

In Her Boots Workshop



Diversification 101: CSAs, cover crops, currants and more!

Christensen Farm | Browntown, Wis. | Friday, July 31, 2015

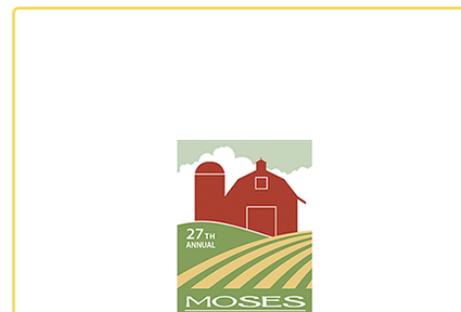
“Sometimes you just simply need to try something, see how it works or not and tweak as you go,” shared Katy Dickson of Christensen Farm during the *In Her Boots: Sustainable Agriculture For Women, by Women* workshop at her farm. Her statement sums up the mantra of Christensen Farm: Keep trying new things, experimenting and think creatively as you go while remaining true to your values. In Katy’s case, two of her core values are bringing healthy food to her rural community and integrating family into her operation.



Growing a Rural CSA

Katy successfully built the first CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) with regular drop-off points in her local community of Monroe, Wis., a typical rural town of around 10,000 people.

“Monroe is like a lot of rural communities in that there isn’t a strong demand of organic produce nor a clientele willing to pay a premium,” Katy explained. She drummed up support and paying customers not through slick marketing or social media but the old



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fashioned way—face-to-face education.

“I asked community groups like the Women’s Club if they would be interested in a presentation about CSA and the importance of local food and just about everyone said yes,” she said. “I created a Powerpoint about CSA in general, not just my farm. I even included other area CSA farms in my resource list.”

Another key factor in Katy’s local CSA success involved a partnership with the Monroe Clinic, one of the largest employers in the area. Via the Monroe Clinic’s insurance program at the time, the clinic could offer a financial incentive for employees to join the CSA as well as inviting Katy to use the clinic parking lot for her Thursday drop-off location.



Integrating Family

Katy lives next door to her parents and the farm where she grew up. Living next door to her parents has been very helpful, since her father is good at finding or modifying scale-appropriate equipment, and both grandparents have provided childcare for Katy’s three young kids.

“From a young age on, our kids held roles and active responsibilities on the farm,” Katy shared. “My husband, Mark, and I want them to feel a part of this operation and love the farm as much as we do, but not force the place on them. Our kids particularly enjoy helping at the farmers’ market and have really developed strong social and sales skills via talking to customers.”

Katy was very open in sharing her challenges and successes as we toured her fields, vegetable processing area and moveable poultry houses. Katy has worked to build a farm that meets her passion for what she wants to produce, as well as keep both her small town and urban customers happy. She continues to learn as she develops perennial fruit plantings, controls erosion on hilly fields used for annual vegetables and poultry pasture, and improves efficiencies in production and post-harvest handling.

For more on farmer Katy, check out [this profile from Edible Madison](#).

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