

Applebean Farm: A Family Farm Started From Scratch

By Scott Laird

Denice Scott and Doug Chatfield are carving out a new life for themselves and their family in Columbia County. Nestled into the hills between Rainier and Clatskanie is Applebean Farm, what some might call an experiment in back to basics living and subsisting. But for Denice and Doug and their children, it's more than an experiment. It's a way of life that mirrors their values. It's an opportunity to get back to what is important—food, family, shelter, community. It's an idea that life can be more interesting and satisfying if we would all just turn off the television for a while and get our hands dirty. It's the idea that a good day's work can be satisfying and rewarding, especially if at the end of the day, that work has put food on your table and fed your family.

Denice and Doug describe themselves as “hard core do-it-yourself-ers, who believe in the power of hard work.” They purchased their five acres, and, with their three children, moved in this past November. They have carved out a small family farm with the idea that they could support themselves by raising their own food and selling their excess to friends and neighbors and others in the community.

The Scott's are part of a new tradition, one that is moving away from corporate farm produced food, and back towards the once-disappearing small family farms. Away from pesticides and herbicides and towards organic growing. Away from large supermarkets and processed foods and towards farmers markets and bartering. Towards sharing tools and equipment rather than taking on excessive debt to own a large tractor you only use a few times a year. And in these tough economic times, self-sufficiency is a skill set that can be very valuable.

The idea of going out to the backyard to pick your dinner from the garden is something many of us have gotten away from. “That is hugely satisfying,” says Denice. “And I really like the idea of promoting it as accessible. We're doing this farm on a shoestring. We're figuring out what we can do in this first season. And next season we'll add to it.”

They don't have huge expectations, just some very attainable goals. “I really like the idea of raising food for a small community of people,” says Denice. “Ultimately, one of our main goals is to be able to feed our own family, whether by growing it, or by raising enough cash from selling it, or by trading it. By adjusting your expectations and goals, I think it's totally reasonable to think you can have a successful farm, by being diversified.”

Denice and Doug have begun selling shares in their CSA— which stands for Community Supported Agriculture, where community members who buy-in at the start of the season receive a basket of fresh produce each week direct from the farm. CSA's are a growing successful business model for small family farms, and a way for consumers to be more connected to where their food comes from. Besides the weekly basket, Applebean Farm is offering something unique— canning shares. Customers can order large quantities of tomatoes, cucumbers or other



Inside the greenhouse at Applebean Farm

vegetables that they can put up themselves at the end of the season. “We've had a good response to the canning shares,” said Doug.

Denice and Doug are experienced gardeners and canners, who grew some of their own food in their backyard garden in North Portland before moving to Rainier. The property they bought is half covered in trees— which provides an ample supply of firewood, and half-cleared for the house and large yard area. A large green house was already on site, one of the main selling points of the property. Doug borrowed a tractor from a neighbor and has turned and tilled three large plots for the heirloom vegetables and berries they plan to grow. The greenhouse is full of vegetable starts, already well established in early spring. They will be growing strawberries and blueberries, carrots, peas, tomatoes onions, potatoes, lettuces, broccoli, cabbages, and of course, apples and beans. “I am trying to grow things my family likes to eat,” says Denice. “We have three little kids, so at the end of the day we have to go inside and put dinner on the table.” They have a variety of laying hens that are producing eggs, and the hope is to raise meat chickens as well. They may also raise some pigs in the future.

Denice is a former teacher, who may apply to do some substitute teaching in the winter to supplement their income. The children are home-schooled and have daily chores. The girls, Olivia, eight, and Mia, six, feed the chickens and collect the eggs every day, and are already learning to cook. Olivia made an egg breakfast for her Dad that morning. “Perfect medium eggs!” said Doug. “There's nothing better than that!” The youngest, two year old Brishen, doesn't work— yet. The name Brishen is old English/Gypsy which means “born in the rain,” appropriate to this northwest region. A family farm is a great way for young children to get educated and learn about responsibility. “A lot of families spend good money to send their children to a school with a working garden on site,” says Denice.

“I've always had a garden,” said Denice, while explaining how the idea to start a farm came about. “I never had a need for a weekly share from a CSA. And I was always going out to Sauvie's Island to get my

big boxes of tomatoes and cuc's to can. And I started thinking, ‘I could be that person that does this.’ Right now, I think people are more in the mindset to brush up on all those things your grandma knew how to do.”

“Especially when you are serving your local community, where someone can come and see you,” adds Doug. “The money stays in Columbia County. And it's an opportunity to meet people as well.”

That sense of community is a big part of what Denice and Doug are hoping to accomplish with their move to the country. “It's been a little frustrating to look around and see how much opportunity there is to do small scale agriculture out here,” says Denice. “It's not organized. The Grange system has sort of fallen apart. There is so much out here.” The idea of working together with their neighbors, sharing resources, trading and bartering, is very appealing— and practical. “We don't need to have a cow if you have a cow,” says Denice. “We'll trade you our extra tomatoes for milk every week.” She is also exploring the idea of purchasing a mobile chicken processing plant that could travel the county and be shared among families who could raise their own meat chickens. Again, working together and sharing resources to accomplish common goals.

Denice and Doug have taken what some consider a big risk, quitting their jobs, moving to a new community, starting a new farm. But it is a life of their choosing, and a life that reflects their values. A life that is simpler and less complex in some respects, yet will take a lot of ingenuity, self-reliance and hard work. “There is always something to do on a farm,” says Doug.

“And at the end of the day, you have to work at something,” says Denice.

More information about farm happenings, photos, recipes, and musings can be found on

Denice's blog at <http://applebeanfarm.wordpress.com>. To get in touch with Denice and Doug and to sign up for their CSA contact applebeanfarm@gmail.com or call 503-369-6635. Also, look for them at the Vernonia Open Air Market on Fridays.



A hen thinks about laying an egg



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