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Comucopia of markets, lifestyles for organic farmers



Julie McAdoo arranges flowers as husband Tim takes snap pea inventory at their roadside stand. The couple owns and operates New Field Farm in Temple and grows only organic produce.

Carol Connare

By CAROL CONNARE
Transcript Staff

Whether passing in vogue or part of a lasting trend, organic farming has gained a foothold in the Monadnock region.

Like weeds in a moist growing season, organic gardens are popping up wherever markets allow. In an age of 'lite' this and 'natural' that, market demand for less processed products is at an all-time high.

According to Vicki Smith, Department of Agriculture, eight NH farmers certified as organic last year. "This year, that number has jumped to 29 and I don't even want to try to predict how many will certify next year," she said.

Certification is no small field to be tilled. Seventeen pages of soil and crop specifications must be met, and inspections must be passed before a farm can be certified.

A more obvious challenge faces the organic farmer: how to produce successful crops without the

aid of chemicals to combat weeds and pests. The farmer must then find a place to sell the often more costly produce.

Five local farms have heard the organic call and have been answering it, each in their own way.

Working Mom

Judy Unger-Clark had always gardened during her summers off from teaching art in Milford. Wanting to spend time with her daughter Helen, 4, and son Asa, 2, Unger-Clark decided to find something to keep her busy at home.

Starting an organic garden this year has kept her more than busy — Unger-Clark often works from dawn to dusk. She tends to her garden alone, doing everything by hand.

"It's pretty religious. Everyday I am out there looking at my garden making sure everything is just right," Unger-Clark said of her 80 square foot site "I'm no longer squeamish about bugs; I research them to find out what they are"

Her plot is new this year, so she has planted a broad range of vegetables and flowers to see what grows - and sells - best.

The vegetables of her labor can be sampled in a Monadnock Inn salad or bought in quantity at Coll's Farm Stand, both in Jaffrey.

"I doubt I'll turn a profit, this being my first year," said Unger-Clark, adding that packaging her own goods can be tedious. "I've always been concerned with what my family eats, even more so with young children. That is a main reason why I am doing this."

The Five Year Plan

Green Truck Farm spans roughly four and one-half acres on Sibby Kunhardt's land in the heart of Francestown. The husband and wife team of Betty James and David Trumble have been farming the land for three years

In another two years, the team plans a huddle to assess how their

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● ORGANIC

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venture is working out

Trumble was a farmer's helper for more than five years, and a lawyer and a farmer for a few more before he made the total conversion. "One day Betty just looked at me and said 'you've got to choose one or the other' and this is what I chose," said Trumble amidst rows of organic tomato plants

Green Truck is one of 18 farms in the Deep Root Organic Truck Farmers cooperative Governed by the farmers themselves, the co-op lines up definite markets for growers and divides trucking and packaging costs among the farms

"Our first year, we were like most other farmers in this area We planted about 30 different crops and we had to seek out local markets We spent more time on the road than in the field," said Trumble

"Last year, we sold about 40 percent of our produce through the co-op, and this year we will sell almost all of it," said Trumble, who now serves on the Deep Root board

Green Truck now specializes in about six crops, including Swiss chard, tomatoes, squash and cucumbers James and Trumble pledge to deliver a certain amount of produce throughout the season and get paid following each shipment

"Co-op farming has eliminated a lot of stress," said James "We can concentrate on growing and for the first time we aren't totally frazzled.

This season is new in another way for the team: they have added two part-time workers to their operation and two boys who work a few hours each week

"We need the extra help," said James, compared to other years when the team did it alone. Both agree managing employees has been a new experience.

"You have to figure out what each one likes and does best to keep things running smoothly," said Trumble.

James and Trumble work almost year-round on the farm, caring for fields late in the fall and starting seeds in their greenhouse as early as January. But both hold other jobs as well.

James has been town librarian for 15 years and Trumble coaches

the debate team at St. Anselm's College in Goffstown. The pair is dedicated to the principle of organic farming.

"Too many chemicals strip the soil. We use the least amount of even organic sprays as possible," said Trumble.

"It all comes down to the soil," said James. "If you have healthy soil, you get healthy plants and they are better able to take care of pests themselves."

No Place Like Home

When Tim Winship of New Field Farm in Temple first hung his 'organic produce' sign in Seattle's Pike Place market, "people snickered," he says. "But now, even the large growers on the West Coast are spending a lot of energy looking into organic methods."

Julie McAdoo and Tim Winship are another husband and wife team giving organic farming a go. Both grew up in the east but transplanted to the West Coast for awhile, farming in the Pacific Northwest.

Tired of living in cities and wanting to be near family, the couple returned, partly to be near family So near in fact, that they bought 29 acres from McAdoo's parents and are now neighbors.

The pair cultivates a varied crop and boasts the only organically grown corn sold in the region. In addition to their roadside stand, open six days a week, Winship and McAdoo peddle their produce at farmers' markets in Newton MA and Milford.

"We always need lots of manure, and we have to use some botanical and biological sprays, but even those we keep to a minimum," said McAdoo.

Winship has been farming since he was 15. "I got into organic growing from different influences over the years. I was forming opinions in the late '60s, early '70s when 'organic' was in the air."

Though the couple sees recent growth in their industry as almost faddist, often attributed to media attention to the chemical Alar used by apple growers, Winship comments "Organic farming was here before and it will be here after."

But New Field Farm welcomes customers for whatever reason.

For three years, the couple has farmed three acres in the summer

months and works at other jobs the rest of the year McAdoo teaches kindergarten, and last year Winship drove school buses for Mascenic

"It is tempting to diversify, winterize, and be a farmer all year long; we don't want to get too big

ously She and partner Craig McKown till three acres on Bass land and sell primarily to local grocers and chefs.

"Some of our buyers are more interested in the high quality of our products than in the fact we are or-

main varieties swell her fields, each with various strains

Rosaly's is currently trying to break into the Boston market with varieties of baby lettuce A popular item at Maggie's in Peterborough this year is Bass' bag of salad mix, which includes different greens and herbs merely awaiting your favorite dressing

With a master's in philosophy of education, Bass is a long way from the days when she taught "every bad fifth grader" in a school in Harlem

"I just hate the idea of poisons on food," says Bass "I don't want to eat, breathe or touch anything grown with harmful chemicals, and I don't think others should have to either "

Discriminating Clientele

For Debbie Stroh, manager of the Miriam Hill Center in Greenville, organic gardening is necessary to keep her customers happy

"Most of our clientele prefer it," said Stroh, who runs the center and cares for the garden Most of the food produced in her one-half acre plot is used by the Center to feed conference-goers

Stroh also supplies a few local caterers with organic goods

Different educational groups come to the center for retreats and conferences It is Stroh's job to keep them happy—and coming back "We are able to cook organically from our own food stores well into January," she said

In addition to starting her own seedlings and making compost, Stroh participates in a co-op which runs out of the Center barn "We can often get organic goods through the food co-op, since as a group we can place big orders "

Stroh said the original garden at the center was laid out according to the I Ching pattern of oriental philosophy "We have kept much of the pattern and it truly is beautiful "

Market Trends

Archie Coll of Coll's Farm Stand agrees the overall trend in the food industry is toward a less processed product

"We've always been very much against using a lot of pesticides, but to produce the good-looking product consumers demand, we find it necessary to use some controls," said Coll

Of his three egg-producing farms, two put out an 'organic' product, "which means, they are free-running birds as opposed to caged, and they aren't fed any bolstering chemicals," he explained. "One farm has roosters which produce 'fertilized eggs' Some people think the hens are happier with roosters around," said Coll. "To me, an egg is an egg But if people want it a certain way, then we will give it to them "

Coll buys some organic products from Judy Unger-Clark and carries many packaged organic foods at the Stand. "There is a demand for it, but it seems so high priced. Even so, we sell about three-quarters of the things she brings in," said Coll;

Jim Mitchell, chef at the Monadnock Inn, uses Unger-Clark's greens in his unique salad. "I make a real effort to 'cook clean;' there isn't any MSG in the house," said Mitchell, referring to an additive often used in bulk foods. "I think it is a good trend, but I don't know. It may be aimed at narrow minded types, elites, and not everyone will benefit "

Chef Hiroshi Hiyashi of Latacarta in Peterborough has been buying produce from Rosaly's Farm. "Organic food is much better. It is easier to cook with, it's tastier, fresher. The natural thing is always better than the man made," he said.

For Hiyashi, the old cliché of you are what you eat is a way of life. "It is important to take in good food every day to make for a sound body. If you don't do this, your body will not be able to act the way you like."



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Betty James and David Trumble of Green Truck Farm in Frankestown stand amidst their organic tomato plants. The pair will play host to a National Organic Farmers Association (NOFA) open house on July 23, when they will share organic tomato growing techniques.

We want to maintain the smallest viable unit on our farm," said Winship

"During growing and harvesting season, there are constant demands to be met," says Winship, "but being self-employed has many advantages Decisions large and small are your own to make. If I want to take time out for a swim on a hot afternoon, it is up to me "

Lettuce Mania

Rosaly Bass grew up on a farm, but "frankly, I always considered my mother's work in the garden to be sissy work. I was mostly interested in the animals."

Now, Bass has a garden of her own that demands to be taken seri-

ously, "but we get positive feedback "

Bass has been farming organically on a smaller scale for 15 years and applied for certification three years ago Nine women round out her staff to do all planting, cultivating and harvesting by hand

In addition to an impressive list of local commercial accounts, Rosaly's Farm has three subscriber families For \$400, each family can pick as much of anything they want from her gardens

"It has worked out well because all three families are good pickers and they take care when in the fields," says Bass

Lettuce is the farm's primary crop, with about 18-20 different plantings a season "We'll be picking into October," says Bass. Five

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Pharmacy Topics
by Derick Nichols

Cheer up! It may keep you alive. According to a Washington University psychologist, those who were seriously depressed at the time heart disease was diagnosed were twice as likely to die, have a heart attack or need major surgery soon after

Sugarless chewing gum does a better job of helping discourage cavities if you start chewing within five minutes of finishing a meal and chew for at least 15 minutes, a study at Indiana University found.

Daily doses of anti-inflammatory drugs—including aspirin and ibuprofen—may keep gallstones from recurring, according to a preliminary study at St. Thomas Hospital in London. More extensive trials will follow.

More new moms are having twins, doctors report. Why? More older mothers who are more likely to have more than one child, fertility drugs that increase the chance of multiple births—and more twins surviving today, thanks to advances in neonatal medicine.

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