling his apples at the market after Fully Rooted sampled them.



Fully Rooted cross markets Farming Turtles Wheat Grass.



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Market table displaying samples from three different farms.

Photos by Melody Reynolds

LOCAL FOOD & MARKETING**Reaching Underserved Communities with CSAs***When farmers and organizations work together, feeding underserved residents healthy food can be rewarding for all*

by Rebecca Heller-Steinberg

Food insecure households — those with limited food dollars and/or difficulty accessing healthy foods because of location or transportation — are typically not served by CSAs. This is understandable, since food insecure households are not a particularly lucrative market. Even for farmers who want to serve such an audience, the challenges are not insignificant. However, as the popularity of local food has grown, as well as awareness about food insecurity, some farmers and organizations are coming up with ways to overcome these challenges.

Binghamton Farm Share (BFS) is a pilot program seeking to improve food access for local residents as well as to support area farmers through a modified CSA format. The project was launched in June 2013 by a unique partnership of community organizations (see side bar).

Binghamton Farm Share partnered with local CSA farms to provide weekly shares to area residents. Although BFS is targeted to food insecure individuals, it is open to anyone. Two of the program distribution locations (a school and a community center at a subsidized housing complex) are on the north side of Binghamton, a neighborhood with limited access to healthy, affordable food due to a lack of a supermarket. BFS has two distribution locations in other neighborhoods too, including one at a church.

Farms partnering with BFS grow, harvest, and package the shares, then transport them to a central location where BFS distributes them to other sites. BFS does the majority of marketing, staffs distribution sites, deals with customer communication and paperwork, and collects and processes payments. The program operated from June through mid-November, with members allowed to join or drop at any time as long as shares were available.

Several challenges were addressed successfully in the first year including affordability, shareholders failing to pick up shares or

dropping out of the program, how to sell CSA shares to customers unfamiliar with them, and ensuring shares were being used. Other issues were identified for which the program is still seeking solutions (such as needing a better shareholder tracking system).

To address the issue of affordability, BFS offered shareholders a choice of several different sizes and prices of shares. Members could pay on a weekly, biweekly, or monthly basis with cash, check, or SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program aka food stamps). Approximately one third of customers used EBT for payment at least once. Programs planning to accept EBT payments would be wise to apply to the USDA many months in advance, as well as to consider that businesses can only accept SNAP payments at the time when food is received by the customer, whereas a non-profit organization can accept SNAP payments up to 14 days in advance.

BFS also offered a dollar for dollar match for all payments made by shareholders who received SNAP benefits. Matching funds were provided by the City of Binghamton from Community Development Block Grant funds and the United Way of Broome County. Money was also raised for a Share Bank, which enabled members to draw from it to pay for their weekly share up to two times during the season if they could not afford it on a particular week or failed to pick it up. Shareholders were encouraged to pay back into the Bank if possible to allow more people to use it.

Marketing was also a challenge. BFS used the term "farm share" instead of CSA because it is more self-explanatory. Outreach focused on the freshness of the food, health benefits, affordability, and convenient pick-up locations. The messaging was chosen based on limited focus groups conducted before the program began. All marketing materials prominently stated that the program accepted SNAP and the availability of matching funds. The most success-



A large share from Early Morning Farm — \$24/week for 3/4 bushel.

ful methods of outreach were face-to-face outreach at events and hearing about the program through another community organization. Marketing was also done through fliers, going door-to-door, local media coverage, and Facebook.

Since the program was targeting community members who were unfamiliar with CSAs, it was important to provide education on how to use the produce in the shares. Staff and volunteers met with each share recipient — at every pick-up — to review items in the box, provide cooking tips for any new items, and answer questions. Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) offered samples of prepared dishes at one distribution site per week and BFS provided printed recipes at all sites. Cooking suggestions and recipes were also shared via email and Facebook.

Although the program is primarily intended to increase food access, a secondary goal is to support local farmers. Though programs like this offer a way for CSA farmers to reach new markets and sell more shares, it is important that the motivation for participating is not solely financial, but also a strong belief in increasing access to healthy, affordable food. Farmers are often expected to be actively engaged in the program. BFS highly values farmer participation and feedback and believes it is essential for farmers to be involved in shaping the program, including providing input about program structure.

A program like this could be a great opportunity for a new CSA farmer in that much of the logistics are handled by the program. Program grants may also include money for technical assistance to farmers involved in

the program. BFS helped one farm that was new to CSA develop their share sizing and pricing. However, all farmers need to consider the ways in which such programs differ from a typical CSA and whether that will work for them. Farmers should decide the minimum number of shares they need to sell as well as designating a maximum number of shares sold through such a program. This can ensure that the farmer has a good balance between shares paid up front and those paid throughout the season. Farmers also need to decide whether they will accept new sign-ups throughout the season. Doing so can be an advantage, as programs can continue to recruit new members to offset shareholders who drop out, but can also make crop planning tricky.

Binghamton Farm Share and other programs focusing on food access can greatly improve the quality and quantity of healthy, affordable food available to more residents of our communities while also opening up new markets and increasing share sales for CSA farmers. The logistics of doing so are more complex than a regular CSA, but farmers and organizations working together can overcome the challenges to make it rewarding for all.

For more information on Binghamton Farm Share, visit www.vinesgardens.org/farmshare or www.facebook.com/BinghamtonFarmShare or contact farmshare@vinesgardens.org.

Rebecca Heller-Steinberg is a local food entrepreneur and advocate and the coordinator of Binghamton Farm Share.



A single share from the Binghamton Urban Farm — \$12/week for an average of five items.
Photos by Rebecca Heller-Steinberg

Community Organizations Supporting Binghamton Farm Share

- Volunteers Improving Neighborhood Environments (VINES)
- Healthy Lifestyles Coalition
- United Way of Broome County (UW)
- Cornell Cooperative Extension of Broome County (CCE)
- Center for Agricultural Development and Entrepreneurship (CADE)

Funding for the first season of BFS came from a New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets FreshConnect grant, with some initial funding provided by Winrock International. Similar programs get funding from a variety of sources, including contributions from shareholders and farmers, and fundraising dinners and events.

STEWARDSHIP & NATURE

Orb Weaver Farm

Marjorie Susman and Marian Pollack pioneered the artisanal cheese making movement.

by John Thurgood

The cyclical rhythm of nature is the foundation that supports Marjorie Susman and Marian Pollack of Orb Weaver Farm. Like the cyclical pattern of a spider's web, Orb Weaver farm engages the seasonal activities on the farm. In the words of Marjorie "sowing, harvesting and enriching the soil to grow new pastures and gardens season after season."

Starting over 30 years ago in the Town of Monkton, VT, Marjorie and Marian began farming and soon purchased a herd of Jersey cattle to set out to make cheese. When they began producing cheese they were working out of the mainstream because at that time there were only a handful of people making artisan cheese on the farm. For Marjorie and Marian it seemed to be just the right enterprise. They began

learning about cheese making by participating in a workshop given by Ricki Carroll of New England Cheese Making, and began preparing cheese in their kitchen.

Marian and Marjorie were never concerned about the type of cheese they were making; rather, they created their own recipe for cheese that, as Marjorie put it, is "good tasting, kid friendly, something just right for making macaroni and cheese." To be more specific, their cheese is something in between Havarti and Colby. Their aged cheese she likened to a Gruyere.

They have seven cows that are milked twice each day from November through May. These seven cows provide about 50 pounds of milk per cow, per day. From the milk the two cheese makers craft 7,000 pounds of artisan cheese each season. Their cheese is truly outstanding, as evidenced by their

receiving numerous national and international awards. In 1989, Orb Weaver farm was presented the Innovative Farmer of the Year Award by "Country Folks."

The cows are honored for their work and are given names based on family themes and nicknames. As the organic vegetable enterprise gears up each season, the cows are set out to pasture. When the animals reach the end of their productive lives they aren't sent to the auction barn. "We wouldn't want



Jersey cows of Orb Weaver Farm.
Photo by Marjorie Susman

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Marjorie and Marian on a beautiful summer's day.

Photo by John Thurgood



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to put them through that humiliation," Marjorie said. Orb Weaver cows are sent to a local butcher house, and their meat is donated to H.O.P.E. food shelf in Middlebury.

The vegetable portion of the farm consists of a wide variety of crops including just about everything from lettuce and shallots, to root crops and artichokes. Marian related, "Tomatoes are probably our favorite crop. First of all, a tomato grown out of doors tastes like a tomato should. Bright and juicy, with the perfect balance of sweet and tart."

The culture of the tomato plant to Orb Weaver farm is "... a thing of great beauty. From planting, to weaving or trellising it resembles a beautiful dance..."

For 33 years the farm has sold its produce to the Middlebury Natural Foods Coop. They meet with the Coop manager each winter to scope out what produce the Coop would like to offer. "It's a wonderful relationship. The Coop takes great pride in promoting local growers, and we in turn work to give them produce that shines in their display case," said Marjorie.

The combination of the livestock and veg-

etable enterprises has served to enhance the farm's productivity and resiliency. The animals provide for a mix of manure and bedding material that is stacked on a concrete storage pad, then, is composted. When applied to the vegetable beds, the compost feeds the biological community above and below the soil surface, leading to a healthy soil ecosystem. The healthy soil provides a range of macro and micronutrients that are used by the plants, leading to nutritious produce. Marian and Marjorie have indeed developed an elaborate and beautiful web.

From a functional side, the farm has seen its share of droughts and wet seasons, and these seem to be on the increase in recent years. Having a diverse set of crops and fostering healthy soil adds resiliency and minimizes effects of the weather on their operation.

As they approached retirement, Marjorie and Marian were concerned about the future of the land they had devoted their lives to nurturing. To this end, they contacted the Vermont Land Trust and last year they sold a conservation easement, forever protecting the land from development. The Vermont Land Trust worked in collaboration with numerous other funding sources, including the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service - Farm and Ranchland Protection Program, the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board and the Town of Monkton's Agricultural and Natural Areas Committee.

The story doesn't end here. Last fall, Marjorie and Marian invested part of the



Marjorie cutting the curd.

Photo by Marjorie Susman

monies they received from selling the easement to refurbishing the barn. The main purpose was to shore up the facility for future generations. The floor plan was kept open "so the next owners' can do with it what they wish." In addition, "there is a huge usable space for the cows to loll around in."

If you would like to purchase Orb Weaver Farm cheese or would like to learn more about Orb Weaver farm, visit their website at: www.orbweaverfarm.com.

More information on the Farm and Ranchland protection program can be found at: www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/easements/farmranch. Vermont Land Trust can be found at www.vlt.org.

John Thurgood is District Conservationist for the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Central Zone, Vermont.



The cheese cave at Orb Weaver Farm.

Photo by Marjorie Susman



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