

Gleanings From Summer 2014 Farm Walks

**“GROWING NEW FARMERS
THROUGH URBAN AGRICULTURE”
SEATTLE TILTH FARM WORKS / July 14, 2014**

On a hot July day, 35 farmers, community members, educators, and non-profit representatives gathered at Seattle Tilth Farm Works (STFW) in Auburn, WA. This farm incubator program provided a wonderful example of how the agricultural community can approach training new and successful farmers. Resource people from WSU Extension including Malaquias Flores (Latino Program Coordinator), Hannah Cavendish-Palmer (Cultivating Success), and Brian Bodah (Pierce County Extension Director) were on hand to answer questions regarding small farm production.

The walk began with an introduction and history of the STFW program by Andrea Platt Dwyer, executive director of Seattle Tilth. She explained how the program was initially piloted by BURST for Prosperity with a group of Somali-Bantu refugees. In 2011, the entire program was handed over to Seattle Tilth and the non-profit received a Beginning Farmers and Ranchers Development Grant from the USDA to jumpstart Seattle Tilth Farm Works.

Matthew McDermott, STFW farm manager, and Micah Anderson, STFW educational coordinator, gave an overview of the farm site. In total, 40 acres of land are leased from the youth camp organization that owns the land. The program works on nine acres which is broken into quarter-acre parcels doled out to program participants. The farm hosts 10 to 12 new farmers every year, and farmers can lease land from the STFW site for up to four years. Currently, they have 18 farmers on site.

Micah explained the structure of the educational component



Chris Sechrist, Seattle Tilth Farm Works' youngest participant at 19, talks about his plan to raise pastured turkeys at the farm. Photo credit: Becky Warner

EXTENDED WEB VERSIONS

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of STFW. Potential participants are interviewed in November/December; the program starts in February and runs through the end of June. Classes are held on Wednesday evenings where they focus on the “book-learning” side of things, covering all aspects of farming including business planning, plant production, equipment, and marketing. Since farming is best learned by doing, Micah explained that they also have all-day Saturday classes oriented to be hands-on.

For the rest of the farm walk, attendees visited different farms incubating at the site. These farms included a mushroom operation, pastured-pork, and several diversified vegetable operations. Matthew and Micah explained the logistics of their multi-producer CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) program and Food Hub program. In the spring, the STFW farmers build a crop plan together to plan for what will need to be grown and available for the CSA throughout the growing season. This year, the farm grows for 75 half shares and 22 full shares. While most of the farmers participate in the CSA, they can also utilize other marketing outlets. The farm walk demonstrated first-hand how important it is for young and beginning farmers to receive the support they need to find success in the field. STFW offers a viable system to provide for that need.

**“COWHERD MANAGEMENT & DAIRY PRODUCTION”
SPOKANE'S FAMILY FARM / July 28, 2014**

In an area known as the West Plains near Spokane, WA, Trish and Tim Warner of Spokane's Family Farm led fellow farmers and dairymen on an informative farm walk regarding their cow dairy operation. The Warners began managing the dairy in early 2013, and since that time have made many improvements to its infrastructure as well to expanding their markets. Currently selling only vat-pasteurized, non-homogenized whole milk, the Warners are looking to expand product offerings to chocolate milk, cream, half-and-half, and perhaps even ice cream and cheese.

The farm walk began with a walk through the hay fields surrounding the dairy itself. The farm consists of about 80 acres which previously operated as a ranch. At present, the farm grows alfalfa-oat mix on about 20 acres. The Warners harvest this hay for their cows which is supplemented with hay and feed grown by their partners, the Royslance family in the Moses Lake area. Tim explained that their long-term goal is to become pasture-based and utilize all 80 acres. For now, they house their cows in free stalls and a fenced corral area.



One of Spokane's Family Farm Jersey cows.

Photo credit: Angela Anegon

Tim worked closely with animal nutritionists at Washington State University to develop a feed ration for his cows that they can certify as GMO-free. Tim and Trish explained how their herd size is largely determined by the volume needs of their markets. Spokane's Family Farm currently milks 45 cows—a mix of Jerseys and Holsteins—and they have determined that one cow can

supply three grocery stores per week. The Warners sell to local grocery stores in the Spokane area with Spokane Produce as their distributor. They also deliver to restaurants, cafes, and grocery stores located throughout Eastern Washington, Northern Idaho, and Montana.

To manage their cows' waste, Tim designed settling ponds with the help of the Spokane County Conservation District. He was also able to obtain a USDA-EQIP (Environmental Quality Incentives Program) cost-share grant to help fund the construction of a double-lined lagoon that they are prepping to build in the coming months. After visiting the cows, attendees toured the milking parlor to learn about Spokane's Family Farms milking and processing. In 2013, Tim remodeled the milking parlor into a pit milking system so that milkers are at eye level with the cow udders. The cows are milked twice a day every day, and it takes them about 75 minutes to milk the entire herd.

Most of the pasteurization and bottling equipment was already on the farm when Tim and Trish took over management. Tim shared that the equipment set-up isn't ideal for them—as a result, they have begun construction of a new milk processing room that makes processing more efficient. Eventually they would like to add a cream separator to offer cream and half-and-half to their customers. Both Tim and Trish stressed the importance of developing a good relationship with WSDA inspectors. The Warners have a great relationship with theirs and often call the inspectors for feedback on the types of expansions they would like to include for the dairy.

At the end of the walk, attendees gathered for a cheese making demonstration. Trish made a soft, farmstead cheese for everyone to try. In the future, Trish would like to experiment with selling her cheese at Spokane area farmer's markets. It was apparent throughout the entire walk that both Tim and Trish take seriously the health of their cows, the quality of their milk, and the sustainability of their business.

"HORSE-POWERED ORGANIC FARMING" YACOLTMOUNTAINFARM/August11,2014

Near Yacolt, farmers from around southwest Washington gathered at Yacolt Mountain Farm & Nursery to learn about certified organic farming with draft horses. Farmer-owners Dan and Caroline Swansey were incredibly knowledgeable as they shared their passion for working with their four draft horses and growing certified organic vegetables and fruits. In attendance were several resource people including Eric Lambert of WSU Clark Co. Extension and from the WSDA Organic Food Program Linda Condon, Scott Rice, and Erica Ware (WSDA-Organic Food Program).

To begin, Dan demonstrated the use of two draft horses, Duke and Betsey, to cultivate the soil with a disc implement. Yacolt Mountain uses their horses for all cultivation and also for manure and lime application. With Caroline's background in soil science, she spoke readily to their soil structure. When looking for farmland, she carefully scrutinized the soil of each by using the Web Soil Survey, an online tool that maps out the soil types of a given location. Yacolt's soil is a silt loam and is on a slight, south facing slope which makes it quite amenable to early spring cultivation. Since the soil is not very sticky, horses maneuver easily through. The horses themselves do not wear shoes and do not compact the soil as much as tractor tires might.



Dan Swansey of Yacolt Mountain Farm & Nursery near Yacolt, WA, explains the use of the furrower implement. *Photo credit: Angela Anegon*

Both Dan and Caroline expressed the importance of a relationship with their horses that reinforces positive experiences. At the end of the day, horses are unpredictable animals—but Dan explained that consistently working with them to establish trust reduces the risk. In terms of feeding the horses, the Swanseys purchase feed and graze them when possible on their acreage. They recently obtained a USDA-EQIP (Environmental Quality Incentives Program) cost-share to construct a heavy-use protection area for the horses, so the horses can have more time outside of the barn

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stalls. In the future, the Swanseys would like to produce the majority of their horse feed on the farm. Dan mentioned that the horses not only provide labor, but they also provide fertility with their manure, which is just as valuable.

Dan and Caroline spoke to their desire to be a sustainable, diversified operation. They currently grow three acres of diversified, certified organic vegetables along with a small orchard. They have a 25-member CSA, sell at two farmer's markets, and have their own farm store. Yacolt Mountain has a large flock of hens for eggs and they also produce pork and lamb. The integration of the animals has allowed them to diversify their production and marketing.

Attendees visited the root cellar that Dan constructed last winter. The cellar allows them to store root vegetables and winter squash for their CSA customers through the winter months. In the future, Dan and Caroline envision extending the length of their CSA season. They also believe that their land can produce enough food to support a 200-member CSA—a goal they aim to reach in the next 10 years.

In addition to expanding their growing capacity, Dan and Caroline are giving careful consideration to starting a farm internship program next growing season. They want to help train the next generation of farmers and are interested in providing young people a rich educational farm experience. Having managed an organic farm that hired interns, the Swanseys realize that it is not always simple to find the right type of intern nor to be both teacher and farmer. All in attendance agreed that Dan and Caroline would make wonderful mentors, judging by their passion and the quality of information shared during the farm walk.



Dan Swansey of Yacolt Mountain Farm in Clark County, WA, uses horses Duke and Betsey to help demonstrate discing. *Photo: Angela Anegon*

"POST-HARVEST HANDLING: THE PROCESS OF GAP CERTIFICATION" LOCAL ROOTS FARM / August 25, 2014



Jason Salvo, co-farmer/owner of Local Roots in King County, WA, explains the use of their root washer in postharvest handling. *Photo: Angela Anegon*

At Local Roots Farm near Duvall, WA, farmer-owners Jason Salvo and Siri Erickson-Brown led nearly 50 farmers and community members on an informative farm walk regarding postharvest handling and the intricacies of following GAP guidelines (Good Agricultural Practices). Farm manager Sam Bowhay, who has been instrumental in researching GAPs recommendations and making changes at Local Roots, also spoke. Resource people in attendance included Tricia Kovacs (WSDA Food and Consumer Safety/Farm-to-School), Hannah Cavendish-Palmer (WSU Cultivating Success), and Andy Bary (WSU Puyallup Research and Extension Center).

Local Roots Farm grows eight acres of mixed vegetables sold through a 235-member CSA and three farmers markets. Jason shared the challenges of balancing time and efficiency when it comes to harvesting and proper handling for all their markets. Sam explained that this past winter he took the time to research GAPs guidelines—which he found amounted to a lot of record keeping. Jason talked about their postharvest handling routine, and expressed the desire to use more field packing (directly harvesting into a wax-lined box then sold to customers) for certain vegetables including kale, cabbage, and perhaps even lettuce. In experimenting with field packing, Jason found that often times produce holds its quality longer when field-packed, rather than being washed before it is packed.

Jason encouraged attendees to drive the Farm Walk conversation with their questions. A common question among all was the difference between GAPs and FSMA (Food Safety Modernization Act). Andy Bary and Tricia Kovacs were able to clarify for the group that GAPs is a certification driven by large food purchasers such as schools, hospitals, and grocery stores. FSMA is a federal law currently being written and going through the commenting process. So while no farmer is subject to the rules of FSMA quite

yet—they have yet to be finalized—it behooves them to get their practices in line with the rules being proposed.

Jason and Sam took attendees through set-up and logistics of one of their wash stations. Local Roots currently uses wash tubs for leafy vegetables, and a spray table and root washer for root and other cylindrical vegetables. Produce for CSA shares, restaurant sales, and some farmers markets are packed into wax boxes. These boxes cannot technically be reused, so Jason has been trying to find alternatives. For markets, they pack into Rubbermaid tubs that are sanitized between use. Along with their re-usability, Jason and Sam have found that the tubs lack the air exchange that wax boxes offer, so produce doesn't retain its quality quite as well.

In 2013, Jason and Siri purchased a shipping container to store winter squash and some root vegetables. Squash is washed and cured in their greenhouse before storing. Jason outfitted the container with a humidifier to provide some sort of humidity and temperature regulation. Last year, Local Roots sold squash and root crops through March, providing the farm income through the winter months.

Attendees were able to see Local Roots employees pack up some of the 235 CSA boxes. Produce is packed into wax boxes, filling one box at a time. Jason and his crew deliver boxes to 12 drop-off sites in the Seattle area. Throughout the walk, Jason, Siri, and their farm manager Sam offered their breadth of knowledgeable and honesty regarding their experience with postharvest handling and the rigors of GAPs certification.

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To find more resources and programs for beginning farmers and ranchers please visit www.Start2Farm.gov.

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