

Farm aims at creating community

By ERICK PETERSON
For the Capital Press

When Merritt Mitchell-Wajeeh left her job in Florida to become a farmer in Washington state, she wanted to do something special.

As she envisioned it, her farm would be a learning center, where people could discover sustainable farming practices. Average people could learn how to plant gardens in their yards, and young students could learn more about their food.

In addition, people could get involved with the farm, and they could receive fresh vegetables direct from their source.

This goal had its origins in lessons learned from her mother, Brooks Mitchell, who would eventually join Mitchell-Wajeeh in



Erick Peterson/For the Capital Press
Sam Wajeeh and Merritt Mitchell-Wajeeh stand with their sons Zachary and Laith Wajeeh on Heavenly Hills Harvest Farm in Sunnyside.

the endeavor. But this new mission was also encouraged by motherhood. She wanted to provide healthful foods for her children and other people's children.

Also, she was influenced by her education, a master's degree in environmental science, and her career, having worked as an environmental regulator. Years of study and

Harvest Farm

Owners: Merritt Mitchell-Wajeeh and Brooks Mitchell

Year started: 2007

Acres: 92

Location: Sunnyside, Wash.

Crops: Includes various greens, carrots, beets, potatoes, tomatoes, cucumbers, eggplant, peppers, beans, squashes, melons, radishes and herbs

work put her in touch with, and gave her information about, farming practices.

She and her husband came to Washington, where she said she had an experience that seemed religious. She visited farms that were for sale between Yakima and the Tri-Cities, Wash., and came across the farm that she would later purchase.

It was a former dairy farm that had degraded in years of having not been used. But when she entered the barn, she saw a ray of sunshine beaming into the building and she was filled with a good feeling.

"That's when I knew," she said. "This place was it."

Her mother, a teacher and writer, was also excited about the farm and joined Mitchell-Wajeeh as an investor.

"I come from a line of people who were always interested in nutritious food," Mitchell said. "This was even before anyone was talking about organic."

Being involved in this farming project intrigued her. She bought into it, and she began splitting her time between her home in Florida and her new farm in the Yakima Valley.

Mother and daughter engage the public with their farm, starting a community supported agricultural program.

"This is a way for a small farm to know who the

customer base is," Mitchell-Wajeeh said, explaining the concept of CSA. "You sell shares of the farm. The dividend to the person buying the shares is a box of produce."

She believes that her farm was one of the first in the area doing this, but more farms in the Yakima and Tri-Cities area have established CSAs since.

Shareholders have gained an education on the farm. While they receive and enjoy staples such as tomatoes, potatoes, peppers, herbs, melons, lettuce, chard and kale, they have also received rarer foods. Many have learned about foods like sorrel, an herb with a sour flavor, for the first time, and have eaten heirloom beans, melons and more.

Also, the farm has hosted farming workshops and has partnered with other community organizations, such as the Mid Columbia Fisheries enhancement group. Projects are constantly in development to educate.

"We've created a community here," Mitchell-Wajeeh said.

Products & Solutions for Agricultural Safety



SPRAY SEASON PPE

Personal Protective Equipment
Comfort & Protection

www.oxarc.com

Washington - Idaho - Oregon - Shop Online
1-800-765-9055

- Chemical Gloves
- Full-Face Respirator
- Half-Face Respirator
- Chemical Splash Goggles
- Chemical Resistant Boots
- Disposable and Reusable suits available.



Chemical
Protective
Suit

Gloves with
protection
requirements

Add a Cooling-Vest on
hot days as a heat stress
precaution

Safety First:

Follow chemical manufacturer's guidelines for decontaminating the spray suit. Do not use suit if there are cuts, holes, tears, missing snaps, or separated seams.



CHOOSE FROM 50 TILTS IN STOCK

starting at \$1,525 for a PJ 5'x10" Tilt Trailer



TRUCK BEDS
starting at \$1,895

LARGE INVENTORY
• DUMP TRAILERS
• ENCLOSED TRAILERS
• UTILITIES • CAR HAULERS
• FLAT BEDS • STOCK

Diamond Trailer Sales
Your All Service Dealer

541-740-5135 or 541-953-7548 • Halsey, OR
View our entire inventory: diamondksales.com

S15-5/#5