

# A Tale of Two Farms: *Small Local Farms Are Becoming Popular Again*

By Scott Laird

*Small family farms are again becoming popular as a place to buy fresh, locally grown produce. And Vernonia is no exception, with two new farms expanding their operations this past summer, and offering delicious, homegrown produce direct from the farm and at local farmers markets. Both of these two new operations have been selling their produce at the Vernonia Open Air Market on Friday evenings from 5-7:30 PM. Here are their stories.*

**Dairy Creek Farm**, just north of Highway 26 on Highway 47, is offering a wide range of you-pick fresh produce for



purchase. Debbie and David Wycoff are growing their vegetables naturally, with no pesticides or herbicides, although they can't claim to be certified organic until they jump through all the required hoops. David has installed a drip irrigation system called "plasticulture," which wraps the soil rows in plastic, and keeps the soil moist and uses less water.

The Wycoffs purchased the eighteen-acre property four years ago from the Allen Family, who wanted the farm to go to a family that would farm it. The Allen family had been on that piece of land for forty-eight

years.

The Wycoffs have been in the office furniture business, which has struggled dur-



ing the economic slowdown. So the family, which includes sons Devon, 14, and Dawson, 10, have decided to give vegetable farming a try. They have a stand where vegetables can be purchased by passers-by. They also allow shoppers to you-pick, and Debbie said she would gladly trade some help with weeding in exchange for vegetables. A greenhouse was installed in June which will allow them to start seeds earlier next year. They are also raising turkeys and chickens. They have been attending three weekly farmers markets-- in Banks, Forest Grove and Vernonia. They are also considering a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) system, where customers buy a seasonal membership and receive a weekly produce box of whatever is fresh.

Dairy Creek Farm is growing tomatoes, beans, five different peppers, six different cucumbers, cabbages, melons, zucchini and other squashes, and lots of pumpkins.

**Ancient Earth Farms**, on Keasey Road in Vernonia, was started this past year by Brenda Skeels and Earling Yontz. The pair have taken a somewhat different approach to family farming and are raising all their vegetables in pots. They are developing

natural and organic soil mixtures and fertilizers, and spent this past season experimenting with mixtures to see which seeds would grow best in the Vernonia climate with the best mixture of soils and fertilizers.

"Some plants are doing awfully well, and some plants are struggling," said Earling.

The farm idea started out as a hobby in January as a project for Brenda, who is suffering from fibromyalgia, and recently had to leave her job with the State Corrections system. "What started out as a small greenhouse project has just exploded," said Earling. "We just kept meeting people and making contacts that have got us where we needed to go."

Ancient Earth Farms is using sustainable farming practices-- all organic soils and no spraying. They intend to get Tilth Organic Certified, but didn't do that this past year.



Yontz and Skeels have installed two twenty-by-fifty foot greenhouses, and plan to erect two additional thirty-by-one-hundred footers. This past year, they planted only heirloom seeds, and hope to be able to continue with those. With the heated greenhouses, they intend to grow vegetables year round.

The experiments with soils have led to an additional opportunity-- marketing of soil mixtures. Yontz, who has a background

in sales, has been out to visit some large area distributors, and may be able to sell the mixtures that they have proven to work at Ancient Earth Farms. The soil mixes they are creating are coming from local sources. Skeels works with the plants and Yontz has



been working the street, finding customers.

Ancient Earth Farms is doing contract growing for local outlets which include the Cedar Ridge Camp and The Blue

House Cafe, both in Vernonia, so local produce is being used in local businesses, and they hope to expand on this market as well.

Skeels and Yontz, with their children, Zach, 8, Rachel, 11, and Ashton, 18, have been on their four-acre farm for four years. They produce farm fresh eggs, and raise pigs and cattle. They are growing lettuces and spinachs, cucumbers, peppers, eggplants, onions, carrots, cabbage, melons, tomatoes and squashes, and herbs, and see this past year as an opportunity to learn about farming in Vernonia. "Knowledge is everything and we've learned a lot this year," said Yontz. "And I think we'll do real well next year."

They hope to open a small roadside stand right at the farm where people can stop and shop and they have been attending local farmers markets. "We get a lot of input from people at the markets, finding out what kinds of things people want," said Skeels.

*Two local farms, two similar, yet different stories. All I know is there is nothing quite like a sliced tomato or a cantaloupe straight from the garden. And now both are available locally.*

## CONGRATULATIONS!



Vernonia Sentry Market would like to congratulate Dana Roach and Black Bear Coffee on the opening of their historic saloon, The Bear Creek Pub & Bar.



Driving can be frustrating at times, especially when you feel threatened or annoyed by another driver. It's really important to keep a cool head and steady hands on the wheel. You can do more to protect yourself, your passengers and other drivers by avoiding aggressive drivers—or taking it down a notch yourself.

Driving too fast is the number one threat on the roads. AAA reports that aggressive driving can double your chance of being involved in a collision. So if you notice someone else speeding, tailgating, weaving among cars, honking excessively, yelling and gesturing, don't aggravate them. It's best to avoid eye contact and make room for the driver to get by, then call 9-1-1. If you see a crash, stop safely nearby and act as a witness.

There are also a few ways all of us as drivers can keep from annoying others. Try to drive close to the speed limit and don't block passing lanes. Don't tailgate, yell, gesture or speed up when someone is trying to merge or pass. Only use one parking space.

Columbia 9-1-1 reminds all of you—our friends and neighbors throughout the county—to take safe driving into your own hands. Buckle up, stay calm, drive close to the speed limit and don't drink and drive. And if you're ever in a traffic emergency, call 9-1-1 right away because every second counts.



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