

WHY WE FARM ORGANICALLY

Our commitment to organic agriculture originates from a commitment to the long-term sustainability of the planet as well as the land we live on. We want to cooperate with the land and life around us rather than treat it simply as a resource to be exploited. We act on this commitment by striving to maintain and improve the health of our soil as well as the farm ecosystem. Cover crops such as rye, oats, clover, vetch, and sudan grass are grown on our land when it is not being used to grow cash crops. The cover crops are then tilled under to provide food for earthworms and microorganisms that work diligently to maintain soil health. We avoid harming the soil life by forgoing the use of synthetic pesticides (which also protects you, the consumer, from residues) and synthetic, concentrated fertilizers that upset the natural balance. No one family of crops is grown in the same ground year after year, helping to protect our vegetables from diseases and pests. A given plot of land is taken out of cash crop production at least once every four years to give it a rest from tillage, compaction by machinery and foot traffic, and to regenerate it through the use of cover crops. During its year out of production, the land hosts a flock of about 200 laying hens, who graze on a rye, clover, and oat pasture mix, and add their fertility and pest control.

While our emphasis is on soil and ecosystem health, we occasionally need to use a quick fix. We fertilize spring broccoli plantings with fish emulsion and feather meal to provide them with adequate nitrogen when cool soils and low biological activity limit nitrogen availability. And we sometimes apply a plant-derived insecticide to control flea beetles on broccoli or cucumber beetles on squash.

We strive to encourage ecological diversity and stability on the farm by growing a variety of plants exclusively for food and shelter for beneficial insects, which eat aphids and many other vegetable pests. Insect eating bats are invited to find a home in an increasing number of bat houses placed around the property. And we are planting perennials such as fir, locust, Oregon ash, and alder tress, and hedgerows of native flowering shrubs and plants, on land that is not suitable for crops. We wish to provide more diverse wildlife habitat and counter the excessive emissions of carbon dioxide created by human activity.

We wish to employ as much renewable and clean energy as possible in our farming practices. We currently have 17.5 kilowatts of solar energy production, which provides 85% of our annual electricity use (for irrigation, cooler, ice machine, a battery-powered tractor, packing shed, greenhouse, shops, and homes). Additional solar installations are planned for the future.

We are concerned that there are not enough new farmers to carry sustainable food production into the future. We hire several apprentices each season in hopes of offering some training and education for future farmers. In addition, we speak at several conferences each winter to share some of our experiences with new and established farmers, and to help support and sustain the farming community that has nourished us.

While a high percentage of produce is grown with disregard for the soil and the planet, as well as a lack of concern about nutrition and flavor, we recognize that some growers use many of the practices outlined above, regardless of the label they use to describe their farming practices. Given the complexity of nature, much of which is not understood by farmers and scientists alike, it would be presumptuous of us to claim that our organic growing practices represent the best way to farm. However, we feel that the organic standards we abide by are a strong step in the right direction, because they encourage an ecosystems approach to farming and prohibit the use of toxic materials. Because our farm is Tilth certified, you are assured that our food is free of toxic residues and is grown in a manner that strives to cooperate with nature rather than make war on the earth. By supporting farms that grow certified organic produce, you can share in this effort to heal the planet.