Joel Salatin to Keynote 2002 NOFA Summer Conference
by Steve Lorenz

It hasn’t been that long since summer, but already the NOFA Summer Conference Committee is getting its act together for next year. We have read what all you conference-goers had to say about the 2001 act, and we are pleased to say that overall your comments were very positive—that makes our work so satisfying. There are, however, several areas in which we think we can improve, and we plan to address those at the 2002 event.

One aspect that people voiced complaints about was the newest one, the food vendors. Some conference-goers lamented the loss of NOFA Nibbles. Alas, the nibbles arrangement didn’t bring back enough for those who agreed to take it on, so those days are past. We, as a committee—and Bernard Kirchner as an individual—will redouble our efforts to get more vendors with a greater variety of food and drink for next year.

We are also determined to make the fair more exciting. New fair czar Michael Faber is brainstorming as we speak; as a committee we’ve already thought of having some or all of these events: a parade, more games, more demonstrations, and live entertainment.

Judging by the overwhelming majority of high marks, conference goers were quite pleased with this year’s dining hall experience. We plan on working hard to create an exciting menu for summer 2002 as well. This includes a local meal in which we will invest more money and effort to inscribe the freshest, “most local” provisions. We look forward to exploring this territory and promoting these eating habits on a grander scale. Additionally, after reading through your evaluations, we will offer organic brown rice at every meal and do a better job labeling the entrees. Any other suggestions that were not expressed via the conference evaluation forms can be directed to Dre Rawlings at drechris@crocker.com. Your input is always welcome additions to the committee as we continue to flesh out the 2002 conference at meetings over the coming months. Watch this space for more information about the conference, keynote Joel Salatin, and for the logo by the never-disappointing Chris Rawlings.

Joel Salatin, who farms fulltime in Virginia’s Shenandoah Valley, will keynote the 2002 NOFA Summer Conference. Salatin believes that family-scale farming must produce an income attractive enough to bring young people to the profession. On his own farm he has shown that this is possible. Joel also has written numerous articles in farming journals, holds a B.A. in English, and has written four books, including “Family Friendly Farming,” the conference starts. Titled “Whole Farm Planning,” it will cover his integrated systems approach to farming using sheep, poultry, rabbits, cattle and hogs with his orchards, small fruit and vegetable gardens. Limited to 100-200 participants, this pre-conference, if successful, may become a fixture of the NOFA Summer Conference.

January is workshop selection time. So if you have a workshop that you would like to offer, or know of someone whom you would like to see present, or if you have a topic you want to see a program on, please contact Julie Rawson by December 31, 2001, at (978) 355-2853 or jackkitt@aol.com or 411 Sheldon Road, Barre, MA 01005. Presenters receive free conference registration, $25 and two meals. This year, in response to presenter requests, we will make presenter meals transferable to another registered participant.

Julie is looking for help on the following adult workshop topics: mushrooms, wild and cultivated plant identification, biodynamics, permaculture, mad cow disease, grain growing, lifestyle changes from city to farm, land use history in US, all aspects of greenhouse production, farm equipment, cheese making, animal nutrition, animal health, community gardens, crafts and practical skills hands on workshops of all types, single crop advanced level workshops. The list goes on...

Similarly, Children’s Conference coordinators Justine Johnson and myself, Steve Lorenz, are seeking new ideas for children’s workshops. We are also looking for energetic, engaging people to lead these workshops. Be creative: What would interest and inform the young minds, hearts, and hands who are the future of NOFA? If you have an idea for a workshop—even if you don’t want to lead it—contact us at (413) 527-1920 or johnsonlorenz@charter.net.

Elaine Peterson, former registration queen and crowned as such at the last conference, is new to the advertising, exhibits and sponsor coordinator position and says she will of course pursue “our steadfast and loyal exhibitors,” but she’s also seeking some fresh new looks for our exhibits. In particular she is interested in farm tools/implements/equipment, mushroom sales, and ecological clothing. If anyone has any ideas or requests for types of exhibits, please contact her at khollow@worldnet.att.net or (978) 928-4707.

Taking over for Elaine at the registration position will be Audrey and Dennis Cronin. They hope to be ready for the onslaught of registrants when the weather turns warm again. Other positions which are in new hands are Helping Hands coordinator, filled by Barbara Cohen; Publications, which will be handled by Justine Johnson and Steve Lorenz, and Audio-Visual and Food Donations, which will be handled by committee newcomers Nate and Kim Schildbach. They and their children will be very welcome additions to the committee as we continue to flush out the 2002 conference at meetings over the coming months. Watch this space for more information about the conference, keynote Joel Salatin, and for the logo by the never-disappointing Chris Rawlings.

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The family farm has been an icon of American life for a long time. No less a luminary than Thomas Jefferson believed that the economic independence and community spirit created by life as a ‘ yeoman farmer ’ would be the guaran-
tor of liberty and democracy in what would otherwise be a reckless political gamble.

But while America originated as an agrarian republic, the close of the frontier, the growth of mechanized, industrial agriculture and the advent of cheap shipping has made it hard for family-scale farming to remain viable. As the reality of family farming has become more and more difficult over the last couple of generations, its practice has placed more and more stress on the key social institution holding it together and making it possible — the family.

In this issue we examine the impact of family farming on the family. Ridicule for farm kids, inadequate financial returns, differences between spouses in dedication to farming, a de-

The Natural Farmer
Needs You!

The Natural Farmer is the newspaper of the North-
est Organic Farming Association (NOFA). All members receive a subscription as part of their dues, and others may subscribe for $10 (in the US) or $18 outside the US. It is published four times a year at 411 Sheldon Rd., Barre, MA 01005. The editors are Jack Kittredge and Julie Rawson, but most of the material is either written by members or summar-
ized by us from information people send us.

Advertise in
The Natural Farmer

Advertisements not only bring in TNF revenue, which means less must come from membership dues, they also make a paper interesting and helpful to those looking for specific goods or services. We carry 2 kinds of ads:

The NOFA Exchange - this is a free bulletin board service for NOFA members and TNF subscribers. Send in up to 100 words (business or personal) and we’ll print it free in the next issue. Include a price (if selling) and an address or phone number so readers can contact you directly. If you’re not a NOFA member, you can still send in an ad - just send 5$ along too! Send NOFA Exchange ads directly to The Natural Farmer, 411 Sheldon Rd., Barre, MA 01005 or (preferably) E-mail to JACKKITT@AOL.COM

Display Ads - this is for those offering products or services on a regular basis! You can get real attention with display ads. Send camera ready copy to Justine Johnson, 37 Cherry St., Easthampton, MA 01027 and enclose a check for the appropriate size. The sizes and rates are:

Full page (7 1/2” tall by 10” wide) $240
Half page (7 1/2” tall by 5” wide) $125
One-third page (7 1/2” tall by 6 1/2” wide) $85
One-quarter page (7 1/2” tall by 4 7/8” wide) $65
One-sixth page (7 1/2” tall by 3 1/8” wide), or (3 3/4” tall by 6 1/2” wide) $45
Business card size (1 1/2” tall by 3 1/8” wide) $12

Note: These prices are for camera ready copy. If you want any changes we will be glad to make them - or to type set a display ad for you - for 10$ extra. Just send us the text, any graphics, and a sketch of how you want it to look. Include a check for the space charge plus 10$.

Frequency discounts: if you buy space in several issues you can qualify for substantial discounts off these rates. Pay for two consecutive issues and get 10% off each, pay for 3 and get 20% off, or pay for 4 and get 25% off. An ad in the NOFA Summer Conference Program Book counts as a TNF ad for purposes of this discount.

Deadlines: We should receive your ad copy one month before the publication date of each issue. The deadlines are:
January 31 for the Spring issue
April 30 for the Summer issue
July 31 for the Fall issue
October 31 for the Winter issue

Contact for Display Ads: Send display ads with payment to our advertising manager, Justine Johnson at 37 Cherry St., Easthampton, MA 01027. If you have questions, or want to reserve space, contact Justine at (413) 527-1920 or johnsonlorenz@charter.net.

Disclaimer: The Natural Farmer cannot investigate the claims of advertisers and we don’t vouch for anything advertised here. Readers are expected to exercise due caution when inquiring about any product or service. Different NOFA chapters have different standards for fertilizers, for instance, and a product acceptable in one state may be prohibited in another. Please check with your chapter when in doubt. Remember, however, that advertisers are helping support the paper and, when appropriate, please support them.
New York Greenmarkets Recovering. Manhattan has an extensive network of Greenmarkets which was disrupted by the September 11 attacks. Two of the markets were at the World Trade Center, where 18 farmers were actually set up at the time of the tragedy. Another four markets were in restricted areas and were closed by the city. Altogether over 50 farmers lost an estimated $600,000 — some of that in direct losses of trucks, tables, tents and produce destroyed when the towers collapsed, and the rest in lost income. The Greenmarket organization is helping farmers find new areas of the city in which to set up. A fund has been established to help in this relief effort. Farmers reported possessions lost in the attacks. It is the Fund for the WTC Greenmarket Farmers, c/o the Farmers Market Federation of New York, 2100 Park St., Syracuse, NY 13208. source: Growing for Market, October, 2001

From Farm to Table Too Far! A new study of our food system finds that the average pound of fresh produce distributed year-round through the Jessup Maryland produce terminal traveled 1685.5 miles from the state of origin. Fruits traveled 2416 miles and vegetables 1596 miles. The top producing states were California at 29% of the produce total, Florida at 14%, Idaho at 5.2% and Washington at 4%. Produce from the eastern states region (North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, New Jersey and Pennsylvania) comprised 4% of the total. source: Growing for Market, October, 2001

Irradiated Beef Sales Halted. Over 80 grocery stores and meat markets in Florida and Wisconsin have discontinued selling irradiated ground beef. The test market failure convinced meat packer Eppmank to drop the line altogether. “There’s been absolutely no customer acceptance,” explains a spokesman for the Wisconsin Pick ‘n Save super-markets, explaining why they have pulled the product from their shelves. The chain began offering irradiated beef patties after a young child died last year from eating an undercooked E. coli contaminated hamburger. source: New Connections, Fall, 2001 and Acres, USA, November, 2001

FFA Rule Threatens Hatchery Shipments. A Federal Aviation Administration ruling that airlines working for the post office may refuse to deliver live animals (except bees, frogs, crickets and fish) has resulted in airlines refusing to deliver live baby chicks and turkey poults. Farmers too far from a hatchery for ground shipment are threatened by this rule. Sen. Russell Feingold has filed legislation (S-1397) to overturn the ruling. For an update on this, contact Judith Kleinberg with the Northeast Pastured Poultry Association (518) 371-5592. source: New Connections, Fall, 2001

Bayer Acquires Aventis CropScience. The agricultural chemical seed business consolidates even more with the Bayer purchase of the Aventis seed division. The price was $6.7 billion plus assumption of debt, and should lead to combines sales in the range of $6 billion, second only to market leader Syngenta. One interesting feature of the deal is the exclusion of the StarLink technology and related liabilities, which will remain with Aventis. Anti-trust authorities still must approve the purchase. source: The Fruit Growers News, November, 2001

Twin Cities Challenge GE Foods. Minneapolis on August 25, 2000 and St. Paul on August 1, 2001 passed resolutions calling the safety of GE foods into question, and urging rigorous federal testing and labeling of such foods. In addition, they urged their school districts to investigate offering organic foods as part of their food service programs. source: Acres, USA, November, 2001

Dept. of Energy Plans to Sell Us Nuclear Waste. Under a DOE plan, radioactive waste from nuclear reactors and weapons complexes would be recycled in trace amounts into scrap metal, from which consumer products like lawn chairs, zippers, braces and hip replacements could be made. By recycling the scrap the DOE hopes to avoid the need for long-term waste storage. Critics say the plan is ridiculous. source: Acres, USA, November, 2001

World Organic Industry Thriving. An international study has found that total land area in organic production is 15.8 million hectares (a hectare is about 2.5 acres) with the most in Australia (7.5 million) and Argentina coming second (3.2 million). The 12 European Union countries together represent 3.7 million hectares and North America more than 1 million. Tiny Liechtenstein has the highest percent of land in organic farming (18 percent) with Austria (8.4%), Switzerland (7.9%) and Finland (6.8%) next. Global retail sales for organic products reached $20 billion in 1999, with the US first ($4.2 billion), Germany ($1.8 billion) and Japan ($1.2 billion) in the lead. source: Acres, USA, November, 2001


FAA Rule Threatens Hatchery Shipments. A Federal Aviation Administration ruling that airlines working for the post office may refuse to deliver live animals (except bees, frogs, crickets and fish) has resulted in airlines refusing to deliver live baby chicks and turkey poults. Farmers too far from a hatchery for ground shipment are threatened by this rule. Sen. Russell Feingold has filed legislation (S-1397) to overturn the ruling. For an update on this, contact Judith Kleinberg with the Northeast Pastured Poultry Association (518) 371-5592. source: New Connections, Fall, 2001

农民的未来

东北部有机奶业协议于2001年10月31日到期。

这份协议一旦失效，将对美国东北部的乳制品生产商造成巨大影响。牛奶价格可能下降，农民的收入可能会减少。这份协议旨在保护乳制品生产商的价格稳定，从而保证乳制品价格的稳定。

这是一份由纽约、新英格兰、安大略省和宾夕法尼亚州奶农共同签署的协议。它要求乳制品生产商在奶价低于一定水平时，必须支付给奶农一定的补偿。这份协议的失效可能会对农民产生严重影响。

在东北部地区，有48个牛奶合作社参与了这份协议。农民们希望通过这份协议来保护他们的利益。然而，农民们担心这份协议的失效可能会对他们的收入产生影响。

农民们希望政府能够采取措施来保护他们的利益。他们认为，这份协议的失效将会对农民产生严重影响。农民们希望政府能够采取措施来保护他们的利益。他们认为，这份协议的失效将会对农民产生严重影响。农民们希望政府能够采取措施来保护他们的利益。他们认为，这份协议的失效将会对农民产生严重影响。农民们希望政府能够采取措施来保护他们的利益。他们认为，这份协议的失效将会对农民产生严重影响。农民们希望政府能够采取措施来保护他们的利益。他们认为，这份协议的失效将会对农民产生严重影响。农民们希望政府能够采取措施来保护他们的利益。他们认为，这份协议的失效将会对农民产生严重影响。农民们希望政府能够采取措施来保护他们的利益。他们认为，这份协议的失效将会对农民产生严重影响。农民们希望政府能够采取措施来保护他们的利益。他们认为，这份协议的失效将会对农民产生严重影响。农民们希望政府能够采取措施来保护他们的利益。他们认为，这份协议的失效将会对农民产生严重影响。农民们希望政府能够采取措施来保护他们的利益。他们认为，这份协议的失效将会对农民产生严重影响。农民们希望政府能够采取措施来保护他们的利益。他们认为，这份协议的失效将会对农民产生严重影响。农民们希望政府能够采取措施来保护他们的利益。他们认为，这份协议的失效将会对农民产生严重影响。农民们希望政府能够采取措施来保护他们的利益。他们认为，这份协议的失效将会对农民产生严重影响。农民们希望政府能够采取措施来保护他们的利益。他们认为，这份协议的失效将会对农民产生严重影响。农民们希望政府能够采取措施来保护他们的利益。他们认为，这份协议的失效将会对农民产生严重影响。农民们希望政府能够采取措施来保护他们的利益。他们认为，这份协议的失效将会对农民产生严重影响。农民们希望政府能够采取措施来保护他们的利益。他们认为，这份协议的失效将会对农民产生严重影响。农民们希望政府能够采取措施来保护他们的利益。他们认为，这份协议的失效将会对农民产生严重影响。农民们希望政府能够采取措施来保护他们的利益。他们认为，这份协议的失效将会对农民产生严重影响。农民们希望政府能够采取措施来保护他们的利益。他们认为，这份协议的失效将会对农民产生严重影响。农民们希望政府能够采取措施来保护他们的利益。他们认为，这份协议的失效将会对农民产生严重影响。农民们希望政府能够采取措施来保护他们的利益。他们认为，这份协议的失效将会对农民产生严重影响。农民们希望政府能够采取措施来保护他们的利益。他们认为，这份协议的失效将会对农民产生严重影响。农民们希望政府能够采取措施来保护他们的利益。他们认为，这份协议的失效将会对农民产生严重影响。农民们希望政府能够采取措施来保护他们的利益。他们认为，这份协议的失效将会对农民产生严重影响。农民们希望政府能够采取措施来保护他们的利益。他们认为，这份协议的失效将会对农民产生严重影响。农民们希望政府能够采取措施来保护他们的利益。他们认为，这份协议的失效将会对农民产生严重影响。农民们希望政府能够采取措施来保护他们的利益。他们认为，这份协议的失效将会对农民产生严重影响。农民们希望政府能够采取措施来保护他们的利益。他们认为，这份协议的失效将会对农民产生严重影响。农民们希望政府能够采取措施来保护他们的利益。他们认为，这份协议的失效将会对农民产生严重影响。农民们希望政府能够采取措施来保护他们的利益。他们认为，这份协议的失效将会对农民产生严重影响。农民们希望政府能够采取措施来保护他们的利益。他们认为，这份协议的失效将会对农民产生严重影响。农民们希望政府能够采取措施来保护他们的利益。他们认为，这份协议的失效将会对农民产生严重影响。农民们希望政府能够采取措施来保护他们的利益。他们认为，这份协议的失效将会对农民产生严重影响。农民们希望政府能够采取措施来保护他们的利益。他们认为，这份协议的失效将会对农民产生严重影响。农民们希望政府能够采取措施来保护他们的利益。他们认为，这份协议的失效将会对农民产生严重影响。农民们希望政府能够采取措施来保护他们的利益。他们认为，这份协议的失效将会对农民产生严重影响。农民们希望政府能够采取措施来保护他们的利益。他们认为，这份协议的失效将会对农民产生严重影响。农民们希望政府能够采取措施来保护他们的利益。他们认为，这份协议的失效将会对农民产生严重影响。农民们希望政府能够采取措施来保护他们的利益。他们认为，这份协议的失效将会对农民产生严重影响。农民们希望政府能够采取措施来保护他们的利益。他们认为，这份协议的失效将会对农民产生严重影响。农民们希望政府能够采取措施来保护他们的利益。他们认为，这份协议的失效将会对农民产生严重影响。农民们希望政府能够采取措施来保护他们的利益。他们认为，这份协议的失效将会对农民产生严重影响。农
Apprenticeship Wanted - Native of India is seeking a 6-10 month organic farm apprenticeship in the US. Trained in Japan on organic farming techniques and composting methods, graduate in agricultural science. Room, board and stipend required. Please contact me Chandrappa Gangaiah, chandrappa_2000in@yahoo.co.in

2002 Farm Manager needed for Waltham Fields Community Farm (5 acres, occupying the old Waltham Field Station) — growing produce by organic methods for food pantries & meal programs, lots of volunteers (schools, synagogues, individuals), supported by CSA (plus grants), also informal farmstand. Write letter of interest with resume to smiller@massaudubon.org, fax 781-259-7941.

Massachusetts Audubon Society’s Drumlin Farm is looking for a highly motivated, organized, creative person to be our Education Manager. Qualified applicants must have excellent knowledge and experience in environmental education, sustainable agriculture methods and Massachusetts state education requirements. For a complete job description and to apply contact Stacy Miller, Drumlin Farm, South Great Road, Lincoln, MA 01773, 781-259-9506, smith@massaudubon.org, fax 781-259-7941.

Herb Pharm offers an HerbCulture Work/Study Program on our certified organic farm in southern Oregon. Program runs March 25th through July 19th. Work includes cultivation and harvest of medicinal herbs in exchange for classes involving many aspects of organic farming and herbalism. Must be prepared for hard work. No monetary fee. Communal housing provided. For application write: Work/Study, Herb Pharm, PO Box 116, Williams, OR, 97544. Email workstudy@herb-pharm.com or phone (541) 846-9121.

Wanted: upstate NY gardeners and farmers who are close enough to use a Boonville/Port Leyden site for a Bulk Order delivery. Call Lynn at 315-942-4218, or email lynnk@usadatanet.net Let’s get a bulk order going for the north country! I need to know how many are interested and what you want to see on the order.

Transgenic Seed Development Very Costly. In addition to threatening human health and the environment, it turns out that genetically engineered seed is far more expensive than traditional breeding. In a paper published by the American Seed Trade Association, researchers argue that using corn varieties from Central and South America and traditional breeding techniques can result in faster, cheaper development of vigorous new inbred lines — the parents of hybrids — than transgenic approaches. source: The Land Report, Summer, 2001

Grower’s Assistants needed for a 21 acre farm site outside of Boston. Individuals should have experience and a desire to be involved in the growing, marketing, and distributing of organic vegetables to homeless shelters, soup kitchens, CSA, and farmers’ markets. This is a Full time position from April-November, 2002. Worker’s compensation. $375 per week. Send resume and cover letter to Tammy Texeria, The Food Project, P.O. Box 256165, Dorchester, MA 02125 or visit our website at www.thefoodproject.org

Assistant Farm Manager wanted for 2002 season. Ol’Turtle Farm, 18 acre organically managed diversified vegetable farm looking for an energetic person eager to take on shared responsibility for the management of the farm and CSA. Field work and tractor experience necessary. Living space, farm vegetables, workman’s comp and salary. Contact Eileen, Ol’Turtle Farm, 385 East St., Easthampton, MA 01027 413-527-9122 olturtle@javananet.com

Apprentice position available for 2002 season. Ol’Turtle Farm looking for an apprentice seriously considering organic farming as a life. Will be involved in all aspects of the farm’s operation with on the job training and more formal educational experiences in CRAFT. Season runs April to November. Living space, farm vegetables and stipend. Contact Eileen, Ol’Turtle Farm, 385 East St., Easthampton, MA 01027 413-527-9122 olturtle@javananet.com

Apprentice position available for the 2002 season. For over 30 years George Hall has been farming organically. Come learn greenhouse work, CSA, farmers’ market, retail deliveries, farmstand, beekeneping, and organic farming methods. We also have an extensive herb garden. We provide rustic housing, stipend, and veggies from the farm. Five interns are wanted for year 2002, April-October (flexible). (Don’t be alarmed by ogre-like voice on the telephone.) Contact George Hall at 180 Old Farms Rd., Simsbury, CT 06070. (860) 638-9297 e mail: georgehallogre@aol.com

Rodale Kills Organic Gardening Magazine. In a move many of it’s 600,000 readers attributed to advertising revenue issues, Rodale Press killed it’s flagship magazine and split the readership between two new ones. OG, with a circulation of 350,000, is the same size and paper as the old magazine, but with fewer pages, less color photography and more oldolithographs. Editor John Grogan calls it a “back to basics” publication without the trendy lifestyle stories. Those (pimier) issue had stories on celebrity restaurateurs, organic cacao, yoga, Vermont travel and tree peonies), plus the flashy ads are in Organic Style, with a circulation of 400,000. source: Growing for Market, September, 2001

Blow Your Own Horn!

Positions are available at Red Fire Farm, in Granby, MA, for the 2002 growing season. The farm, recently purchased by Ryan Voiland, is an expanding operation that includes the growing of high quality certified organic vegetables, berries, tree fruits, flowers and bedding plants. The farm has a 70 acre land base, with about 15-20 acres of vegetables in 2002. Markets consist of two farm stands, CSA, farmers market, and wholesale. Positions include: Assistant Grower, Weed Manager, Cut Flower Manager, and a general Intern. Housing is available in the farmhouse for four employees. Contact Ryan for additional information at (413) 467-7645.

Farm Educator (FE) position available January 2002 at The Morris Farm in Wiscasset, Maine. The Morris Farm is a non-profit educational farm that hosts various educational programs throughout the
(continued from previous page) year. The FE will work with all aspects of the farm, including the dairy cattle, pastures, poultry, garden, greenhouse, raspberry patch, and apple orchard. Equally as important, the FE will interact well and willingly with the public and participate in educational programming. Please contact The Morris Farm, P.O. Box 136, Wiscasset, ME 04578 phone (207) 882-4080, morrisfarm@morrisfarm.org for more information.

Edible Soybeans (Edamame) Seeds For Sale: An excellent variety of edamame from Japan - “Kenko”. This variety produces a large amount of delicious beans on each plant. Ninety days to harvest. These seeds are Certified Organic, grown in Ohio. A great crop for farmers market sales. $16 per pound, plus shipping; one pound minimum. To order, contact Kevin Eigel, 7657 Feder Rd., Galloway, Ohio 43119, 614-853-1036, or email: kevineigel@aol.com


Organic Gardening Opportunity: Certified organic research institute, located in upstate New York, seeking partners to operate organic production garden, greenhouse and crop farm. Background in organic/sustainable agriculture is necessary. Housing available on site. Please mail resume and cover letter c/o business office, PO Box 213, Morristown, NY 13664

Teachers wanted for experiential charter school based on earth literacy. Ridge and Valley Charter School, with a planned 2002 opening in Warren County, NJ, will offer an experiential Earth Literacy curriculum for children ages 5-13. Lead teacher will guide development, design and operation of startup public school with a mission of educating children for a sustainable future. Elementary teachers must be willing to spend significant time outdoors with learners in camp-like integrated program. NJ Teaching Certificates required; alternate route candidates with teaching experience considered. Send resume/certifications to RVCS, PO Box 512, Blairstown, NJ 07825. Attn: Search Committee. For more information, www.ridgeandvalley.org.

Seeking grower’s assistant (GA) and forest & field manager (F&FM). Small non-profit organization with organic farm and forest land in eastern Massachusetts offers 2 jobs. F&FM needs a bachelor’s degree in natural resource studies or equivalent, experience in forestry or agriculture, ability to operate and maintain heavy equipment and ability to communicate. GA needs experience in organic crop production, flower production, with farm equipment, environmental education, and working with groups. Salary will reflect previous experience. Send resume to Land’s Sake, Inc., PO Box 306, Weston, MA 02493.

Individual or couple sought to live on multi-generational organic farm in Connecticut to cook for elderly owner and her occasional guests. The situation (one to two full-time jobs) is flexible but includes caring for dogs, freezing vegetables, some driving, housekeeping, and performing minor repairs. May accompany employer to her Florida home for two to three months in the winter. Excellent salary and benefits, own apartment near I-95, a friendly employer and staff, beautiful location(s) plus free organic eggs and vegetables. Non-smokers please. Please reply with references and phone number to PO Box 250, East Lyme, CT 06333.

Living situation available on organic subsistence farm. Highly scenic area. Modern one bedroom, upstairs apartment available for rent. Seeking a mature, competent couple strongly committed to organic agriculture and sustainable living, who could supply reasonable chore and other help in return for reduced rent. Additional paid hourly farm work available, but off farm income will be needed. Opportunity to pursue a homestead lifestyle in a supportive environment, access to clean, organically raised vegetables, meat, milk and eggs. Independent projects encouraged. Please no smoking, drugs or dogs. Howland Homestead Farm, Philip and Dianne Lang, 175A Geer Mountain Road, South Kent, CT 06785.

Dairy farm for rent. 59-cow tie stall barn, pipeline milk, 2 large silos, manure pit, heifer facilities, house, 95 acres organic pasture and hay fields. Custom hay harvesting and mentoring from neighboring dairy farmer available. Located 3 miles off Interstate highway in Tioga County, NY (607) 699-7968. Four interns needed as “Farmers in Training” for 2002 growing season on certified organic, seven-acre Community Supported Agriculture project growing vegetables, herbs, and flowers in central Arkansas. Training and education will accompany hard work. Time will be allotted for research projects (i.e., beekeeping, composting, seed saving, etc.) Benefits: Housing, large noon meal, monthly stipend and eligibility for AmeriCorps educational award. To apply: Contact Andy Olson, Field Manager, Heifer International Ranch, Perryville, AR. 55 Heifer Rd, Perryville, AR 72126, Tel. (501) 889-5124, Fax (501)889-1574, Email: ranchvol@heifer.org.
We have been interested in the issue of farming’s impact on family life for a long time. Julie grew up on a farm — a hog and corn farm in the northwestern corner of Illinois — during the 50’s and 60’s. The farming line is uninterrupted on her father’s side for as far back as she knows, pretty much all over the Midwest. Her mother grew up in the suburbs of Chicago, but spent summers in Wyoming where her people had farmed the valleys and ranched the high ground since shortly after that part of the West was settled by whites. Julie was the youngest of five and learned to farm helping her folks produce much of the family’s food.

Jack was a suburban boy and, like so many in the NOFA back-to-the-land movement, had never lived on the land. But he was a strong believer that farming is the best way to raise practical, self-confident, and curious kids. And he had experience with carpentry and machine repair — no small advantage if you are getting into farming without much capital.

When we met as organizers in inner city Boston and Julie became pregnant with Dan, we began to dream of moving out to the country and settling down as a family. It took 4 years to find decent land we could afford, and 3 more kids were born by the time we were ready. It took 4 years to find decent land we could afford, and 3 more kids were born by the time we were ready. Julie became pregnant with Dan, we began to dream of moving out to the country and settling down as a family. It took 4 years to find decent land we could afford, and 3 more kids were born by the time we were ready.

We always took the position that our kids had to have the sense of humor and a loving spirit. That so many NOFA couples have made it so far is a testament to their commitment to and belief in each other. That some have not made it is a hard fact about this life. We’re hoping we can make it another 20 years!

Kids

We’re pretty sure that there is no better way to raise kids than on a farm. Most people thrive when they have useful work. Kids on a farm can have important work to do at an early age — feeding chickens, collecting eggs, watering stock. They learn responsibility, compassion, and the facts of life: birth, growth, mating, and death. They have a place in the scheme of things from before they can remember.

But it is easy, given the endless work always needing to be done on a farm, to push the kids too hard. The line between chores and drudgery can be a fine one, and the kids need to know they are loved as well as counted upon. In another article in this issue our kids speak out about where they felt this line was on our farm.

Some farm parents are so concerned about turning the kids off about farming that they expect little of them. Others, exhausted by coaxing and wheedling, figure it is easier to do the work themselves than get their kids to help. We always took the position that our kids had to help us with pretty much everything we did — grow food, cut wood, do our NOFA jobs. That work was what made it possible for us and them to eat, stay warm, have possessions.

No two farming or family situations are exactly the same, so each family must find a balance that fits. But there is no more important question facing us than how we raise up our young, so we need to make this as much a topic of discussion and learning in farming circles as any cropping practice. One thing that we have learned on our own farm, having gone through 4 kids, is that they want clear, consistent rules. They may protest at the time, but ultimately they are testing us rather that we testing them. They want to make sure we really believe what we say.

Retirement and Inheritance

On every family farm the aging of the farmer eventually brings up the question of transferring the property. In a lifetime of hard work on a place it is possible to build up a very desirable homestead or even business. But few farmers set up retirement programs for themselves, so often the farm itself is the only thing keeping them from poverty when they get old.

The traditional idea of passing the farm to your children has much appeal. In the northeast, however, land values have climbed so high that often a child can not make enough money farming to be able to afford the mortgage payments. You can give the farm to a child, but if you have several kids is that fair to the others?

Creative ways of trading the farm for retirement protection, both within the family and outside of it, are emerging to resolve this problem. One useful device is separating out the development rights to your land. Private and public groups will sometimes purchase those rights, providing funds which can be used for retirement, without disturbing your ability to transfer the farming operation to one of your kids. Or you can transfer them to a group of trustees to guarantee the land will stay available for agriculture.

We don’t have much experience with this issue yet, but we are talking with our kids about it now, before they settle in to their own adult lives. If some would like to farm here, we would like to encourage that. In 20 years we have built up the soil’s fertility, cut roads into the wood lot, planted a hundred fruit and nut trees, built barns and sheds, trenched water and electric lines into the fields and generally put a lot of our energy into making this place a practical farm and homestead. It would be hard to see those dreams come to nothing.

A couple of weeks ago Julie stood atop a pile of loose hay on our homemade hay wagon, jumping up and down on it to condense the pile as Jack and Dave (a returning Australian volunteer) pitchforked hay up to her. Dan (our oldest) alternated pitchforking and pulling the wagon up to the next window with our antique 1943 tractor. Only when the pile was preposterously high did he deem it time to drive it up to the haybarn. Riding atop the dangerously swaying pile, we looked out over the blazing trees lining the field and reflected in the pond and figured it can’t get much better than this.
It was 1981 and we were finished with college and in our mid-20's when we bought our 150 acre farm and planted crops. The plan was to grow low spray for the u-pick market. As the years passed, markets changed and we refined growing practices, became certified organic in 1988, a certification maintained until today. In 1990 my husband left his job to farm full time. Growing in excess of 60 different types of fruits and vegetables (over 125 varieties) on 30 acres made us the largest certified organic grower in Central New York. Growing this scale requires that we hire employees to help with both field and office work. Connecting directly with the consumer has been fundamental in our marketing with the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) concept since 1991 and launch of year-round internet sales in 2000. Each year our sales have increased, but so have expenses.

Each year has brought both victories and challenges. The challenges have seemed to be more common than the victories in recent years. Our commitment to paying our staff a living wage, struggles with viable markets, maintaining equipment that has outlived its usefulness, keeping up with utilities, taxes and insurance have all become formidable tasks. Fortunately my off-farm, full-time job covers the mortgage and household expenses and has on many occasions assisted with farm debt. In addition to working with numerous farm assistance agencies, there has been tremendous support from family who have loaned or gifted money and loyal friends who have hosted fundraisers. They’ve watched our struggles and agree that we are performing good work. Fortunately, everything has a cost, and the cost has been very high. It’s hard for my husband to set aside his passion, look at the dollar and cents, and assess business viability. As the wife, there was bitterness for many years that I had to be breadwinner, household manager, and help peripherally with the relentless pressure he’s under. I have struggled with a love/hate relationship with the farm. I have resented the physical, emotional and financial demands made on me to shore up what my husband cannot. Despite the pride of knowing who we are and that we are performing good work but many wonder why, in spite of the hard struggles and agree that we are performing good work.

The pain of reality sears our hearts. Our mission to grow sustainable, high quality organic produce has always had great merit both to us and to our customers. Unfortunately, everything has a cost, and the cost has been very high. It’s hard for my husband to set aside his passion, look at the dollar and cents, and assess business viability. As the wife, there was bitterness for many years that I had to be breadwinner, household manager, and help peripherally with the farm in order for my husband to dedicate himself 12 to 14 hours a day to farming. I have struggled with a love/hate relationship with the farm over the years. While I love our land and our homestead life of living off the land, I hate both the vast amount of time my husband must work and the relentless pressure he’s under. I have resented the physical, emotional and financial demands made on me to shore up what my husband cannot. My source of strength through the darker days on the farm has come through my walk in faith and with the grace given me by God. Many, many farm-related issues have tested our marriage, and miraculously, with God’s intervention, our relationship has overcome them and is now the best ever in its 26 years.

Have we failed? No. We’ve provided income to hundreds of people and their families, produced the finest organic fruits, vegetables, herbs and flowers available anywhere and fed thousands. We’ve shared bounty with the needy and pumped large sums of money back into our local economy. Even though farming has not been financially rewarding, we’ve lived a life of indulgence that few can embrace...the life on a farm. No price can be placed on living the miracle of the soil, walking fields each week and witnessing the effect of warm rains and steaming sun bringing life and growth of luscious, healthy produce grow naturally in concert with nature.

Also on this farm we’ve watched our son play in the field, fly kites in the fields, build tree forts, swim and fish in the ponds with pals, learn to drive and discover our land in new ways each year. Both his father and I agree that we don’t want him to hate the farm by forcing him to work. Now twelve years old, I helped him launch his first business growing flowers and selling cut bouquets. Our son agreed to this project, and it was good experience for him to see the potential of working the land to earn an income – and he enjoyed counting the money at day’s end. Whether or not he decides to grow next summer will be his decision. He’s expressed that he doesn’t want to farm when he grows up – and it’s ok if he doesn’t. My husband said the same thing too of his dad’s farm. Obviously there can be a change of heart.

Taking stock of our efforts unveils the harsh reality that somehow through our diligence and hard work as farmers we can now be counted among America’s working poor. Now, still standing tall at the crossroad, we must make the decision about the future. The crossroad has two paths. The first involves a radical restructuring of the way we do business and possible future risk of loss or meager financial return. The second is abandoning our life’s vocation and my husband turning to outside employment.

Farming is not a job. It’s a lifestyle. Built into this farming lifestyle is hard work, emotional and financial investment as well as great value...and the value has many faces. One face gleams contentedly with the peace of living on and being steward of a wonderful piece of God’s earth. A different face is filled with the pride of knowing who we are and that our work has worth. Another face is frustrated with the lack of status and respect placed on our work by most of society. And there is yet one more face that wears the mask of hope but also is lined by weighty concern for the future.

All of these faces have become our face that now stands at the crossroad. It is not a particularly comfortable place to be, and scrutinizing the paths is laden with complexity.
A Farming Family: The Harlows
by Susan Harlow

I’m the last person who should write this story. I have neither the responsibility nor the luxury of being objective. And I don’t farm, so I don’t really know what it takes and what it takes out of you. But here I am.

My three brothers, Paul, Tom and Dan Harlow, and their families farm organically, raising vegetables and flowers in Westminster, Vt. There are two separate farms, and a farmstand in which all three are partners.

Just as important as my brothers are all the others involved along the way. An extended family of spouses, partners, other family members, employees and friends gave a great deal to what the farms are today.

We have a history as a farming family. Our grandfather, Paul G. Harlow, and an employee on Harlow Farm. The employee, the & uncle, Roger Harlow, in 1953, when the farm won the Vermont Green Pastures award.

In 1977, Paul and Susan had started Westminster Truck Farmers, later called Vermont Vines, with four other Westminster farmers. They wanted to sell as a group to local grocers and to Black River Produce, a new wholesale produce distributor. So in addition to his own farmwork, Paul worked several evenings a week until 11 p.m., helping put up orders for that venture.

By 1983, with two young children, Paul and Susan were burned out. They also felt that people weren’t particularly interested in organic and were unwilling to pay a premium. So they decided to close the stand and grow wholesale produce.

By 1985, Vermont Vines had metamorphosed into Deep Root Organic Truck Farmers Cooperative, a group of organic farmers who pooled their marketing and distribution. Besides Paul and Susan, it included Liz Henderson, Joe Scanlon and Carol Rees, and two Massachusetts growers.

“There were a few rough years [with Deep Root] when we were not only growing but selling and trucking, too. But we saw that people were interested, and started to see the need for quality and packaging and doing things on a bigger scale,” Paul said. “The first year helped us focus more on what we were doing and what to grow and sell.”

“For the first few years, I was wawering on organic,” he said. But the second year, Deep Root’s sales doubled to $80,000 and kept on climbing. “That was encouraging and we were getting good prices because we had the market to ourselves. We were growing fewer acres of vegetables but getting more money,” Paul said.

Keestrel Farm

Meanwhile my brother Tom, now 46, had been farming rented land across the river in Walpole, N.H. He had worked for Paul since 1974, and they had been partners for a few years. Then they went their own ways, although Tom still worked part-time for Paul.

Tom grew six acres of sweet corn in his first year of farming. “I decided to go organic because I didn’t like handling chemicals like we did in the late 1970s and early 1980s,” he said. “And I saw that Paul switched to organic and it seemed to be working okay. The weeds weren’t taking over the farm and disease and pestilence weren’t wiping him out, like people said they would.”

Tom added crops and land each year and became a member of Deep Root in 1989. He and Paul traded machinery and labor back and forth. For a few

(continued on next page)
years, they kept track of hours and squared up at the end of the year, until they realized they were always close to even and they quit keeping track.

Paul had been renting 50 acres of land on a farm at the south end of Westminster Village. In 1995, Tom and his wife, Merrilee, bought it, after the development rights were sold to the Vermont Land Trust. The farm, named Kestrel Farm, was certified organic.

Tom increased his acreage of crops over the years. He now grows mostly lettuce, parsnips, sweet corn, potatoes and squashes, because there’s a good market demand. He’ll also experiment with other crops like daikon or green beans.

“The land is good to grow just about any vegetable,” he said. “In the first six years of farming, I added a crop or two. But since, have been subtracting crops that I find I don’t make money at. So I eliminated those crops that cost me too much in labor such as bunched greens like collards and chard.”

Harlow Farmstand

My youngest brother, Dan, 44, had worked on the farm for intervals, moving away to try out new places like Massachusetts and New Mexico, and then coming back to Vermont. “I was looking for a different type of job because I knew farming wasn’t satisfying to me,” he said.

With a business degree from Becker College and experience in retail sales and management, Dan thought a farmstand would be a good use of his skills and talents, and also something on which he could put his own mark. In 1991, he formed a partnership with Paul and Tom to build a farmstand on the site of the old stand.

Susan Edgar designed the stand, and family and friends got together to build it. It opened on the Fourth of July weekend and took in $67 the first day.

The farmstand’s sales grew steadily from there until eventually the business became pinched for space in the small building. In 1999, they added on, tripling the size of the stand and adding a second story, basement, commercial kitchen and more cooler space. A café serves meals and take-out items.

Dan and his partner, Tom Johnston, an Indiana native with a master’s degree in business from Ball State University, run the stand. They make all the decisions and hire and oversee the employees, as well as doing much of the customer service, displays, ordering and other work. They also manage field help that grows produce and flowers that Paul and Tom don’t grow on their farms.

The partnership would be more fair, Dan said, if Tom and Paul were more involved in the stand. But given the time and work they have to put into their own farms, it’s an unrealistic wish, he realizes.

The three brothers meet formally once a year, in the spring to plan for the coming season. “We always plan to meet more often but then the shit hits the fan,” Paul agreed. “It feels like we’re in a bind. All of us are ready to lend a hand to the farm or to the stand.”

My sister-in-law Elizabeth has a nice way of describing it: “It’s wonderfully concrete — that Paul and Tom and Dan are farming, and each needs help. They don’t need an excuse to see each other — it’s a special part of weaving a family bond, the smoothness of the way people are able to lean on each other without treading on each other’s toes.”

In 2001, Tom and Paul left Deep Root to set up their own business, Westminster Organics. They figured it was time to use their expertise in sales and management, and keep the sales commission.

Now, they share much of their labor and some equipment. Westminster Organics sells produce to nearby stores as well as in Boston, New York and up and down the East Coast, but their plan is to sell more locally. Paul does sales and Tom keeps the books and finances. It’s a division of duties that fits their skills.

Connie keeps the farmstand’s books. “It keeps me connected to the kids,” she said. “I know what’s going on there and it’s something I can do when I want to do.”

She helped raise all her grandchildren, and frequently babysits the younger ones. “I like being part of them and their children’s lives. I look at people whose children are halfway across the country, and this feels more like a family.”

Unusual for vegetable farmers, Paul and Tom have been taking vacations with their families in early August, when the summer frenzy eases up. “It’s worth it for the most part,” Paul said. “It gives you much-needed rest; usually I’m pretty beat by then. Although I do feel I have to work twice as hard when I get back.”

Despite the need for more formal meetings, it’s a rare day during the season that the three brothers don’t see each other, although usually on the fly. Traffic is constant between their houses and the stand, whether to drop sweet corn at the stand or bring a crew of workers to Kestrel Farm to cut lettuce. They run into each other at the Westminster Station Market or at the kids’ basketball games.

Family get-togethers are frequent, usually for a holiday or birthday. In the summer, Connie rents a lake cottage an hour away. The families come and go, spending time swimming, playing bridge, reading and sleeping.

Dan and his partner, Tom, look at the seven weeks in the winter after the stand closes and before they start the greenhouses as their vacation. They also try to get away in the spring, often to trade shows.

“After the stand opens, it’s not possible,” Dan said. “I want the stand a certain way and I can’t have it that way unless I do it.”

The physical wear and tear of working May through December takes its toll, he said. In another five or 10 years, he’ll have to consider what to do with the stand, whether to sell or hire a manager or lease it out.

Farm spouses

Merrilee Harlow works at the farmstand and also has her own antiques business. Tom says she would like to spend more time at Kestrel Farm. But her forte is not in the field — it’s in working with people, and she puts that skill to good use at the farmstand.

In 1995, Paul and Susan divorced. In 1998, he married Elizabeth Mahone, a Virginia native who had worked on the farm for several years. Their daughter, Hannah, was born in March 2000, and Elizabeth takes care of her full-time. “That’s definitely the best job I’ve ever had,” she said.

Elizabeth has had to sheve the idea of farming alongside Paul for now. She misses the work, and being a more integral part of the farm and, in a way, the community. For instance, when she worked on the farm, she often trucked manure from a nearby dairy farm to the compost piles (a job our Uncle Ralph now does). “I was good at it and I really loved it. I’d wave to everyone on the road,” she said. “It was hard to let it go.”

Elizabeth says she admires the flexibility, organization and willingness to work “any time and all the time” that good farmers like Paul and Tom have. Her value to the farm is encouraging and listening to Paul, helping him solve problems, work out ideas and vent some frustration. “And it’s satisfying to me to make a warm, cozy home for him to come home to,” she said. “I enjoy that role — it’s the first time I’ve done that.”

“The hard part is getting the space to be as flexible as he is,” she said. Cooking a great meal only to find out that Paul is too busy to eat it is hard to adjust to. She’s still learning, she said, that farm work often supersedes any other plans — like the time she missed a good friend’s wedding because frost threatened.

And she’s sometimes frustrated by how little time Paul has for her and Hannah in the growing season. “I have long weekends the summer when I’m tired of not seeing Paul, tired of not getting support,” she said. But because he acknowledges and works on that problem, she trusts that things will get better.

“It’s a strain on a relationship when you’re farming, trying to find enough time,” Paul agreed. “It feels like there’s too much responsibility. It’s easy to
rationalize there are so many important things to get done every day and there’s only one chance that year to do it right — or wait until next year."

"It’s a pretty common strain on relationships, especially if one person has been on the farm and the other hasn’t. It’s hard to take off and say, ‘I’m not going to do that.’ There’s the stress of when you’re on the family farm, you don’t want it to fail. You feel like it’s your responsibility and it ends up being seven days a week.

His advice for making things work with a spouse: It’s important at the outset that the spouse realize how important the farm is to you. “There will be many times it has to be paid attention to,” he said. “To the primary farmer, his hobby is farming. On his time off, he could just as soon cultivate: I’d be just as happy doing that as going to the beach.”

And the farmer must realize what a strain the farm is on the nonparticipatory spouse and make some concessions. The hardest thing to fit in — but essential — is time alone with your spouse.

Farm life is different from when our mother first came to Westminster as a young wife in 1950. Society and the town have changed. “When my kids were little, other families didn’t have playgroups, either,” Connie said. “But now, most young mothers are working. It’s tough to stay home and just be with your kids all day.”

In the fifties and sixties, there were many other stay-at-home mothers. They took their kids to the Westminster pool or to the ballfield behind the Butterfield Institute on Sundays to watch their husbands play softball. They visited each other in the afternoon and went home feeling a little lighter. The town had a Women’s Club and a Grange; there was another club and many other activities within the community. Now, many women leave town to work during the day, while children go to daycare or sports activities.

“Because I come from away, I haven’t grown up with the people who know everybody,” Elizabeth said. “And the whole community feeling isn’t there any more.” That can be isolating. But she knows the old times can’t come back and works to make a different kind of community now, with friends from church, a farm women’s discussion group and a play group.

Dan’s partner Tom is now going to school for massage, and wants to work at least part time in the holistic health field. Not spending all day every day with the people who know everybody, “Elizabeth loves the idea of raising Hannah on the farm. “Without idealizing it, it’s so obvious that the farm life is a wonderful way to grow up,” she said. “She’s so enriched by knowing where her father works and knowing the help.”

Paul said he tried not to push work on his children too much, but did ask them to do a few chores around the house. When Evan was 12, Paul began a work program with Evan and Emma and about 10 kids in their classes. They worked for two hours on Saturday mornings weeding or doing other farm chores. Then Paul would come up with fun activities for them, such as swimming at the pond. The idea was to teach them what work was like and also to give him more time with the kids.

"Growing up with a wide variety of people — the workers — gave me the opened mind that I have today," Emma said. "I don’t judge or discriminate against anyone for being different, because I grew against anyone for being different, because I grew up with all of the ‘different’ people and, to me, they weren’t ‘different’, they were my friends.”

In the early years of Paul’s farm, there were fewer workers, so the crew became close-knit. Paul started out with only his brothers and our cousin Chris Harlow working. “We’d work all day every day; we’d work until we got the work done,” Paul said. “Then we had to hire more people. A lot were transients and we’d have to retrain many every year. In those days, we didn’t have year-round work.

Every year it was different, because it wouldn’t be the same crew.”

They hired a cook for a big group meal at noon, and after work, they played Skeeball. “Overall the work force then came more for the sake of the organizing,” Paul said. “It was more than just a job for them, but the fact that it was a local family farm.”

In the early 1970s, the farm began to store winter vegetables like winter squash and cabbage, and had year-round work for some people. The next major labor change, in 2000, was hiring workers from Jamaica. “We’ve been striving to move from being laid-back to professionalism,” Paul said. “Eventually you realize you have to make some money. And as you get older, you see what it takes to get things done right.”

That’s the story of my farming family over the last 30 years — what they have achieved, lost, won and still struggle for. Where the farms will be in another 25 or 50 years is a mystery. Maybe someone else will write that story.
Don’t Let Farming Wreck Your Marriage

Couples offer suggestions for safeguarding relationships from farm stresses

by Joyce Deming

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Growing for Market
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“Tired of the way I’m doing it, you can just do it yourself!” I threw down my toolbelt, stormed out of the barnyard and into the house. Sound familiar? It happens every day on small farms across the country. A丈夫 and wife are working together on a project from the never-ending “to do” list. They are behind schedule, money is tight and the weather has not been cooperating. They lost their patience with each other, raise their voices, and one or the other stomps off.

Most of the time, the argument is resolved and they continue working. But sometimes, the conflict turns out to be the proverbial straw that broke the camel’s back. It results in weeks of silent treatment, trial separations, and even divorce.

With the divorce rate approaching 50% in this country, the idea of working with a spouse in a family business, especially one as stressfull as farming, seems ludicrous. But hundreds of couples are doing it, and doing it successfully. So how do they manage both a business and a personal relationship?

“Talk, talk, talk.” That’s the advice from Becky Kretschmann, who has been farming in Rochester, Pennsylvania, with her husband Don, for more than 27 years. “These old farmers are content to jump on the tractor and ride off to plow and leave problems in relationships to work themselves out,” she said. “I found I had to take a head on approach — to talk about what’s on my mind — which means lots of late-night discussions. It’s not always productive, but eventually we get to the point of what is important.”

Dr. Robert Fetsch, an Extension Specialist and professor of Human Development and Family Studies at Colorado State University, calls thattractor behavior, the “John Wayne Syndrome.” He thinks that a major problem for farm families has been the mythical belief that “if we’re really strong and don’t need to talk about problems, and we sure won’t tell anyone else about them.” He says it’s critical for couples to feel safe talking and sharing their feelings about how things are going both on the farm in their personal relationship.

Others agree that communicating is a vital element to keeping both the business and the marriage together. Suzy Cook and Art Biggert have a 55-member CSA farm on Bainbridge Island in Washington state. “It helps to touch base every morning to compare schedules and lists and expectations, then in the evening to share successes and frustrations,” Suzy and Art said. “We also often stop during the day to give a report on what is going on.” They continued. “This communication has been critical for both of us to prioritize tasks and identify potential problems before we get frustrated or lose a crop.”

Lucy Goodman agrees that good communication is crucial for farming couples. She and her husband, Eugene, raise over 70 varieties of vegetables as well as apples, pears and strawberries on their farm in New Paris, Ohio. “Figure out a way to communicate well,” she advised, “be it a daily meeting, leaving notes around, or having a post-it board.”

Dr. Fetsch is an advocate of the regularly-scheduled family meeting. And at least one of those family meetings should include a discussion about the farm’s mission and vision, he advised. “People tend to get nervous when you start talking about strategic plans and that sort of thing,” he said. “But it’s critical to have some idea of where you want the farm to be in one, five and ten years down the road.”

Andy Lee, who farms with his wife Patricia Foreman in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, concurs. “Make sure you have the same goal, and that you each understand what it is,” he said. “Every couple needs to be realistic about themselves and each other. When couples come to our farm school or on farm visits, it’s very clear to me that one wants a nice house in the country, the other wants a working farm. These ideals clash at odd moments, such as when the cows get in the flower garden or when the septic tank backs up.”

Having different goals for the farm was also an issue for Sue Steiner and her husband, Daryl. They raise organic vegetables, free-range eggs, pastured poultry, and grass-fed beef on their farm in Wadsworth, Ohio. “We both wanted a farm,” Sue said, “but that turned out to be things to each of us. My husband wanted the honest-to-goodness real working farm and I had in mind a horse farm with the white fencing and days spent caring for my horses.” They reached a compromise and Sue has two horses and a pony, although her husband still believes “there is nothing that turns money into manure faster than a horse.”

One of the keys to reaching a compromise is dealing with the problem of ego. In their book, Working Together: Frank and Sharon Barnett write that strong egos can get in the way of both a relationship and a business. They advocate the development of what they call a wego - “a combined ego shared noncompetitively by the partners and directed constructively in the relationship.” While ego focuses on “I and myself,” wego focuses on “we and ourselves.” They explain that wego “comes with the pride of knowing that you’ve worked together with an ego — not with the statement ‘I’m proud of it because I did it,’ but rather ‘I’m proud of it because we did it.’”

Suzy Cook echoed that sentiment. “I think success in working together gets back to keeping the ego out of the project and respecting each other for what they know and don’t know.” She said. “I guess figuring out our own ego problem is the key to settling arguments. It is always a struggle for us to keep our ego out of the way and trust that the other person really does have the best interest of the farm in mind.”

Mike Verdi, who with his wife Shelley Pasco, raises vegetables, cut flowers, laying hens and pigs on their farm in Kent, Washington, agrees that it’s hard not to always want to be right. “Often, the husband thinks he knows more,” he said, “but the wife has her own idea about how to do things.” If the couple doesn’t see each other as equals in the farm operation or in the relationship, it “goes downhill from there.”

While most small farm couples see themselves as equal partners, many still rely on a division of labor when it comes to farm projects. Mike and Shelley started out “wringing it” but soon realized that too many things were being forgotten. “Last fall we came back to partner with half the farm’s tasks and decided to assign some responsibility for everything,” Shelley said. Mike’s titles are Equipment Manager, Harvest Manager, and Plant Manager, while Shelley’s are Business, Marketing and Customer Service Manager, Greenhouse Manager, and Livestock Manager.

“We still talk about everything and make decisions together, but this makes it a little more manageable,” Shelley said.

Jim Snyter and Jo Meller have also developed a plan for dividing up the chores. They farm in Bear Lake, Michigan and publish The Community Farm Newsletter. “We divide the veggies into Jo’s and Jim’s,” Jo said. “This has made the field work a lot less confrontational.” Shelley Pasco of New Paris, Ohio, that Jim always wants to plant too much lettuce and beans, which leaves too little garden space for her brocoli and carrots. “We’re still working on this one,” Jo laughed.

While being able to work closely together with a loved one is one of the benefits of farming together, that’s not always the case. Other couples agree that dealing with a partner you no longer want to be lovers,” advised Andy Lee. “Dress up occasionally and act like teenagers on a date.”

Aziroma Jaffe, author of “Honey, I Want To Start My Own Business, A Planning Guide for Couples,” says one of the biggest mistakes married business partners make is not creating enough personal space for themselves. “Personal space is necessary in order to get reenergized so that you have something to give back to your partner,” she said.

It’s especially difficult for farming families, where the boundaries between home and office are nonexistent. Leaving work “at the office” just isn’t possible. “Anyone you become busy business is prepared for the business oozing out all over the house,” she said.

There must be some boundaries, which the couple itself must design,” she continued. “For example, one man told me that he asked his wife to stop talking to him about business while he was brushing his teeth!”

She also emphasized that couples need to maintain separate interests outside of the company where each partner can shine on their own. “It’s difficult to spend so much time together with any one human being,” she said, “even if you love each other, boredom, restlessness and friction usually set in, which is often a way to get the space and separation the individuals are looking for.”

Becky Kretschmann agreed with the need for something of your own to fall back on. “In the early days of our farm, I worked with my church in the music ministry, playing and singing. It was an outlet that at times was critical.”

Removing themselves from the business is a constant struggle for most farm couples. “There is always so much to do on a family farm that you could do nothing else,” said Becky. “One thing we did decide very early on was to take Sunday as a day of rest. We have stuck with this decision and look forward to our one day off.”

Shelley Pasco and Mick Verdi had similar comments to make. “Have fun, relax, take a day off once in a while, be friends. Don’t take everything too seriously. Remember that you’re supposed to be happy doing what you love.”

And, most importantly, remember that besides doing work that you love you are doing it with someone you love. “Don’t become such busy business partners that you forget to be lovers,” advised Andy Lee. “Dress up occasionally and act like teenagers on a date.”

Aziroma Jaffe agrees that one of the biggest mistakes couples make is to get so involved in the business that they stop being a romantic couple. “There are lots of simple and inexpensive ways to keep the romance alive in your marriage. Set the boundaries around work that are necessary to ensure that you keep your relationship healthy and strong.”

It’s that relationship that will get you through the inevitable hard times that accompany farming. “In the end, what really matters for us is that we love each other,” concluded Becky Kretschmann. “All the more becomes secondary if we can just remember that.”
I have been growing an acre or more of vegetables ever since the summer of 1969, mostly with various communes at first. My wife, Betsy Ziegler, and I apprenticed with Jake Guest in 1978, and I got fired up about having my own farm. We rented land outside of Brattleboro for a season and sold at the farmers’ market there, and then moved north. We were members of the old Vermont Northern Growers Coop, and later were early members of Deep Root Coop. I gradually developed a taste for growing fairly large amounts of fewer crops. Strawberries have been a specialty since 1983. We moved to our current place in Plainfield in 1987.

The farm takes up about 75% of my working time and makes about 1/3 of the family income. Betsy makes most of our income as a hard-working pre-school teacher, and I work off the farm part time year round teaching about agricultural issues, selling compost based potting soil, and as a substitute special education aide at a local high school. I often tempted to get a regular job, just to have more time for myself. But having so much experience, equipment, and market connections makes it hard to let go of vegetable farming.

At times Betsy has been very angry with me for persisting in farming. It’s true, I have been absurdly obstinate in staying in this occupation. When she urges me to find another line of work, I often agree wholeheartedly. But when I try working off the farm more than part time, I start to crack. I just miss it so much when I read about the memories people cherish growing up in the country. They had next to nothing, but they did have a degree of completeness in our lifestyle that most people miss. They had less, but it really did matter that much. That’s what strikes me most about the memories people cherish growing up in the country. They had next to nothing, but did not consider themselves poor.

What we gained was a degree of integration and completeness in our lifestyle that most people miss out on. In other words, we had less but it really did not matter that much. That’s what strikes me so much when I read about the memories people cherish growing up in the country. They had next to nothing, but did not consider themselves poor.

I have no idea if either of the kids will ever want to live here or work this place. I’m in my 50’s now and figure I have at least another 10 or so years of farming fun before I have to think to hard about who’s going to run the place after me. Abe is enjoying the intellectual life at Hampshire fully. He loves the farm but doesn’t like the burden of routine tasks. Jacob can really settle into a task. He loves working with the young adults who make up our crews. He might farm the place someday. I would be very disappointed if nobody did.

But I feel worse for my kids than for me. They might have benefitted from their parents not working all the time and having more money to send them to better schools, or at least to live in a more prosperous community with better schools. We did manage to get them ski passes and gear, but we have yet to take them to Europe. Generally, they are much better off in my mind for knowing that working hard does not necessarily result in wealth, that food does not grow itself, that a homemade meal and a chance to sit by a warm cookstove is a good time. But they will get to go to college and become mainstream if that’s what they want. I only hope that they get some values out of watching and helping me, like that the people who actually do the work in this world deserve a reasonable life and a lot of respect.

If I had to do it over again, I would try to think of better things out more. I would plan, make budgets, put more effort into the business side of things. Maybe make more money before I decided to drop out. The trouble is, I never even dropped in!

I've got tired of being angry, and just gave up on them. Both tell their friends proudly of their background. A farm is always a good place to be from, and it’s a rarer experience than it used to be. You have to sacrifice so much to be able to farm in this backwards culture of ours!

Realistically speaking I have sacrificed most of a lifetime of potential income in order to farm. I think we lost a lot of potential income over the years. This was money that could have helped us fix up our house, travel, have more free time, save for our retirement, and to have money enough to help out our families more if they needed it. What we gained was a degree of integration and completeness in our lifestyle that most people miss out on. In other words, we had less but it really did not matter that much. That’s what strikes me so much when I read about the memories people cherish growing up in the country. They had next to nothing, but did not consider themselves poor.

It upsets Betsy that I can never get on top of organizing the place, but I feel that at a certain point I just have to lie down and read a magazine. Everything and everybody can just go to hell if they have a problem with that. It’s not the most compromising of attitudes, I admit.

I do a lot of the cooking, because I work at home. I’m not a great cook, but can keep people from starving. A lot of what I make tastes good simply because it is so fresh. I take enough time off from growing crops for sale to put up a lot for us to eat. I’d feel that I was missing the point if I didn’t. Home food processing is kind of a hobby for both of us — I do most of the frozen veggies and Betsy does all the jams. She doesn’t work on the farm at all, although she has a flower garden, which I help her in, as well as lots of good ideas about how to make the place look less messy. My housekeeping skills are poor, but I make a steady effort to help.

Betsy and I are both very busy with our work lives, but we try to take time off to bird watch, hike and bike together. Now that both kids live away from home, especially if I nag them enough or if it involves driving a truck or a tractor, I pay them when they really work. Both of them are competent drivers, but some days I just need help bunching kale in a cold rain. Sometimes they are very useful, I just can’t plan on their help.

I think they are both glad they grew up this way, however. Both tell their friends proudly of their background. A farm is always a good place to be from, and it’s a rarer experience than it used to be. You have to sacrifice so much to be able to farm in this backwards culture of ours!
From Physics to Family Farming

by Jack Kittredge

Some of the most beautiful farm country in the northeast rises up from the Finger Lakes of New York. Their deep beds gouged out by weighty glaciers, the lakes are separated by ridgets of harder rock which better resisted the scouring impact of tons of ice. These ridges are now covered with rich soil that has supported an active farming economy for generations.

Lodi, a small town on the ridge separating Lakes Cayuga and Seneca, is only 5 or 6 miles from either lake. Despite the beauty of the area, however, development pressure hasn’t hit and decent farmland is still $400 to $500 an acre. The town is the home of Meadowsweet Yogurt’s owners, Steve and Barbara Smith.

The Smiths and their five children moved to Lodi in 1995 and have been farming there for 6 years. Before that, Steve was a physicist for NASA in Huntsville, Alabama. His specialty was upper atmosphere meteorology. They built big radar systems to measure the wind at very elevated levels, picking up the slight density differences that would cause radar rays to scatter.

What motivated the Smiths to take such a sudden change was a realization by Steve that his kids were growing up without him: “What made me decide to give up the job in Alabama and move here was seeing how old Ben was getting. I realized I hadn’t had much interaction with him. My kids were getting older and I didn’t know them. Nobody cared what I was doing. They saw me on weekends but I was too tired to do anything. I thought if I left the office and we worked together at home in a family business we would spend more time together. It changed somewhat when we got here — I got to know Ben better. He was pretty set in his ways by then, but I can do a better job with the others.”

Once they decided to make a change, they looked around for a home business opportunity and heard about a small yogurt company for sale in upstate New York. Taking a week’s vacation they drove north, checked it out, and decided to buy it. Then they headed toward Lodi because they heard there were a number of Amish and Mennonite farms in the area. They also wanted to be close to Ithaca because their oldest kids, Ben and Emily, were interested in music. They ended up buying a farm which had been abandoned for several years and needed a lot of work. But it had a milk room built on to the barn which they thought was almost perfect for making yogurt.

Steve and Barbara Smith, along with Alan and Paddy, show their primary dairy products: Steve holds kefir, Barbara a block of cheese, Alan holds a quart of Meadowsweet yogurt, and Paddy a wheel of cheese.

The transition from physicist to farmer was not easy for Steve, however. He thought that being a farmer would be easy, he admits, and that they were going to be at least as well off financially as they were in Alabama — now we work so hard and they are so essential to the operation. They knew they didn’t work that hard there. People ask how we get them to do all this work. But it’s not that we get them to. They know that they have to.”

The transition from physicist to farmer was not easy for Steve, however. He thought that being a farmer would be easy, he admits, and that they were going to be at least as well off financially as they were in Alabama. But it didn’t turn out that way!

“We talked to people and read magazines,” he says, “But we didn’t account for not knowing how to farm or milk cows! There were about 3 years of big mistakes. And when you make mistakes with cows it costs you a lot of money! At one point we had thirty cows, and shipped fluid milk. But we weren’t efficient enough. We sat down and figured it out. We were making about $1 an hour milking and shipping. But we made more like $5 an hour milking and making yogurt. So we stopped shipping and sold some cows.”

Now they’re milking 10 cows, have 8 or 9 dry cows and three calves. Steve went with Jerseys instead of Holsteins because of their grazing ability and their size — the kids could handle them better. Also the fat and protein count is higher with Jerseys, which is better for yogurt.

For two years the farm was certified organic by NOFA-NY, but the price premium for organic milk kept getting smaller and smaller. So finally they dropped certification. Another financial barrier at first was that the Smiths tried to match Stonyfield’s yogurt prices. It took them a year to realize that they just couldn’t make any money trying to compete with Stonyfield on price. At one point they were distributing to ten stores in Ithaca as well as the Moosewood Restaurant. They were making yogurt 3
The Smiths bought 80 acres with their farm, and later bought 70 acres of open land across the road with two houses which they rent out. They graze their cows on a daily rotation, so production is much better in spring and summer when grass is abundant. In the fall and winter they feed their own hay, which Steve cuts 2 or 3 times per year. They also use about 2 pounds of grain a day, which they have to buy.

Besides yogurt, the family makes kefir, a cultured milk drink somewhat like a smoothie. It is made from a slightly different culture than yogurt, and is processed at a slightly lower temperature. Kefir doesn’t become as sour as yogurt and is popular in Europe. Americans, however, are only slowly discovering it. The Smith’s kefir comes in plain, strawberry, raspberry, blueberry and honey flavors.

Barbara also makes a raw milk cheese which she sells at the farmers market. That market goes from April first until Christmas, although it thins out considerably when the weather turns cold. The couple sells raw milk, too, although this is carefully controlled by the state.

“The regulations we have to meet to do this are a nuisance”, says Steve. “But we do have a license to sell it, so they come and sample our milk once a month and inspect the farm. We don’t sell that much. People have to come onto the farm to buy it. If we could sell at the farmers market we’d be rich!”

Steve and Barbara make 100 gallons of yogurt at a time, culturing it in a large tank instead of in the containers. If you’re going to culture in the cups, Barbara explains, you need a big room which can be kept at the culture temperature. Then you need another room for the cooler. They don’t have that much room, so they culture it in a tank. Also, she explains, it’s hard to get yogurt to set well if fresh fruit is with it. Yogurts with the fruit on the bottom are set in the cup, but don’t use fresh fruit. The Smiths culture first and then draw off 6 gallons at a time to mix up with one of their 10 fruit flavors, which they purchase from a dealer in Rochester.

“We start at 5 in the morning culturing,” Steve says, “so by 2 in the afternoon it’s set and mixed. Then we pump it up into a filler which measures out a quart and spits it out. One person places the cups, another puts on the lids, another puts on the date stamp and stuffs them in the cooler.”

Some customers come to the farm, but most of the Smith’s cultured products go to Wegman’s Market and Green Star Natural Foods in Ithaca. Those accounts are of about equal size. Barbara sells a lot of the cheese on Saturday at the farmers market. Right now the yogurt bears a printed label with the brand name and flavor on it. But the couple is thinking of going back to printed containers on which they can tell their story. That way they can let people know how the cows are treated and the yogurt is made. They are also developing a web site at meadowswetfarm.com to get their story out.

“People buy our yogurt not because it’s organic,” says Barbara, “but because of the taste and the quality — it’s fresh and local and has natural ingredients. Once the National Organic Program is in effect we won’t be able to tell people it’s organic milk on the label. But I don’t think that will affect our sales. That’s not why they are buying our yogurt.”

Despite their loyal following, the Smiths are finding that they’re still not doing very well financially. Barbara just took a job she can do at home — proofreading and indexing. They could expand their production, making more milk and processing more products, but they are reluctant to do it.

“It’s pretty hard work!” Barbara says. “If we got bigger we wouldn’t be able to do the work without stressing the kids. And we don’t want to take the step up to hired labor, bigger coolers, etc. One time a week is great. For more income I’d rather do a little indexing rather than more dairy processing.”

The Smiths children, who have all been homeschooled, are quite diverse. Ben is 21 and starting his senior year at Ithaca College on a full scholarship. He lives at home, is interested in music and computers, and is thinking about graduate school at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology where they have an electronic music center.

It was hard for Ben to move onto the farm at 15. For a guy who didn’t like to get his hands dirty, all of a sudden he had a lot of chores. But soon after the move he decided he wanted a bassoon, and took a job at a local dairy farm to earn the money for it. Later, after his family had fixed up the farm and finally bought cows, he knew more about them than anyone else! Last summer he got a computer job for the summer and now has his own car, computer, digital camera and money in the bank!

Emily is 20. She goes to Wells College where she got an excellent aid package, but her folks contribute a little financial support. She lives on campus, is interested in Anthropology, and plays the cello. She worked at home last summer. Abby is 16 and is currently training a pair of oxen. She is home schooled and works at home, as do Alan, 11, and Paddy, 8. Abby has a business making fudge and Alan, though he hates chickens, sells eggs.

“All of them are really good workers now,” says their mother. “When we have other kids come and help who are the same age as them, you can see the difference. We don’t pay them for their work at home. We don’t separate it out that way.”

Steve adds: “But if they start a business they can keep what they make. They take out their expenses and keep the profits. Even though Alan hates chickens, I asked him if he wanted to switch and he said ‘no’. He likes the money!”
Barbara feels most will somehow involve agricult-
ure in their future. “Ben said last year that no
matter what he does for a job he wants to live on a
place like this,” she relates. “Emily wants to join
something like the Peace Corps and go to Africa and
do agriculture while advising. Abby has planted a
huge orchard on our place, all over. She has about 20
trees in. She loves growing fruit, so she might
continue with that.

“I can’t imagine Alan farming,” she says. “Similar
to Ben he doesn’t like getting dirty and is frustrat-
ed with the animals. But he likes working with wood
and tree growing, so we’re going to help him
start selling potted plants at the farmers market.
Paddy, on the other hand, says he wants to be a
farmer. He loves animals and likes to work hard.”

Barbara feels homeschooling has been funda-
mental to their success as a family. When you homeschool,
she feels, your kids are their own peer group. Their
focus is at home and the parents can develop
their individual interests with them. That would be very
hard to do if they were in school, with homework and
outside interests competing for their time. The
Smiths don’t have a television, but do have a computer
which is “a welcome change after the VCR to show
movies occasionally. They try to limit Alan and Paddy
to a half hour a day for computer games.

The downside of homeschooling, she feels,
is that the family assumes a huge role in your life and it is
very hard on everybody when someone needs to
leave. She thinks that is why Ben and Emily went to
college locally and wonders how it will work out for
all if Ben goes to MIT. In their case, running a home
business has given additional focus to the family.

“Operating MeadowSweet Yogurt,” she points out,
“has given the kids something to be proud of.
Whenever they go in this area, when they say they
live on a dairy farm in Lodi, people will say: ‘Isn’t
then your yogurt company out there?’ That’s us.”
The kids will answer. “No! That’s you!” the people
will say, obviously impressed. They get a big kick out of
that.

“When the kids are selling at the farmers market,” she
continues, “people will come up and rave about
the yogurt. So that’s positive reinforcement about
what we’re doing. Also, Emily said the fact that
Steve changed his job has helped her think about her
future. When she talks to other kids in college she
finds that they’re really nervous about the big career
decisions and that they don’t know what they’ll
live with forever. But she has decided she can do what she’s
interested in now, and that can be flexible. It can be
changed or go in many directions. And the fact that we’re
doing so many many things has reassured her that
you don’t have to work for someone else, you can
make a job for yourself doing what you want.”

Barbara feels that the kids have pretty well gotten
used to the pressures of all the work. Right now
Steve milks in the morning and Abby milks in the
evening. In the morning they feed the chickens and the
cattle, and then in the evening they feed the
calves and collect the eggs.

On Monday or Tuesday they make yogurt. Wednes-
day is the day to go to town for music lessons and
errands. Thursday they make kefir and Friday is
for cheese. Saturday is farmers market, and the Smiths
try not to work on Sunday. Everyday except Sunday and
Wednesday they are doing something business-
related.

“We are the yogurt day,” says Barbara, “everybody
works all day. Steve milks in the morning and the
girls in the evening and then go to town for music
teacher or homemaker. They then
make the yogurt starts, with all hands working. Before
that’s done someone usually has to leave to start
milking. Everybody steps in to help out, but still it’s
a long, 12 hour day!”

“At the end,” she laughs, “usually a load of hay will
arrive in the driveway for us to stack in the barn! Those
days used to seem overwhelming, but I guess we’ve
adjusted. We figured that Abby, our 16 year-
old, probably works 20 hours a week. She started
milking when she was 11. When we first came it
was more, because we had more cows. The younger
boys don’t do any milking yet. They help with
yogurt have their morning and evening chores, and
help with the garden, canning, and things we’re
building, but they don’t work a lot at this age. It will
increase, though!”

Compared to their earlier, non-farm lives of course,
farming brings a lot more free work. That is
particularly true for Barbara, who didn’t have a job
in Alabama. “With the older three,” she recalls,
“when they were this age, I had all day to spend
with them. I know now that Steve isn’t going to sit down and
plan something out for a long time, so I don’t get
upset about it.”

Steve laughs: “Usually by the time you plan it, it
could have been all done! It would be good if
people knew that these things are going to be
difficult, though. We read all about working together and
it sounded romantic and great! But you’re thinking about something, reality doesn’t hurt you.
But I don’t know if you can prepare people for that.

When they moved onto the farm from Alabama,
Barbara and Steve felt they had to make the farm
work financially, that it would be admitting failure
to take any outside work. But as their situation has
evolved, they feel that attitude puts an unnecessary
burden on them. If they enjoy farming, why not take
outside work if it pays enough that they can keep
farming?

Steve illustrates the fact that farming is marginal in
the area with a story: “We took out a loan with Farm
Credit to buy the open land across the road. The
loan officer had come out and see if grazing was going
to work. He said that there are a lot of Amish
who want to get out and do it, one who wants to
be as rich, but they have the farm, their work, the
older kids. I have to do a better job of planning and
organizing.

“It takes conscious planning,” she adds. “When
they’re little you have to think of jobs they can do
and then slowly increase the responsibility as they
grow into it. The older two were here for a
while, but then it got boring.”

“One of the reasons we did this,” she laughs, “was
because Steve wanted everybody to work together.
But he’s not a manager — he’s a solitary worker. He
gets through his day with his own list in his head and
expects us to know what we are going to
do. After he has his breakfast and coffee in the morning
he heads out the door. A few minutes later the kids
ask: ‘Where did Dad go?’ It turns out he’s out
working on a fence and wants us to come help!”

“I’m slowly trying to bring them along with me
more,” agrees Steve. “This winter Alan and Paddy
were helping me milk. It was exciting to them for
awhile, but then it got boring.”

As far as other work goes, the kids rotate doing the
nighttime chores (“When you can remember whose
turn it is”) Steve feels there are usually a lot of
discussion about it!” But Barbara does the daytime
ones. Generally she does the household chores and
they help with the farm. It works pretty well be-
cause Barbara feels she can do the outside
duty financially, that it would be admitting failure
about income she and Steve went through: “I
don’t know why they must feel that they have to
make all their money this way. Why not have a
writing or music or performance or wood-working
business on the side? As long as it all works to-
gether and you can enjoy what you are doing.”

Homeschooling and having the whole family work
on the farm can be somewhat isolating, so Steve and
Barbara try to maintain other social contacts. They
go to church in Hilhaca and participate actively in
each of the neighboring groups there. Barbara has friends
through the farmers market, and Steve keeps in
contact with the farmer who is running a NOFA or other farming
conference helps provides a
sense of community since most of the area farms
use a chemical approach to farming and animal
health.

Despite the current income problems, the Smiths
are glad they made the move from Alabama. As Barbara
tells it: “When we were having a real problem with
money and were talking over our options, we asked
ourselves if one of us should get a job and not be
home. We agreed: ‘Absolutely Not!’ We’re willing
to make the farm work. He said that there are a lot of Amish
kids. If one of us was gone there would be so much that wouldn’t
got done, it would put incredible pressure on the
others.”

Steve agrees: “We moved here thinking we’d
continue to have a good income, which we don’t. But
what we really moved here for was the spiritual
income — the spiritual balance. This was not
commuting, no meetings, no answering the phone,
working for yourself.
Commandment 1 - Integration into Every Aspect

Children need to be integrated into a family friendly farm. Little children are alreadyimated into the farm business as early and heavily as possible. In the early years.

The biggest risk in the world is becoming emotionally involved with something—loving unconditionally. Who would want to lose a child if we were all afraid of emotional death? Risk takers get more out of life.

Overprotection is as detrimental as underprotection. Anyone who wants to eliminate risk will tell you what the farm expenses and income are. This information than not enough. They can sort it out themselves.

Children can spot “make work” a mile away. If you can’t think of anything for the children to do today, then you’re not operating a family friendly model. Instead of using a manure lagoon, we do large-scale composting with pigfa. The pigs eat fermented corn from the bedding packs as they churn through seeking the corn. How many children and adults have perished in manure lagoons? But turning a chore into competition will develop a wonderful child friendly experience.

If you teach a child that he’s above mucking out the manure or pulling weeds and you’ll raise an arrogant, uncompromising hard-to-please master. Studying the life cycle of family businesses both experientially and in books on the topic has convinced me that this is probably the most misunderstood area of multi-generational business. The reason the average family business does not fail its founder is because the second generation grows up with the silver spoon and doesn’t appreciate the detail, the nitty-gritty of the operation.

This is one of the reasons why huge conglomerate agriculture cannot be family friendly. A farm that encourages child integration will necessarily be scaled to a family size. Scale does play a crucial role in how much a child can be a part. Scale affects the type and size of the labor force, the noise, dust and disease of the entire operation.

Finally, children should be incorporated into the financial and business planning side, early. I marvel at the young adults in their 20s and 30s who have no idea what the farm expenses and income are. This information will not hurt children. I can’t for the life of me figure out why farmers are so close-mouthed with their children about the financial matters, unless it’s because most of them are embarrassed to reveal the truth about how poorly the farm is performing.

Children aren’t stupid. They know when their opinions are being valued. Fortunately, they are also resilient. That is why I think less damage is caused by them participating in some discussions that may be a little scary than if they aren’t included in which the participation would be appropriate. If I err, I’d rather err on the side of letting them have a little too much information than not enough. They can sort it out later. But they will have a real hard time sorting out devaluation, condescension and disillusionment. If they realize how tight things are financially, perhaps they will appreciate why they can’t have every indulgence. Keeping them in the dark only causes confusion, mistrust, bitterness and frustration.

Whether you are contemplating a farm or looking at your existing operation, be discouraged and see if that can be restructured to a more child friendly technique.

This whole integration issue is another reason I like small farms. A chicken can only do minimal damage to a child, as opposed to a cow. A diversified production portfolio will offer more variety and more chances to integrate children. Children, instead of just growing an apple orchard, for example, can add some strawberries underneath. Now while the adults tend the trees, children can weed strawberries. Some farm stations are not child friendly. In those cases, create a symbiotic one nearby so that the children can still be nearby doing their age and size appropriate jobs.

The bottom line is this: do not compartmentalize your farm. Realize that a family friendly model is an integrated whole, full of participatory entry points for children. Treat the children as partners, as fellow team members. They can pick up that pipe and swing it from bucket to bucket. The water comes out just as fast for her as it does for me. Farm models that allow the children’s time to be just as valuable as the adults’ will yield unbelievable returns, not just emotionally but economically as well.

Models that create room for children with adult-level, meaningful jobs will create the self worth and team play mentality, and will be a vision in their soul for this kind of work. Relegating children to menial tasks or make-work is a sure way to blow out any flame they may have.

Overprotection is as detrimental as underprotection. We dare not shield our children from reality to the point that they have no sense of consequence. The earlier we expose them to potential danger, sickness and tragedy, the easier they’ll be able to cope.

We see this routinely in our customers who come to the farm to pick up their chickens. Occasionally customers call and ask if it is okay to come early with their children and see the processing (euphemism for slaughter). The parents are generally the ones that turn a little bit green around the gills. The children are just fine. Eleven-year-old boys are the best. Daniel gives them the killing knife and lets them slit some chickens with me and move the water hose from bucket to bucket. The water comes out just as fast for her as it does for me. Farm models that allow the children’s time to be just as valuable as the adults’ will yield unbelievable returns, not just emotionally but economically as well.

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Not only is watching the pigs turning the bedding great fun for a child, but it is something that can be enjoyed with Mom and Dad. Compare to that to the pumping and spreading and scraping of a manure lagoon, and you can see the difference. The pigs are wonderful entertainment.

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work together. At first, he would “help” me shovel dirt. But that’s where it starts. Even as a toddler he would throw a small stick into the trailer when we loaded firewood. He was learning to work.

Tragically, the huge industrial crop farm offers few of these work opportunities for children. These new crop operations are designed to develop any and every task oriented trick to drive across the grain belt and see old broken down fences sagging into the side ditches of roads for miles and miles. The big equipment and storage silos. In my humble opinion, work is not child abuse. What is abuse is that if children have too little to do that they are emotionally and psychologically ruined by growing up thinking that soccer and video games are what life is all about.

Work can be made enjoyable not only by turning it into a game or a hobby but also by task oriented trick, not time oriented. For many parents, this piece of advice will justify the purchase price of this whole book. One of the surest ways to destroy initiative is to teach our kids to punch the time clock.

Just as punching the clock in industry creates workers by large who nonchalantly say: “I’m just putting in my time,” so time oriented jobs round the home and farm destroy initiative. Examples are myriad:

“Weed the green beans for one hour.”

“Practice the piano for 30 minutes.”

“Do something meaningful to your garden.”

“Clean your room for 30 minutes.”

“Split wood for one hour.”

The list could go on and on, but I think you get the picture. Time orientation teaches children to dawdle. It does not teach how they can do a task oriented trick, that way they learn firsthand about things like getting a pickup stuck in the mud and making sure all the corrals gates are closed before putting the cows in. Excessive time oriented trick creates boredom. A task oriented trick is not so short cut. And if we can’t trust these youngsters to execute tasks on their own, they will never develop the confidence to solve their problems and take on new projects.

Work. Vocation. This is what identifies people. And how it is done creates the framework of our value system, our integrity, character and relationship with others. Children love to work as long as parents nurture that passion with proper attitudes and techniques.

Commandment 3 - Give Freedom

Give the children freedom to do their own projects and exploitation. Tightly constrained work that children are allowed to discover or perform on their own initiative will make them timid and uncreative.

Certainly freedom must be offered within the confines of prudence and safety. That is not the issue here. What I see routinely is farmers allowing freedom to do only what Dad dictates. Anything else is out of order. As a rule, I think about anything a child feels comfortable performing he should be allowed to do. If he has spent enough time with his children as toddlers, they will grow up with a healthy respect for machinery and danger. Danger will always be a part of life, that’s not been exposed to danger. A youngster raised right will know where his comfort level is and stay within it, whether it’s running the tractor or handling cattle.

Why should anyone feel threatened with a new idea? Newness deters the child. Freedom is not the end of invention, it is not the end of creativity or denial.

The young generation must feel a genuine acceptance on the part of the older generation to offer input and new ideas into the operation. Otherwise, the young people never feel part of ownership, they never develop a love for the business.

If kids don’t like their comments are welcome, they won’t offer any. This happens between any two people. If we need a new piece of equipment, I tend to wave a red flag. But as soon as the child begins purchasing things, real criticism begins. They can get a piece of the pie now, what’s the use in trying to hope for it later?

I know middle-aged children, farming with parents and grandparents, even, who can’t even buy a tractor tire. The surest way to erode the next generation’s control is to allow the children to own portions early.

The earlier the better.

Investment always stimulates long-term commitment. As soon as Dad knew I wanted to farm, he quit buying things. If we needed a new piece of equipment, I would have to earn it. If we needed a new building, I went down and got it in my name.

This did several things. First, it gave me a clear understanding that there would be something here for me when I wanted to take over. There was never a nebulous realm out there, a sort of new, never, land, in which my input and future here was in question. It was clear that my place was assured and there would be room for me.

Second, it gave me a clearer understanding of the many issues. If we were thinking of a new tractor, but not having a new door on the barn or a fancy cordless power tool. But as soon as the child begins purchasing these things, real criticism begins. They can get a piece of the pie now, what’s the use in trying to hope for it later?

As soon as the child begins purchasing these things, real criticism begins. They can get a piece of the pie now, what’s the use in trying to hope for it later?
Encourage the children to have their own business separate from parents' enterprise. A subset, or designated as the child's is not the same as the child understands how much they are appreciated? Their own provide what it would have been necessary to keep from being yelled at, or to keep from failing, and that meets everyone's expectation, including the kids. Paying for their labor, making sure they understand that the farm generated the income. They need to understand the source of the wealth. That way they'll develop gratitude in the right direction.

We have an old chicken house outside the back yard. I had to get hatchery folks to fess up to the "as hatched" myth, that just means we need to exert extra effort to combat the temptations to, as we say, "Cry in our beer."

Turning work into games and contests is all part of this humor. Reading aloud as a family is all part of this. Probably the biggest element is just stopping long enough to enjoy the surroundings with your child.

As adults, and especially as farmers, the work is never done. We can fill our days from dawn to dusk with important, meaningful work. We do not punch a time clock. A 40-hour work week does not exist. We do not punch in and out. The farm life requires you to do what’s needed to get the job done. This leverage is probably more heavily than any other time segment in the day.

Children naturally fear their parents and hold them in awe. Dad is strong and can do anything. Mom is organized and can heal any wound. And these feelings are as they should be. But in addition, we as parents must covet a "best friend" attitude with our kids. We have to make our accomplishments available to them. We can incur fear without friendship, but what kind of relationship is that? It’s one that ends when the kids can get away.

If we want the children to stay with us, take our bountiful candle shining around the same track, we must cultivate laughter together. It will endear us to the children in remarkable ways. What we’re after is a relationship in which the kids can’t wait to bring their friends over and introduce them to our children. When that begins to happen, the future is bright.

Maintain Humor

Keep a healthy sense of humor. This may seem trite, but I can tell you this admonition needs to be shouted from the rooftops in farm country. The need for humor is a little unique to farming—and one big reason why many farm kids leave for the city as soon as they are old enough to assert independence.

Take time to enjoy the humor on the farm. Watch the calves run across the field, kicking up their heels. Tussle with your children in the hay mow after the last bale is in. Enjoy the sunset.

Go on picnics, even if it’s just to the back field. Too often farmers feel like they have to go elsewhere for their enjoyment. Build a pond with an adjacent barbeque pit. Create a space for recreation and entertainment. In a diversified farm, who needs to go away for excitement? After watching the tree you were cutting down, take a walk into the field of a nearby tree, and cutting it down, only to have it fall into the fork of another tree, getting underneath to cut the third tree to let the whole shebang fall on once is plenty of excitement to get your heart ticking.

Anyone who ever played with a bunch of pigs will have experience comparable to the best slides in a water park. Pigs love to be rubbed under the bellies. I’ve washed many a boy’s hand, and my heart is filled with ecstasies opportunites to laugh. I may not make the world’s highest salary, but I sure have a great office. Dwelling on the low point, the low point, is the disease that will drain the drama right out of the farm experience.

The emotional and financial pressures on farmers are immense. They are real, and I appreciate that. But that just means we need to exert extra effort to combat the temptations to, as we say, "Cry in our beer."

Part of the farmer’s job is to do list needs to include items that will enhance quality of life. Certainly sometimes going away can be healthy and create a great memory. We’ve certainly enjoyed our family getaways.

But as animal behaviorist Bud Williams says: "If you have to get away to get your batteries recharged, don’t come back." His point is that if our vocation does not energize us, but probably doing something wrong thing or at least doing it the wrong way. If our vocation wears us down and puts bags under our eyes, sometimes we need a break. And unfortunately, that is the experience of most farmers and the attitude most farmers portray to their children.

Pay the children for their labor, making sure they understand that the farm generated the income. They need to understand the source of the wealth. That way they’ll develop gratitude in the right direction.

I don’t believe in giving children an allowance. For those of you who already do this, hear me out on this one. I know allowances are supposed to be a way to give children money so they can learn proper stewardship. I’m all for kids having money and learning proper stewardship. But money should be earned, not guaranteed.

Allowances do not stimulate children to go above and beyond the call of pass-fail, straight-A farming courses, which do not stimulate excellence. If you all get is what you get, why put out for more? Do what’s expected of you, and if you don’t meet everyone’s expectations, let me know and we’ll work through it. Most kids don’t want to keep from failing, and that meets everyone's expectation, including your own.

Children should be paid for performance. That doesn’t mean they should get paid for everything. They need to learn that they can’t have everything, that they need to do just to function efficiently. Completing school assignments, taking a bath and keeping a clean room are basic requirements of being human. They’re equivalent to sweeping the house and fixing dinner.

But children should be paid for their labor. They should not be taken advantage of by being made slaves. Discuss the big jobs with them, including remuneration. Where possible, tie the pay directly to performance.

If a child is gathering eggs, tie his pay to the number of salable eggs. Don’t tie it to total eggs gathered, because he may not exercise proper caution to bring them to the processing room uncracked. Furthermore, eggs that are too dirty or stained to be cleaned don’t count. That encourages meticulous that border on nervous breakdowns and gathering. All pay should be like this, linked to the actual income derived from the product.

If you have an orchard, picking apples can be tied to bushels picked. This encourages pickers to not drop fruit. Perhaps if dropping seems too large, take a walk and agree on what looks right. If too many are on the ground, deduct something. Don’t let slipped work go unnoticed. The ideal is so clear and particular that they are part of the team. For the most part, daily household chores should not be financially rewarded. Those are things that need to be done just to function efficiently. Completing school assignments, taking a bath and keeping a clean room are basic requirements of being human. They’re equivalent to sweeping the house and fixing dinner.

When the child is the boss and the business success or failure is entirely up to him, all these wonderful characteristics are cultivated in the life of the children. The tears over the failures and the exultation of the successes can come and go multi-generationally, but when the youngsters own the tears and joy, the experience gains a priceless richness. And the experiences endear the youngsters to the older generation with a mutually respectful bond strong enough to last a lifetime.
children all left for town. In a four-child family, the odds of keeping them all on the farm are fairly remote, and perhaps not even a good worth pursuing. But at least one child of two, three or four should catch a passion for the farm. When none wants to come back, I have found that the most common denominator is this issue of fussy Dads. My point is that the overwhelming majority of farms pass out of the family mainly because one or both parents didn’t want it, because one or both parents drove the children away.

The burden for creating a place where the children want to stay rests not on the children, but on the parents. I’m sure there are exceptions to this rule, but I’d bet 90 percent of the breakup cases are due to the parents driving the children away. When nothing I do is good enough, I’m going to head somewhere where people appreciate my contribution. When your child washes dishes, overlook the little egg stain on plate or fork. Really, it’s not that big a deal. It’ll come off sooner or later. If it takes you an hour to wash dishes, something’s messed up. Let them do it. Let them lick the harvested corn on their own, in their own time. Give them the very best. They’ll spot your heart’s desire and respond accordingly. Everyone will be happier.

Commandment 8 - Praise, Praise, Praise

Praise your children. This is another command that seems obvious enough, but in my experience is neglected more and more as the children get older. For some reason, infants receive oodles of positive reinforcement, but then when they are two or three, their innocence begins to disobey and give lack of defiance, parents begin conveniently forgetting how important it is to raise the spirits of their children.

When the children do a good job, the parents say nothing because after all, that was the minimum requirement. Obedience is expected, not rewarded. The normal routine is that good work receives no special notice, and the parents and children rock along in relative silent co-existence.

But when the child bends over one nail, or misses one garden weed, then the parents fuss and fuss. Many children grow up fear-stricken to the point where they are not happy and they were never quite “good enough.” Are you a fussy parent? Did you have fussy parents?

All of the areas I touch when speaking about family friendly farming, I say this is the one that hits more people in the deepest recesses of their spirit than any other single topic. I’ve had men come up to me at the end of a conference presentation, tears rolling down their cheeks, and say: “I’m 52 years old. I could never please my Dad. I am just now getting to the point where I’m ready to try something.”

Men tend not to guess all of their plans, so the children often don’t know that Dad’s eye was on that board or pipeline or research. Thus, if Junior knew that it was lying there and looked like a pretty good board for a bicycle jump. Dad, how are you going to respond to that? I’m here to tell you that the spirit has dampened their zeal. How many times have children brought home a report card with all A’s and one B, only to hear about the one B?

Let’s commit ourselves to praising often, praising long, and praising hard. Put some gusto in it. The kids will brighten, and thrive, and will want to stick around us back-peddling parents for a long time.

Commandment 9 - Enjoy Your Vocation

Enjoy the farm yourself. Complaining, bitter, griping parents don’t raise children who love the farm. Kids gravitate to the things their parents are passionate about and flee things their parents despise. Of course, the “enduring passion” syndrome is not unique to farming, but farmers certainly have a healthy dose of it.

One of my favorite passages in all the old farming books I’ve ever read comes from a little book by C.C. Bowsfield published in 1913 titled Making the Farm Pay. "The average land owner, or the old-fashioned farmer, as he is sometimes referred to, has a great deal of practical knowledge, and yet is deficient in some of the most salient requirements. He may know how to produce a good crop and not know how to sell it to the best advantage. No citizen surpasses him in the skill and industry with which he performs his labor, but in many cases, he loses away with the least profitable of products, while he overlooks opportunities to meet a constant market demand for articles which return large profits.

Worse than this, he follows a method which turns agricultural natural resources to such a feeble advantage, and produces that second-rate product put in the hands of an unskilled labourer, and exported to foreign lands. In a short ten years, you can see clearly which family opted for which lifestyle. I would like to say religion plays the key factor here, but in my experience, it has virtually nothing to do with the parent-child bond today.

The Natural Farmer Winter, 2001 - 2002

Enjoy your vocation. If we are to salvage our farm children, we must change the way we farm. We must institute models that are emotionally, environmentally and economically enhancing enough to romance the next generation into farming. If our models do not do that, the problem is, in the model, not agriculture.

Children will naturally be drawn to our passion. Enjoying our farm vocation is one of the keys to creating that magnetic draw that will keep the children near.

Commandment 10 - Back Off from Personal Domains

Parents, back off. That means you. Quit looking around the yard. I’m talking to you. I’m talking to all the meddling, micro-managing parents out there who can’t understand that if you don’t remove the old mulch, new seedlings can never get started.

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Should market farmers require their children to work on the farm? When we decided to explore that question for this issue of Growing for Market, we expected to find a variety of opinions and philosophies on the subject. Instead, we found absolute unanimity among everyone we talked to. The answer was Yes - we should require our children to work on the farm, and if they are doing work that makes us money, we should pay them for it.

We particularly talked to parents whose kids are now grown, assuming that they would have a better perspective on the subject than those of us who are engaged in the daily struggle to get recalcitrant children out of the house to weed or mow or pick tomatoes. From these parents, we heard reassuring stories about how their children had benefited from being required to work.

Underlying all these people’s comments was a belief that the most important thing we can teach our children is that work is not bad. The culture says it is - the very word “work” has negative connotations. Pamela Arnosky of Texas Specialty Cut Flowers recounts how a customer admonished his child, “Be careful or she might make you work.” Pamela couldn’t resist engaging him in a conversation about how his offhand comment suggested to his child that work is bad.

The only topic on which practices seemed to vary was on how much children should work, and how much they should be paid. In general, most people got their kids out in the garden when they were 5 or 6 years old, doing age-appropriate and safe tasks, and gradually increased their work load and pay.

“We started giving them a small allowance and helped them start managing their finances at age 5,” Jennifer Parent says. “Usually, it required more work on our part as we taught them to plant, weed, harvest, and preserve the bounty of the garden. The older they became, the greater their responsibility, and the higher the wage paid. Besides their allowances, we paid them extra for working in the garden because we were profiting from their work through our U-pick and farmers’ market sales. I think we started them at about $1 or $2 per hour when they were young; up to $6-$8 per hour by the time they left home. Sometimes we paid by the job rather than by the hour. Once we paid a penny for each Colorado potato beetle they found and destroyed. One day, our young son counted every beetle and larva that he picked and told us we owed him $10.00!”

Pamela and Frank Arnosky believe in paying their children the maximum allowed tax-free by law, to take advantage of the significant tax benefits of raising children. You can pay $4,550 per year without having to pay taxes, which amounts to two hours a day at $6 an hour. Because they home-school their children, they know that their kids do at least that much work each day. The money they earn is saved or used for expenses like camp fees, with some available as spending money.

Jennifer Parent says that she required her kids to save for college, the goal being to have one year’s expenses saved by the time they got out of high school.

“When Kathryn graduated from high school in 1994, she had enough savings for a year at the university of her choice - even a $15,000 private school. Phil, too, had enough money in savings to pay for a year of college when he graduated from high school. He chose to spend some of it on top-of-the-line tools for his diesel mechanics classes at the local community college,“ she said.

And though the children didn’t want to work in the gardens during their teen years, and got jobs off the farm as soon as they could, both have grown to like gardening. Kathryn worked on a vegetable farm while at college, and Phil, now 22, is helping friends plant and tend their garden, asking questions, and purchasing bedding plants from his Mom.

Many parents spoke of the work ethic their children developed growing up on the farm. For many, the ability to work well exhibited itself more at other jobs than at home. Bob and Joy Lominska said that farm experience looks great on a resume. Their oldest son, Chris, is attending medical school at Columbia University, and he highlighted his farm background in the competitive application process. “I think it made him stand out from the crowd of kids who grew up in the suburbs,” Bob said.

Jennifer Parent said the benefits to her children have been intangible, but important. “They have learned how to work and complete the jobs they start. They are reliable, do what they say they will do, and have confidence in their abilities,” she said. “Being required to work in the garden has given Kathryn and Phil a self-reliant education. The work ethic they have developed and the long-term knowledge they have gained will be used throughout their lives. These skills are worth far more than any amount of money we could have given them.”
Raised Up on the Farm, What Do the Kids Think?
by Julie Rawson

Jack and I moved to Barre and built our farm/homestead in 1982 when Charlie was 0, Ellen 2, Paul 3 and Dan 4. Now Charlie is 19 and a Junior at Carleton College in Minnesota, Ellen is 21 and a Senior at Oberlin College in Ohio, Paul is 23 and working for an environmentally based non-profit in Washington DC, and Dan is 24, has co-managed our farm for two seasons, and is now negotiating with us for a long-term farm relationship.

I wanted to include an article in this issue from the point of view of the kids on a farm. So I asked ours some questions about growing up the way they did. I have worked Dan, Paul, and Ellen’s responses into this article. Charlie wrote a separate article, which we reprint here.

Dan

Among the most positive aspects of his growing up on our farm, Dan feels, was working with animals (at various times we had cows, pigs, sheep, turkeys, chickens, geese and ducks.) “Working with and experiencing the full life cycle of animals,” he says, “can lead to a full understanding of the process of physical life — from insemination to pregnancy to birth to growth to death. A sense of compassion and consideration is also developed when working with animals, because with day to day tending and providing for them comes an understand- ing of what their needs are and what I can do to assist them. This may be similar to the lessons you learn in raising children — becoming intimately aware of what a child needs to thrive, and what is holding it back.”

He also feels he learned how to be independent and take care of himself because of the skills he had to master growing up on the farm — growing food, cooking food, building structures, fixing machines, handling tools, etc. As he puts it: “The day to day aspects of maintaining a homestead require a number of skills that basically teach self care. Most people do not learn how to provide for themselves, but how to earn enough money to buy what they need. An ability to provide directly for my needs is empowering in that it allows me to be indepen- dent of the dominant system. Because I can provide for all of my needs in a direct manner, I can feel at home in numerous social and cultural settings.”

Another aspect of his farm childhood which Dan appreciates was learning to manage something from start to finish — from planting to weeding to harvest- ing to selling the crop. “This lesson seems to be one of the foremost benefits of this type of childhood and livelihood,” he states, adding that “real life experience with marketing and financial realities is important in providing insight to children about how the economic system works.”

A final benefit of the way he was raised, recalls Dan, was the presence of apprentices in his life: “They are an interesting and stimulating addition to the mix on the farm, and offer a chance to explore whatever issues might come up because of their presence.”

Not all of his memories are positive, however. When the kids were young we expected a lot of help from them in the fields. While Dan admits that the long hours probably taught him a lot of valuable lessons, he tactfully adds: “As a child, however, these lessons are not necessarily what I am interested in learn- ing, and so those many hours of work may appear to be drudgery. Childhood is in large part about exploring reality and seeing what is exciting and fulfilling. If children are not empowered to explore what is interesting to them but are expected to help out on the farm because it is good for them, they will not learn to follow their own interests.”

Also distressing to Dan was the way the family, and he, didn’t ‘fit in’. “As a child going to public school,” he says, “and not having the same clothes, food, pop culture, ideals, or community as my peers I did not fit in and was primarily ostracized. Perhaps if I had been interested in the subject matter at school I would have had some enthusiasm and been more accepted, but as it was I did not care about what I was there to do. In the last twenty years organic has become much more mainstream. People are impressed when I tell them of my upbringing. But I still do not share the same aspirations of success or accompli- shment and do not really care about the topics of conversation that seem to keep most people interested and excited. Throughout my life I have attempted over and over to fit in and be normal in some group, class, or set, but have yet to find one in which I feel entirely at home.”

Paul

Pail is by nature our sunniest kid. Jack and I joke that his first words were “I happy!” He seems to find a positive aspect to any situation. When we asked for his memories of his childhood, they were pretty positive: “Good food, good air, respect for nature, life, animals, woods and our selves,” he recalls. “Lots of food, good food, good people all the time, good view and understanding of an ecosystem, good work ethic, gained a real practical skill base for working with my hands (weeding, splitting wood, chain sawing, working on the tractor, fencing, tilling, etc.) Good food. Did I say that already?”

Like Dan, he loved the presence of animals. “I think being around animals (for food as well as for pets) was a really good idea,” he says. “The more life, the better!”

He is concerned, though, that the skills he learned on the farm — which will stick with him the whole life — are “mostly lost” and “under appreciated” elsewhere. He says, however, that he has found them quite valuable: “Knowing how to do things for yourself changes your worldview, your approach to work, your approach to an American lifestyle in positive ways. It makes you want to value your work, value other’s work, value work in general. (And they may be necessary skills in a post-apocalyptic world)”

Also like Dan, he feels his experience selling at the Farmers’ Market, dealing with customers, hearing us talk about farm finances, etc. has been a good preparation. “It was invaluable! It shows kids an adult world before they need it, gives them time to understand it and a means to make sense of it also. It makes them think in different, necessary patterns. It’s right up there with homestead skills, especially in today’s digital age.”

Paul felt the presence of apprentices and other NOFA farmers, board members, etc. in our lives was a good way to prevent isolation or too much narrow focus on the family. “It was a great social atmosphere,” he states, “especially for kids like us who spent most of their time at (and whose worlds revolved mostly around) home/farm. We got insight into dealing with people who are older, and also not as knowledgeable about things that we took for granted.”

Dan, always the animal lover, used chickens as the subject of his 6th grade science project.
Concerning the amount of work we expected from him as a kid, Paul has clear memories of his feelings at the time: “I thought we were worked too hard, I didn’t always feel as if I was doing valuable work. I knew I was loved and appreciated, but I didn’t feel like we had as much time to ourselves as I would have wished.”

But now that he is 23, Paul says he sees things a little differently. “Perhaps I didn’t see the whole perspective like I do now. I think I bitched a lot when I was a kid! Rock picking, weeding, that kind of stuff is just menial labor. But, at the same time, plain hard work is good for you. I learned how to burn the candle at both ends, knowing there were so many things I wanted to do and limited time to do them.”

Paul thinks that the fact that Jack and I were both able to work at home while he was growing up was “a very important choice.” He says the presence of parents in the home “gives kids a sense of family, value, place in society, place in male/female child/adult social codes.” As far as some of our other choices, however, like wearing homemade clothes, eating homemade food, or not having a TV, he agrees with Dan that these things made it rough for him at the time with his peers. “People made fun of us.” But, he says, that changed as he got older. “In high school and college, others wish they had your lifestyle rather than their own. Also, being in a counter culture gives you a better sense of what is right and wrong around you. You can analyze more objectively.”

Paul says he plans to farm or at least homestead eventually. Asked about what he might do differently regarding child rearing and relating to a mate, Paul replied: “Not much. I haven’t much thought about it, but I think I would handle the basic situations mostly the same (homestead, family values, music, sports, activity,) and just approach them slightly differently. Maybe more cultural awareness.”

Ellen

Where she is right now, as a senior at Oberlin College, Ellen believes her background and lifestyle growing up are admired by her peers. “They are in some ways envious of my upbringing,” she says. “This makes it really easy to see the good stuff about my childhood. I’m lucky to be in a place where my lifestyle has been appreciated.”

Growing up on a farm has given her several advantages, as she sees it: “I really understand the connections between things in the world. An important part of growing up on a farm is learning the process that it takes to grow a head of lettuce or to raise a pig. I think I have good practical life skills. But sometimes I think I have maybe too good of a work ethic. I feel I am good at talking to older people and having good relations with them. As 8 year olds we were selling to 60 year olds at the farmers’ market.”

“I also think that growing up on the farm has influenced my decision to be an environmental studies major,” she continues. “Things that I learned by living in a passive solar house, not using too much energy, not eating packaged foods — for many students in my classes these sorts of lifestyle choices are a revelation. For me, relearning these ideas in school is just a corroboration of the facts I already know. It’s been easy for me to see alternatives out there. I feel lucky to have that sort of knowledge.”

It certainly didn’t seem all positive for her at the time, however: “Sometimes I hated the fact that we had to be tied to milking our cow and doing the chicken and pig chores. I never liked killing the animals (but I liked eating them.) I really liked playing with the baby chicks and riding the pigs and sometimes I liked milking the cow.

“You guys always taught us to be really proud of where we came from, so I was proud to be an organic farmer, but at the same time I never liked doing all the stuff we had to do—to work every day after coming home from school and before school and to work so much during the summer. In elementary school I was made fun of every day of my life for sprouts and homemade cheese and dark bread and carob chip cookies. And because I was a farmer I supposedly smelled like cow shit and was stupid. I was embarrassed about eating lunch

Paul, ever the one to count and categorize, was a natural for taking charge of egg sorting, cleaning, and boxing.
Ellen took naturally to growing things, especially flowers. Here she sets up tomato cages in the hoop house.

Ellen took naturally to growing things, especially flowers. Here she sets up tomato cages in the hoop house.

every day. We would come home and complain, but you would always explain why we eat this way. And it wasn’t in any of our personalities to take people's shit. We defended ourselves.

“I also hated chopping wood. But now I really miss living in a house without a wood stove. It seems foreign to me that the heat comes out of the walls. Electric and gas stoves are strange to me. I’m always surprised when I turn on a burner and the water boils in a couple of minutes.

“I never felt I fit into my peer group. In some ways I was judgmental of my peers and in some ways I just felt uninvited. At the same time that girls in my class were reading Seventeen Magazine and I thought it was total bullshit, part of me wanted to read it. I was definitely proud of being different but it was a source of insecurity too.

“I remember being so distanced from my peers... I remember the time we went to the NOFA Malathion Rally and coming back to school a kid mentioned that he'd heard about it on the news. It was so neat and so unusual that there was someone else who knew what was going on in my world.”

One current advantage of all the work she did as a kid, however, is that when Ellen went to Oberlin and got involved on the college's organic farm, the other kids — who mostly had come from suburban backgrounds — respected her abilities. She also feels she gained from having apprentices and other people from around the world come to the farm. She didn’t have to go elsewhere to learn about different people and cultures.

Ellen liked working at the Farmers Market in Barre, and being involved in the farm business. “I love marketing stuff,” she admits, “and knowing how much money we have. We used to say that you had us so that we would work for you — we felt we were worked too hard. At the same time there was a sense of importance to the family. My decisions and actions had an impact on how much we made. I think that I always understood the importance of what we were doing — although it didn’t mean I didn’t want to eat candy or read a book instead of working!”

Being on a straightforward basis with Jack and me was always important to Ellen. “I think the field time, talking, was good,” she recalls. “A lot of the talking when we were young was negative. I remember fighting all the time with my brothers - but that’s normal. The fact that we could swear around you was a big deal. We didn’t feel we had to hide our feelings. You were always very open to who we were. Talking to my peers and asking them about how they were raised, I feel you guys were always forthcoming with info and treated us as if we could handle info — were important enough, intelligent enough to be part of the information sharing. Julie always talked to us about what was going on in our lives so it made it easy to talk.”

When asked what aspects of her upbringing she’d continue in her own life, Ellen came up with an interesting practical list. “I definitely would like to have a woodstove,” she asserts. “I don’t know if I’d have a woodlot. I can’t imagine doing that without a partner and I don’t see myself running a chain saw. I always want to be connected with the seasons, which means to be in touch with things that are growing. I can’t imagine going through a year without participating in the growing process. I don’t see myself ready to settle into full time farming or homesteading, but I think that I will have a big enough garden to go on as we struggle to establish more equal relationships with our kids.

Now we’re thinking more and more about the issues involved with in-laws and grand children. Whether Dan will become a member of the farm team and what about the other kids is also a huge concern for us right now, as we sort out all of our fears and dreams and consider equity for the kids and a continuing place for the parents. If I were to offer advice to people it would be to follow your instincts in your farm/homestead-based child rearing whenever possible. Seek out people who you consider to be good models for yourself, read the inspirational books, find like-minded peers in your immediate community (our local like-minded friends were our salvation), laugh as much as you can and hug your children several times per day!
The Complete Works of a Worker

by Chuk Kittredge (with apologies to his immediate family)

My life as an organic farmer began as early as I can remember. I have no real recollection of my first memory, but I know that as long as I can remember I have loved and worked on an organic farm. I suppose for Dan, and maybe for Paul it was a little different, growing up in Dorchester, but I grew up on the farm. My best friends from the beginning were always my siblings, Dan, Paul and Ellen. To this day they remain some of the people closest to me, and I think they always will be. We learned our work ethic, our games and way of life from the farm. I always knew that chores had to be done and the garden had to be weeded and wood had to split to keep the farm going. I guess it wasn’t so much of a realization as an acceptance, as a savant just accepts the fact that (s)he is brilliant. I definitely learned my work ethic in the fields and at home. It wasn’t that I worked for money or hours when I was a kid; it wasn’t a job or a career, as you would say, just a way of life. I knew that the farm needed my contribution to keep going, and only if the farm kept alive would I eat, be clothed, and have a bed to sleep in. It is different now; when I work for money to do all those things, and get free time when and where I can. But somehow, I have always felt attached to any company or business I have worked for, and felt that its survival was dependent in some small part on me.

So much for work ethic. One of the most important things about the farm was the food. There has always been food on the farm, and usually plenty of it. There has always been the sweetest water I have ever tasted, from the deep well in our backyard. There were always fresh vegetables, which like all kids I shared with a vengeance. There was always fresh meat, from our own animals, and spices and the few things we bought, like flour and grains, and my mom’s good cooking. Not that my dad isn’t a good cook; in fact, his pig’s foot soup is second to none and his cornbread brings tears to my eyes to this day. But there is something about a man’s hands. Stickies and stale (I will compare to looking up at your mother as she hums and prepares a meal fit for a king. Now that I’m at college, I live in an off-campus house, where we are off-board and can buy good organic and healthy food, but for two years I was stuck on a campfire plan. Marriott is evil. I can think of no way to describe it better that this: their food has no soul. Nothing. If the food from the farm is alive andthrobbing, then Marriott food has been rolling over in its grave since time began. It weakened me, depressed me, killed me physically, and put my head into such a tailspin I was two years getting out of it. If you do one thing in this life, eat well. Eat well.

Now, the farm wasn’t all that I’ve made it sound like. As I look back across the decades, the years grow slightly rose-tinted and beautiful, tragic and peaceful, heroic and vigorous. I got my ass kicked on a regular basis. Dan used to beat me mercilessly (a fact which he will deny to his dying day). Kids at school would tear into me like a fat person into a pie, like a polar bear into a seal. We were more than my hands, dirty and torn seams hanging out, more than my empty pockets, more than the shitty old playground use. I hated them more than the homemade down coats with the never quite fit, the old saggy backpacks, sweat-stained and torn from years of use. I hated those sprouts more than the way I had to work, the hand-me-downs that I was always two years getting out of it. If you do one thing in this life, eat well. Eat well.

More or less, anything else, when I was a kid, I wanted to be like everybody else. Just that. Like everybody else. That was the constant question: “Jack and Julie, why can’t we be like everybody else?” And they’d paw us off some adult shit about how this was making us stronger and we were better than the rest of the kids (no, sorry, that was just Jack) and give us adult answers to child questions. I hated that at the time. Now I know how right they were, and looking back on it, I wish I had had more chance to revel in that childhood life and learn its lessons better, because they keep coming back, stronger and stronger the older I get. But the fact that I learned the least bit of what Jack and Julie were trying to teach us (and to themselves as well, I now think) is valuable. There were good lessons in that, along with the hardship. And they needed to be taught.

I was always happiest on a warm summer day out in the fields. My siblings would be there, and maybe an apprentice or two who were like Jack and Julie before me. And in the summer days there would be tearing weeds at the big weeds and little at the base of the plants and the bugs and the good earth, and I’d smell it and be happy. I can do that to this day; if I get a good whiff of fresh healthy dirt I get happy. That’s all it takes. I sometimes wish that I could be out there in the fields with my stupid siblings and stupid parents, working on that stupid farm, and living that stupid life, and loving it more than anything else I have ever known. Because I loved that farm and I love that farm and I hope that more kids could have had a farm to grow up on. Maybe there would be less hatred and anger in the world, if we all had grown up in the hot sun pulling weeds with our siblings. I don’t know.

As for siblings, I really don’t know what to say. I guess just that they have their faults like anyone else, and I’m glad I learned that at a young age. And that I love them, as ridiculous as they all are in their own ways.

On the matter of parents, its much the same. Julie was a bitch when we were kids. She’d work us too hard and push us to be musical and theatrical and well-rounded and I think she missed out somewhere on who we were during that time. She’s much better now. She lets us do our own thing, and helps us out when and where she can. She’s still the best mom ever, and cooks a damn good meal, too.

Jack was entirely different. I think maybe that’s why they were so good for each other, because they were so opposite. I remember Jack being distant when I was very young, but somehow he got closer every year. He was always funny, incredibly funny, and he read us all of the greatest literature ever written and gave us morals and ideas and handled the money. I think that was a lot of it; that Jack handled the money. Julie was always broke, and would give away her money if she thought someone needed it. Jack was different; he was canny, and saved up and made ends meet and I always thought we were poor when we were kids because I never remember having much money. But Jack started up bank accounts for us, and taught us how to handle money, and put more away while he was at it. I’m sitting at one of the best colleges in the nation right now, typing this, and Jack, and his damned tightfisted penny-pinching, Uncle-Scroogish ways are what got me here. How’s that for irony? I think Jack grew up slower than Julie and was still figuring it all out when we were kids. He surpassed Julie for a bit there, but once we were gone, Julie did a little growing of her own and I think that for one of the first times in their lives they are happy together. And I think that’s because they’re finally equal in their own eyes. I think that’s wonderful.

I learned a lot of things from my childhood; how to grow vegetables, how to care for animals, how to get along, what pain feels like, what hard work feels like, what love feels like. What it means to be honest, what music is, what a good education is, how to save money, how to fix mechanical things, what maturity is. But most of all, how to accept what you’re given and make the most of it. I guess that’s what I did, and am still doing. One of those lame “Give for the best. If you’re reading this right now, I hope you have learned something. Parents, try and feel the trouble kids are having with this way of life. Kids, try and understand it all better soon enough and you’ll be better off. And everyone, just love each other. That’s all we can do in this world. Love another and hope that it will all be better soon enough and you’ll be better off. And everyone, just love each other. That’s all we can do in this world. Love another and hope for the best.

And it probably wouldn’t hurt to go play in some dirt, and smell it. You’d be amazed at what you might find there.
Inheriting the Family Farm
by Alix White

I live with my husband, David Bigley, and our three children on a micro farm in Cohasset, a small town twenty-two miles southeast of Boston. For the last sixty years, this has been a commuter town. First, it was for jobs in Boston, then for jobs on Route 128, the inner beltway around Boston. Eighty percent of our town is now zoned for housing. Before Route 128 existed, we were a farming and fishing village, and a port. The land I farm on — “the Middle Pratt lot” — was purchased by our ancestor, Thomas Richardson, from a sea faring Pratt (as opposed to the farming Pratts, who lived more inland). He purchased this land in the 1840’s as a summer place. In its heyday there were over 400 acres here. The Algonquin Indians named their summer encampment here Conohasset. It means the last rocky place. Anyone farming in New England will know that this isn’t the last rocky place, but what they meant by the name was that we were the last bit of rocky coastline. From the next town to the South, Scituate, Massachusetts, to Key West Florida, it is a sandy coastline. Our town was created and is informed by the granite that is the foundation of this community. The granite was defined by the glaciers. The glaciers themselves came down from New Hampshire, rubbing across the granite, gouging their way through the rock until they made it to the sea and came crashing back again dropping their rocks and sand back into what are now our fields.

In 1929, my grandparents bought from his parents 7.67 acres. The Middle Pratt Lot was more or less in the middle of my great grandparents’ farm of 185 acres. It is primarily a flat well drained piece of land stepping down towards the sea at the eastern edge. The land is broken up into a series of “finger fields” — narrow strips of land between the exposed granite. My grandfather, James C. White, was in medical school with three young children when he built the small house we live in. The fields that were once used for potatoes and then pasturing sheep he used for pasturing horses and for hay. We still find the electric fence and barbed wire he used to keep in his horses. He was able to keep horses here because his brother, Richardson White, lived next door and ran a horse and buggy stable, Holly Hill Farm. My Uncle Dick took care of his horses and his land.

When they bought this land, it was open pasture. The forest had long since been cut down for agriculture. When they bought this land, it was open pasture. The forest had long since been cut down for agriculture. When they bought this land, it was open pasture. The forest had long since been cut down for agriculture. When they bought this land, it was open pasture. The forest had long since been cut down for agriculture. When they bought this land, it was open pasture. The forest had long since been cut down for agriculture. When they bought this land, it was open pasture. The forest had long since been cut down for agriculture. When they bought this land, it was open pasture. The forest had long since been cut down for agriculture. When they bought this land, it was open pasture. The forest had long since been cut down for agriculture. When they bought this land, it was open pasture. The forest had long since been cut down for agriculture. 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financial security we have needed to be good stewards of our family and the farm. We have also put the land into the state’s property tax abatement program, Chapter 61-A, so that we pay tax based on the land’s agricultural value, rather than its development value.

We are often asked why we don’t just sell the land to a developer. What is the value of inheriting the family farm? I believe that question was answered with horrifying clarity on Sept. 11, 2001. The value of keeping the family farm is national security. It’s that simple. If you want to protect the ability of this great nation to feed itself then we as families, communities, states and the nation have to value the ability to grow our food locally. A secure food system is a diversified food system. Shouldn’t we be concerned that two super supermarkets in our town are owned by European companies? Shouldn’t we be concerned that food we used to grow right here on the South Shore in the 50’s and California in the 90’s is now being grown in Mexico? If you are, please join me by protecting the open space in your community, opening up for agriculture the land that is protected but unused or under used so that we can truly care for ourselves by feeding ourselves.

What my relatives have taught me about passing on the farm is to pass it on to the seventh generation yet unborn. As a steward, create a good deed while you are of sound mind and body. Protect the land from development as best you can. And lastly, make sure to share in the poetry of the farm.
Passing on the Farm: Loving It and Leaving It

by Sam & Elizabeth Smith

We abuse the land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.

Aldo Leopold, A Sand County Almanac (1949)

Aldo Leopold presented a bold challenge to environmentalists: if we are to foster a culture of love and respect for land, then land can no longer be an item to buy and sell on the market. Leopold was describing not just a new land ethic but a transformation of our relationship with land in fact and deed. Nothing short of a fundamental change in the economic treatment of land can affect the attitude toward land rooted in the American psyche. Nothing short of a radical overhauling of an established system of land ownership will achieve the results Aldo Leopold envisioned.

Susan Witt and Bob Swann, Land: Challenge and Opportunity (E.F. Schumacher Society, 1995)

Our Place in the History of the Farm

In 1969—when our children were seven, eight and nine—we purchased 35 acres out of an older and larger farm that had been first settled in the early 1800s. The main house was in fair condition, but a tenant’s cottage, the barn, a pig house, a hen house and equipment shed had not been cared for in many years. Of the 35 acres, 8 acres were poorly drained but tillable. The remainder included 16 acres of pasture, five acres of woodland, and some wetlands.

We made immediate, critical repairs to the building, and equipment shed had not been cared for in many years. In no time we were milking a family cow, raising pigs, chickens, and bees. We planted a big garden and began to restore the soil. We called it Caretaker Farm.

At the time, Sam was teaching at a nearby community college and I was working towards a degree in elementary education. The thought of fully supporting ourselves by farming had not yet occurred to us. It was a time of tremendous social unrest and protest against the Vietnam War. Along with so many others, we yearned for a more humane and gentle alternative to the mainstream American way of life. Housing and food cooperatives were springing up all over the place, young couples were resettling the land, and, in 1971, NOFA had its founding meeting. Some even dared to dream of the “greening of America.”

We were caught up in the spirit of the times and by 1974 Sam decided to quit his teaching job to devote himself to full time farming. It was a little frightening. In view of Caretaker Farm’s then questionable economic and agronomic condition, any sensible person with a yen to farm would have been advised to look elsewhere. But the farm was paid for, we had some savings, we lived very frugally, and we dismissed the idea that a family member might want to continue in our footsteps, but in truth farming seemed to be more “our thing”. We added that we knew the family respected and admired what we did and that two of our daughters, Brenda, was getting her degree in social work. Their first child had just been born and they were planning to return and settle nearby. We had a lot to talk about and a lot of thinking to do.

During that summer three and a half years ago, the most significant event in relation to the future of Caretaker Farm was a three day, multi-generational family retreat on Cape Cod, a place well removed from the constant interruptions and demands of the farm. While our apprentices looked after the farm, those three days together provided a unique chance to explore in depth how everyone felt about the farm.

At the beginning of the retreat, we said we hadn’t dismissed the idea that a family member might want to continue in our footsteps, but in truth farming seemed to be more “our thing”. We added that we knew the family respected and admired what we did and had a great love for the farm, but we admitted we didn’t exactly groom them to follow in our footsteps. This, of course, left open the question of who would follow us. The question didn’t require an immediate answer, but, then, it also couldn’t be

Becoming a Community Supported Farm

In 1986 our friend Robyn van En, who lived just 30 miles south of us, was pioneering a new program called Community Supported Agriculture. The idea was that members of the community would receive a weekly share of the harvest in exchange for a yearly payment and participation in the life of the farm. At first we sadly rejected the idea for Caretaker Farm because we felt that our local community wouldn’t buy it, but after a time we became convinced the farm had to be part of this radical experiment in support of the renewal of community and local agriculture. We gave our customers a year’s notice, we closed our farm stand, dropped our restaurants and other accounts and, at the end of the 1990 season, converted the farm to the CSA model.

During the fall of that year, we built a root cellar to harvest crops in anticipation of turning our skills toward growing a varied year-round food supply to share with the local community.

In twelve years our CSA has grown into a vibrant community of two hundred households who not only share in the production of the farm but who have also found in the farm a place to meet and socialize with others, relax with their children, help out, and spiritually revive. In the wake of September 11th, members have been coming to the farm just for the sake of being within the beauty and peace of its embrace.

Becoming a Community Supported Farm

“Passing on the Farm” Family Retreat

The issue of our future and the farm’s future came to a head in the summer of 1998 when our eldest daughter Barclay and her husband Tony approached us with a proposal to move with their two daughters from Colorado and co-farm with us. Tony, a newspaper editor, had sold the small daily paper he had founded, Barclay, an art teacher, is also a skilled baker and maker of special wedding cakes. They were exploring any number of ideas, one of them the thought that we might want them to co-farm with us. We were intrigued, but were aware of many obstacles, the most obvious being that our youngest daughter, Annie, and her family had been renting the tenant’s house from us for 9 years. When they moved to the farm we had shared a fantasy that they also might farm with us someday. Annie was teaching her own dance classes and creating perennial gardens. Her husband Jim, a high school biology teacher, had apprenticed on organic farms and was also very interested in agriculture. At the time, our son Sam was in medical school in Boston, training to be a Physician-Assistant, and his wife Brenda, was getting her degree in social work. Their first child had just been born and they were planning to return and settle nearby. We had a lot to talk about and a lot of thinking to do.

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postponed indefinitely as we were approaching our mid-60s and our children their late 30s.

Our discussions raised many issues, brought out lots of feelings, and helped us all to make some tough decisions. We realized that the farm was not able — financially support two families. The second realiza-
tion was that it would not be easy for our children to give up the security and the benefits of their jobs. The summer’s experience also made us realize — somewhat to our surprise - that we were not ready to
step down as the CEOs of the farm. This outcome was unexpected by all, especially Barclay and Tony who had anticipated a different response such as “Yes, let’s go ahead and make this intergenerational, family farm transition work.” The issue was also very emotional for Jim, who might have wanted to farm, but after teaching for thirteen years, felt
locked into his job. Annie wasn’t clear about what to
say, or how she felt about it, except that it is clearly our farm, not her’s. Our Sam son also thought wistfully about what “might have been”, but was ready to begin a career in medicine.

In hindsight, we all wished that we had begun the practice of meeting together ten years earlier. The retreat ended with the agreement that if at all possible Caretaker should be preserved as a working farm. We were grateful for this outcome and felt the affirmation and support of our children in our on-
going struggle to assure the future of the farm

Moving on

Almost four years have passed and much has happened since our family retreat. As much as our meeting seemed to close doors, it also opened doors. Annie and Jim, realizing it was unlikely that they would be able to farm over the agreement that if at all possible Caretaker should be preserved as a working farm. We were grateful for this outcome and felt the affirmation and support of our children in our on-
going struggle to assure the future of the farm

Community Land Trust

The retreat raised many questions. When the time comes for us to “let go,” will any of our children be
in a position to replace us if they have been engaged for many years in other work and pursuits? Would
our kids feel comfortable with our offering/selling the farm to an unrelated family? What if we decide to
“let go” only after an accident, poor health, or old age? Will it still be possible under such circum-
stances to effect a transfer of the farm from us to one of our children or to an unrelated family or will our children be forced to sell the farm? And lastly, how can we balance our commitment to leave something to our children and provide for our retirement with our desire to see that Caretaker Farm continues in perpetuity as a full-time, farming operation that can support a family?

In the interim years since the family retreat, we’ve begun the conversion of Caretaker Farm to a community land trust in the belief that this is best possible response to these questions and the interests of the wider community. In brief, this has taken/ will take place within the following stages:

1. We created a working timeline with the valuable help and advice of Chuck Matthi of Equity Trust, Inc. and Susan Witt of the E. F. Schumacher Society.

2. With critical support from the Town of Williamsstown and the Williamsstown Rural Lands Foundation (a local, nonprofit conservation land trust), we made a formal application to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to sell to the state the development rights to the farm.

3. This past summer the state agreed to purchase the development rights to Caretaker Farm with the assurance that the date for the actual transfer/sale of the rights will take place in 2002.

4. The following stages still lie ahead of us.

5. The launching of a public gift campaign to enable the local land trust organization to purchase the farm from us and hold it for the good of the community forever at a fraction of its former real estate develop-

6. We will have a financial involvement in subsidiz-
ing the sale of the farm for the sake of its future “affordability” through the gifting of our investment in infrastructure improvements to the buildings and land over the past thirty years. This contribution may represent approximately 15 to 20 percent of our equity in the farm.

7. After the community land trust agreement is a

In conclusion, the farm and the land can never again be bought or sold or treated as a tradable commod-
it will, in turn, give the farmer a 99-year, renewable lease to the land at a rent adjusted to the farm’s income. As for the houses and buildings, they will be sold by the CLT to the farmer at a price well below their replacement cost in order to increase the farm’s “affordability.” The “terms of agreement” will also include a covenant that provides an option to the CLT to repurchase the houses and buildings at the earlier, subsidized sale price plus a factor for inflation and subsequent improvements.

While we hope to be the first lessees, we are also thinking about our successor. Because, fortunately, there are two household dwellings on Caretaker Farm, we have already invited a former apprentice and his young family to join us as co-farmers with the blessings of our children. Our intention is that this family will work full-time with us for a number of years, with an understanding that they will - at an appropriate time and if mutually agreeable - “in-
herit” the lifetime lease to the land and purchase the farm buildings and improvements from us at an affordable price under the legal covenants of the land trust.

We recognize that this is an unfinished story with a number of additional chapters to be written while we continue to farm. But, if the transformation of Caretaker Farm goes according to plan, we will be truly liberated in the joy of knowing that the future well being of the farm is secure.

A long time ago we were part of a group of early guides in the organic farming movement that took root in North America in the late 1960s. We now see ourselves as guides again; guides within the univer-
sal dream of passing on to others as working farms the farms that we have built.

In the spirit of lines from Wendell Berry’s long poem Work Song, we know the time will come when—

Families will be singing in the fields. In their voices they will hear a music risen out of the ground. They will take
nothing from the ground they will not return, whatever the grief at parting. Memory, native to this valley, will spread over it like a grove, and memory will grow into legend, legend into song, song into sacrament. The abundance of this place, the songs of its people and its birds, will be hearkened and dwelling light. This is no paradisal dream. Its hardship is its possibility.
Women and Men Working Together
by Elizabeth Henderson

On the mythical family farm, husbands and wives, parents and children, friends and neighbors all work together in cooperation and harmony. Mutual respect and appreciation govern relations between sexes and generations. When differences of opinion occur, the people involved take the time to sit down and negotiate a mutually acceptable resolution. If only we could live up to this myth. Unfortunately, in reality, all too often tempers flare; in the pressure of the moment, people who care deeply for one another say angry or thoughtless things and feelings are hurt. How can we move our reality closer to the myth?

At the Northeast CSA Conference in 1999, everyone was free to convene workshops on the topics they wanted to discuss. I posted the topic “Women and Men Working Together.” A diverse group assembled in response to my call. There were two of us who had left farms where relations did not work out with partners, two young men who were about to start farming with their female partners, two young women who farm with men, a woman who has been farming for many years with her male partner, and a woman who is still farming with her ex-husband although they live separately. Everyone contributed to our lively discussion. We concluded by drawing up a series of recommendations to help ourselves and others to work more harmoniously and productively together:

* Don’t let irritations and disagreements accumulate till an explosion occurs. When a difference occurs, note the context and skip the generalizations. Use conflict resolution and hold regular meetings.

* Differences in sensibility can be a source of richness or of increasing irritation. Honor deeply your own perspective and the other person’s.

* Balance expertise and nurture leadership skills. Balance expertise and nurture leadership skills. Take charge of separate areas and exchange these when possible to learn perspective of other role.

* Write a contract (Nollo Press Publishers has helpful models).

* Resolve issues by end of day - don’t go to bed angry or hurt.

* Learn good teaching skills - how to give enough information and then space/time to absorb.

* Do not overburden a partnership by always having the more skilled partner teach the less skilled. Turn to others for instruction. Our community needs to offer training in critical skills.

* We take this farming way too seriously. Build in play and social time. Have fun!

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National Children’s Center for Rural and Agricultural Health and Safety

1000 North Oak Avenue,
Marshfield, WI 54449
Phone: 888-924-SAFE (7233)
Fax: 715-389-4996

View the illustrated guideline posters online

Each year, more than 100 children are killed and 33,000 seriously injured on farms and ranches in the United States. Another 20 children are killed in agricultural-related fatalities in Canada each year. Unintentional injury can occur when adults and children mistake physical size and age for ability, and underestimate levels of risk and hazard.

In non-agricultural industries, there are regulations and work standards that indicate appropriate work for both adults and children. In agriculture there are no such standards and children are often assigned farm jobs based on parents’ past practices, need for “extra hands” to get the job done, and preferences of the child and/or parent.

The North American Guidelines for Children’s Agricultural Tasks were developed under the direction of the National Children’s Center for Rural and Agricultural Health and Safety to assist adults in assigning farm jobs to children 7 to 16 years, living or working on farms.

We invite you to learn more about the North American Guidelines through our website www.nagcat.org and join us in our efforts to help kids do the job safely!
“Spirit of Organic” Award Presented to Liz Henderson

This year, for the annual organic dinner at the Natural Foods Expo sponsored by New Hope Natural Media and the Organic Trade Association, the theme was “Spirit of Organic: Honoring Women in Organics.” Four organizations were beneficiaries of this fundraising extravaganza: the International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements (IFOAM), the Organic Alliance, the Organic Farm Research Foundation, and the Organic Materials Review Institute. Each group nominated one woman to be honored at the dinner, which took place at the National Museum of Women in the Arts on November 11, 2001. IFOAM nominated New York organic farmer Elizabeth Henderson.

The criteria for selection were:
1. Remains dedicated to preserving organic integrity.
2. Helps the organic industry without need for recognition.
3. Represents the organic industry’s values in how she lives her life.
4. Is a farmer, gardener, or land care professional as well as consumers, and just about anyone concerned about improving our food supply and environment.

In his theme talk, “Building Community Through Grassroots Organics”, Mr. Gilman will explore creating community as a positive response to the industrialized food system, including the USDA’s National Rule.

The conference is a major building block in that community, where participants will find, in addition to the wealth of new information, an amazing pot of ideas, techniques, and opportunities to network with like-minded folks from around the region. Free childcare will be provided with advance registration, and scholarships are available.

For detailed information and registration forms, contact: NOFA/CT End of Winter Conference P.O. Box 386, Northford, CT 06472 Tel: 203/484-2445, e-mail: nofact@connix.com, website: http://ct.nofa.org.

If you would like to be a vendor or exhibitor, call Alice Rubin at 860/423-4906.

Northeast Open-Pollinated Vegetable Development Project

A new joint project of NOFA-NY, Cornell University, the Plant Genetic Resources Unit of USDA-ARS in Geneva, other public breeders from around the country, and the Oregon-based Farmer Cooperative Germplasm Project.

CALLING ALL FARMERS & GARDENERS!

DEMONSTRATIONS & TRAILS

The 2002 growing season, NOFA-NY will be working in the field with farmers, gardeners and breeders who want to help shape the future by planting a wide variety of open pollinated vegetables. Varieties will grow disease resistant varieties developed by public breeders as well as underscribed heirloom varieties from USDA’s national seed bank that may be of interest and value to growers today. Participants can plant for their own enjoyment or sign up to be part of a network of growers who will host an opportunity for other interested people to visit their fields. Grower descriptions of how the varieties did for them are valuable to breeders and other growers (we can’t all try everything).

SEED PRODUCTION TRAINING

Another aspect of the project is to offer training to help interested farmers learn the requisite skills for seed production. Regional seed companies are looking for qualified growers to produce seed and we expect this demand to grow as farmers and gardeners re-discover the advantages of regionally adapted vegetable varieties. Public breeders at Cornell University and elsewhere are particularly interested in getting their new varieties out in the field and then into seed catalogs. They are seeking farmer interest and participation in developing the seed supply, since large companies don’t seem to pick up open-pollinated vegetables, no matter what their desirability to growers.

ON-FARM BREEDING

For the adventurous grower, we are initiating a project with breeders who want to participate in on-farm breeding. Farmers were the original breeders and still have a significant role to play in developing vegetable varieties. Breeders need to hear from growers about what traits they want in particular vegetables. Then, seed of variable populations with potential for selection of these traits will be searched for and provided to be grown by the farmer for on-farm breeding. The farmer will then use selection techniques to choose the plants that have exhibited the most desired traits.

An initial training for project participants will be held on January 25, the day before NOFA-NY’s two-day winter education conference, scheduled for Jan. 26 & 27. (Our annual conference is two days, with 36 workshops and two keynote speakers. Please join us to hear Sally Fallon, nutritionist and advocate for traditional diets, and Will Stevens, NOFA-VT certified organic farmer and former certification committee chair.)

NORTHEAST ON-FARM & IN-THE-GARDEN VEGETABLE DEVELOPMENT TRAINING WORKSHOP

Friday, January 25
Waterloo-Seneca Falls Holiday Inn
9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
$25 per person, lunch included
Information and training on vegetable plant breeding techniques will be provided by Dr. Larry Robertson, Vegetable Curator, USDA-ARS Plant Genetic Resources Unit (the name for the Geneva National seed bank), and Dr. Molly Jahn, public plant breeder, whose open pollinated Bush Delicata won the All America Selections Gold Medal for 2002.

For more information, contact NOFA-NY at 518-734-5495 or check out our website at: http://ny.nofaic.org.
Family Friendly Farming
by Joel Salatin,
published by Polyface Inc, Swoope VA
distributed by Chelsea Green, White River Junction, VT (800) 659-4099 www.chelseagreen.com
388 pages reviewed by Julie Rawson

It seems that our family has been immersed in Joel Salatin’s world of farming for quite some time. My oldest son Dan read his book and raved about it for different reasons, and then the NOFA Summer Conference committee decided to invite Joel Salatin as our keynote speaker. He accepted and I had some good chats on the phone with him regarding his upcoming visit to us. Spurred on by these events I did a rare thing and sat down and read the whole book in three different sittings.

Joel’s passion for his farm, his family and his way of looking at life come through with great intensity from start to finish in this book. I am a person from a similar background and am at about the same place in my life. I’m 4 years older than he is, my oldest is four years older than his oldest, and his youngest is four years younger than my youngest.

Joel grew up on the farm that he now operates with his family. He spent about 6 years away and came back, gung ho to join the family operation. The exciting message that he has here is that the farm life can be the best life there is, not only for the parents but also for the kids. Unlike many NOFA people, and really like most other farmers, he makes a very convincing case that it is such a great life that it should be continued by the next generation with no apologies to them that they are somehow being shortchanged by staying on the farm. I notice in NOFA that most of us can sing the praises of our lifestyle for us, and even for raising our children. Somehow, however, we often feel that our children have been cheated if they are encouraged to stay right here on the farm with us, or nearby in our communities, to continue this vocation/profession.

Salatin has very strong opinions about how children should be treated. I found his ten commandments very refreshing. They were for the most part principles that Jack and I held strong and fast to while raising our kids: integration into every aspect, love driven, mutual agreement openness and vulnerability, recognition that all of us have baggage, radical honesty, the assumption that no one is vindictive and everyone is compassionate, accountability in attitude, action, and philosophy, recognition that some people don’t want to cooperate, so don’t blame yourself for it, not waiting for someone else to open up first, but going ahead and starting, and realizing that time is real - both to accumulate and to heal.

Statements like “I have a temper problem that puts me into the needing forgiveness category too often.” help me really appreciate his humanity.

I found equally insightful his 10 deadly destructive deeds. They include: conventionalism, secrecy, manhandling, disinterest, doting, perfectionism, authoritarianism, bagging, screaming, and inconsistency.

Not only is this a book about raising kids on the farm, it is a book that is chock full of creative suggestions for how to make your farm economically viable, a real asset in community, and a joy to work on. That he speaks throughout about diversity in operations, integrating animals with plants in one very co-creative biological relationship, is worth the price alone.

I could go on and on with praise for his opinions: his views on the importance of intergenerational dependency, his feelings about meeting his neighbors and his customers half way by seeing the world through their eyes, and his love of learning from books and others. His statement that “A life that is removed from the soil is one that quickly loses touch with reality” is one that I have found to be true for me in my life.

From time to time, it seems to me, he is a tad self-satisfied. Therefore I appreciated his chapter on bagginess where he explained his approach. This includes, in family meetings, mutually agreeable openness and vulnerability, recognition that all of us have baggage, radical honesty, the assumption that no one is vindictive and everyone is compassionate, accountability in attitude, action, and philosophy, recognition that some people don’t want to cooperate, so don’t blame yourself for it, not waiting for someone else to open up first, but going ahead and starting, and realizing that time is real - both to accumulate and to heal.

Statements like “I have a temper problem that puts me into the needing forgiveness category too often.” help me really appreciate his humanity.

I didn’t agree with everything that he said. Frankly, I find him a little sexist. I found his use of the term “juniorite” offensive. And near the end when he talks about what he looks for in an apprentice, he states “We want the classic, all-American boy look.”

Does this automatically knock out 50% of the population? Also he goes on to give negative votes for dyed hair, earrings, baggy pants or clothes worn hip (backwards cap, untucked shirt, untied shoes), matted hair or pony tails. We would have lost about 90% of the population.

This book wasn’t what I expected. I thought that I was going to read all about becoming just what I have wanted to become all these years; self-sustaining, more knowledgeable, able to plant and grow anything in a single season.

What I got was a personal account of two people who wanted to grow their own food supply and their reasons for doing so, and what happened to them while on that journey.

Joan and Alan Gussow’s story begins in the early seventies. Twenty miles north of New York City, in the town of Congers. As owners of a new house and parents of a new baby, it seemed economical to grow food on the half acre. As all new gardeners find out sooner or later, one doesn’t know what is in the ground and get food. Some of the obstacles that their lot presented were shade trees surrounding the property and lots of well-established lawn. Their solutions did not come quickly or without lots of hard work.

In the course of their careers, Joan was teaching and speaking publicly against a food system that was not sustainable; Alan was hired to teach art in Santa Cruz, California for a brief time. While at the University of California, Alan discovered a hillside garden started by Alan Chadwick, an English gardener. Although Alan Chadwick was long gone, the garden had been expanded to a lower site and Chadwick’s methods of gardening, double digging and raised beds remained behind. Alan Gussow took this knowledge home to Congers. More hard work followed. Time passed and as the Gussow’s garden grew, mistakes and discoveries were made. Garden records were kept. The eighties arrived, Joan had been writing books and she was still speaking about problems with the food system. Not only was growing food for them an evolving lesson, the Victorian house they lived in was continuing to be high maintenance. By the late 1990’s, the boys had moved out, the gardens were providing vegetables and fruit, time to settle down and enjoy life right?

Wrong. Time to find a smaller, low maintenance house.

What follows are Joan and Alan’s search and ultimate discovery of the “perfect” house and site of their next garden. The story told by Joan tells how they came to Piermont, New York and what challenges awaited them. She tells about what was planted, when and why, pests and varmints that discovered their garden, and those always unexpected surprises from Mother Nature. Recipes are scattered strategically throughout the book when she writes about a certain vegetable and a bibliography motivates us to read more about how store bought food costs us more than just our money makes me think twice before I purchase now. I think she would be happy to know that.

This book is a not only a story about growing food but a reminder that life is never what you expect. We will sit down with our 20, 21, 23 and 24 year olds this holiday season and start discussing what will happen to our family farm in the near and distant future. In preparation I will refer often to Joel’s chapters on multi-generational transfer.

Again, it is his creative thinking and ability to make decisions “out of the box” that draw me to his many sound principles.

I am in a period of great excitement about the possibilities on our farm. Joel Salatin’s book fueled that excitement over and over with many sound ideas on how to enhance life on the farm, and how to do it with all the pride that is appropriate to this wonderful profession.
Applying Surround is analogous to spray painting. It is easy to spot any areas I had missed because when sprayed multiple times with a fine, fast drying mist. It was nice to know that I hit all surfaces, from all angles, on 10-15’ or so, sloshing the tank around a bit, set the bypass valve to full agitation, move the cart and fruit surfaces becoming exposed as the season progresses, you’ve got to keep putting it on. I made the mistake one time of mixing in some fish emulsion as a foliar feed which caused a clogging problem with my sprayer. I did a total of six sprayings; the final heavy cover was on June 18th. With the help of Extension, I deemed the active pc egg laying season over in late June. This was a little scary for me to do as the pc’s were still out there, unlike the years with Imidan when they were just dead and gone! Also I worried a bit about the plums as their slippery surfaces seemed more difficult to cover with an even, complete coating, but in actuality I had almost 100% pc control on plums. What this meant in practical terms was that my spouse and I had to do a lot more thinning on plums than we did on apples where the pc’s did help thin a little bit (or at least they helped with the thinning choices). In early July I put out my 100+ red sticky balls to trap the apple maggot flies. An option would have been to continue with the Surround as it is effective on maggot fly and controlling moth as well.

Just like in spray painting you want to avoid “runs”. Hot sunny weather helps. Also with Surround the strategy is to get it on before the problem occurs. I did a partial cover on some plums and pears on May 17th and covered the whole orchard on May 30th.

This initial full cover took 45 gallons and half a day. Subsequent covers took 20 to 30 gallons and a little over two hours to mix and apply. Since the product is somewhat susceptible to rain flushing it off and, just as importantly, dry leaf and fruit surfaces becoming exposed as the season progresses, you’ve got to keep putting it on. I made the mistake one time of mixing in some fish emulsion as a foliar feed which caused a clogging problem with my sprayer. I did a total of six sprayings; the final heavy cover was on June 18th. With the help of Extension, I deemed the active pc egg laying season over in late June. This was a little scary for me to do as the pc’s were still out there, unlike the years with Imidan when they were just dead and gone! Also I worried a bit about the plums as their slippery surfaces seemed more difficult to cover with an even, complete coating, but in actuality I had almost 100% pc control on plums. What this meant in practical terms was that my spouse and I had to do a lot more thinning on plums than we did on apples where the pc’s did help thin a little bit (or at least they helped with the thinning choices). In early July I put out my 100+ red sticky balls to trap the apple maggot flies. An option would have been to continue with the Surround as it is effective on maggot fly and controlling moth as well.

An advantage of using Surround early in the season only is that by harvest time most of the product has been washed off by the rain. On peaches it was a bit more of a problem as it sticks well to the fuzzy surface. We mostly dealt with this by peeling them. Our harvest was great. We have a little more codling moth damage than we usually see (maybe 10% overall and up to 40% on some varieties). They hit us late in the season. I did have three codling moth pheromone monitoring traps out which don’t seem to catch much (I didn’t renew the baits after six weeks as I should have). It is possible that for all those years I was using Imidan and putting it on kind of late for the pc, it was giving me some control of the first generation of codling moth. I’m seeing more scab on certain varieties than some years which I assume has nothing to do with the Surround. I put a little extra work this fall into chopping up all the leaves with the lawn mower, raking them to the drip lines of the trees, and adding some compost and fish emulsion/seaweed. Hopefully that will tame the scab next spring.

The arrival of Surround™ on the market is a real breakthrough for organic tree fruit production in the Northeast and a great relief for me personally to finally be 100% organic!

Sincerely, Doug Clayton

NOFA-VT Winter Conference: Feb. 16

The Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont’s (NOFA-VT) 20th Annual Winter Conference will be held Saturday, February 16, 2002 at Vermont Technical College in Randolph, Vermont. The theme of the conference is Hope and Renewal, a celebration of seasonal rejuvenation.

John Elder, Stewart Professor of English and Environmental Studies at Middlebury College, will present the keynote address. He is the author of Following the Brush and Imagining the Earth: Poetry and the Vision of Nature and Reading the Mountains of Home.

In addition, more than 30 workshops with varying topics will be presented by experienced farmers and authors.

The conference will be held 7:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. Youngsters ages 6 to 13 can attend the Childrens’ Conference for ages 6 to 13, which offers farming-related workshops, games and crafts. A colorful farmer’s market with educational materials, organic products, crafts and associated businesses and non-profit organizations will be open all day.

NOFA is a diverse organization, comprising farmers, gardeners, producers and consumers working to promote an economically viable and ecologically sound Vermont food system. The NOFA-VT Winter Conference has earned a distinguished reputation in the organic farming and gardening community by providing valuable information, networking opportunities, and wholesome entertainment for those who attend. This year we anticipate 600 attendees.

For more information or to preregister, contact: Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont P.O. Box 697, Richmond, VT 05477 802-474-4122 Fax: 802-474-4134 info@nofavt.org

Letters to the Editor

Dear Jack,

I thought I should follow up on the article you wrote about “some of the summer’s ‘Natural Farmer’ with one piece of great news. That is that the new organic control for the Plum curculio, Surround™, worked beautifully for us this summer. It had seemed an unattainable goal to become totally organic due to the Plum curculio (pc) problem with apples and plums. As you mentioned in your piece, for about ten years my “orchard spray program” consisted of one carefully timed cover of Imidan™ to control the pc (7 to 14 days after “petal fall” and based on daily IPM scouting). Apple maggots fly I’ve always trapped out with red sticky balls and codling moth has generally seemed a “minor” pest for me. Apple scab I control “culturally” with mowing, mulch and “inoculation”. The cosmetic fungal diseases, fly speck and sooty blotch, I ignore or wash off after harvest.

In case some of your readers haven’t heard, Surround™ is a “crop protectant” coating that has many beneficial organic agricultural uses which can be learned about by linking through the web site www.englishard.com or calling 877-240-0421. Incidentally one of these benefits seems to be suppression of the dreaded Plum curculio. Surround is primarily composed of kaolin clay with a little other stuff that gives it desirable dispersion and adhesion qualities. Surround doesn’t kill, but suppresses the dreaded Plum curculio. Surround doesn’t kill, but

I need to take a few months to overcome my skepticism about the “new thing” and fear of the extra work and expense I knew it would entail, but I’m glad I bit the bullet. The best deal I could find on the purchase was from Fedco Seeds (PO Box 520, Waterville, ME 04903). I bought ten 25 pound bags to get the price break and used five and a half of them. The product cost me about a dollar a pound. Freight cost is the problem. I think it will be available from my local ag supply dealer next year for a little over two hours to mix and apply. Since the product is somewhat susceptible to rain flushing it off and, just as importantly, dry leaf and fruit surfaces becoming exposed as the season progresses, you’ve got to keep putting it on. I made the mistake one time of mixing in some fish emulsion as a foliar feed which caused a clogging problem with my sprayer. I did a total of six sprayings; the final heavy cover was on June 18th. With the help of Extension, I deemed the active pc egg laying season over in late June. This was a little scary for me to do as the pc’s were still out there, unlike the years with Imidan when they were just dead and gone! Also I worried a bit about the plums as their slippery surfaces seemed more difficult to cover with an even, complete coating, but in actuality I had almost 100% pc control on plums. What this meant in practical terms was that my spouse and I had to do a lot more thinning on plums than we did on apples where the pc’s did help thin a little bit (or at least they helped with the thinning choices). In early July I put out my 100+ red sticky balls to trap the apple maggot flies. An option would have been to continue with the Surround as it is effective on maggot fly and controlling moth as well.

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Sincerely, Doug Clayton
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**NOFA Membership**

You may join NOFA by joining one of the seven state chapters. Contact the person listed below for more information.

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*Individual or Household:* $35, Business/Institution: $50, Supporting: $100, Student (full time, supply name of institution) $20

**Massachusetts**


**New Hampshire**


**New Jersey**


**New York**

*Student/Student/Limited Income:* $15, *Individual:* $25, *Family/Farm/Nonprofit Org.* $35

**Business/Patron:** $100, *Corporate Sponsor:* $500, *Lifetime Sponsor:* $1000

**Rhode Island**


**Vermont**


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Karen Anderson, PO Box 886, Pennington, NJ 08603, (609) 941-8684

Johan van Achterberg, (full time, supply name of institution) $20

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*indicates co-chair

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Ed McGlew, 140 Chestnut St, West Hatfield, MA 01088 (413) 247-9264

Elizabeth Henderson, 2218 Welcher Rd., Newark, NY 14513 (315) 331-9029

**Calendar**

**Tuesday, December 11 - Thursday, December 13:**

12th New England Vegetable and Berry Conference and Trade Show, Sturbridge, MA, for more info: Vera Grubinger at (508) 257-7967

**Friday, January 11 - Sunday, January 13:**

Sustainable Greenhouse Design & Production with Eliot Coleman, Ed Person, and Steve Moore, Saratoga County, NY, for more info: (518) 677-6537

**Saturday, January 26 & Sunday, January 27:**

NOFA-NY Winter Conference, for more info: 914-246-6848

**Saturday, January 26:**

NOFA/Mass Winter Conference, Barre, MA, for more info: 978-335-2853

**Saturday, January 26:**

NOFA/NJ Winter Conference, for more info: 609-737-6848

**Friday, February 1:**

Increase Your Profit: Financial Management for Established Farmers led by Richard Wixsell, Saratoga County, NY, for more info: (518) 427-6537

**Saturday, February 2 - Sunday, February 3:**

Creating Healthy Soils and Overcoming Weeds: Biological Principles of Organic Agriculture featuring Anne and Eric Nordell and Klaas and Mary Howell Martens, Saratoga County, NY, for more info: (518) 427-6537

**Saturday, February 16:**

NOFA-VT Winter Conference, Randolph, VT, for more info: 802-434-4122

**Saturday, February 2:**

Sixth Annual Grazing Conference “Grazing Farming: Connecting Land & Communities”, Randolph Center, VT, for more info: 603-656-5459.

**Thursday, February 14:**

Friday, February 15; Tuesday, February 19; and Wednesday, February 20: 1st Organic Land Care Accreditation Course, sponsored by NOFA/Mass and NOFA/CT, Framingham, MA ($400 for 30 hour course), for more info: Marilyn Castriotta at 781-646-6522 or mcastriotta@aol.com

**Friday, March 1:**

Ecological Landscaping Association Winter Conference, Boxborough, MA, for more info: 978-232-9047 or 413-543-0895

**Saturday, March 2:**

NOFA/Connecticut End of Winter Conference, Hartford, CT, for more info: 203-974-8480

**Friday, March 8 - Sunday, March 10:**

International Organic Beekeeping Conference, Chestnut Ridge, NY, for more info: 845-352-5020 ext. 20 or info@golfercenter.org
Here the Smiths (Alan with yogurt, Steve with kefir, Paddy with a wheel of cheese and Barbara with a block of cheese) show their products as well as their Jersey cows (over Barbara’s shoulder) whose milk made them possible. Over Steve’s shoulder one can see the incredible views with which the Smith’s New York homestead is blessed.

News, features, and articles about organic growing in the Northeast, plus a Special Supplement on

Farming and Families