

# From the Fields

Exploring Cottage Grove area farms

## Beyond the homestead

Brice Creek Croft learns to feed its community

BY JON STINNETT  
The Cottage Grove Sentinel

When Bruce Hutcheon and Val Rocco settled on the land that would become Brice Creek Croft, they originally sought to grow food for themselves. Apparently, they got too good at it.

The previous few years had already been a bit of a whirlwind for the couple; they met when Hutcheon offered Rocco a ride while the latter was hitchhiking in New Zealand (really).

Rocco spent time interning on a farm on Orcas Island, Wash., while Hutcheon served as an environmental consultant in his native Scotland, a gig that ended when an outbreak of hoof and mouth disease shut down many of the country's farms.

After spending time in California, the couple decided they liked the Eugene area; they would end up here in 2005.

"We were planning on buying land to homestead and build there if we wanted to," Hutcheon said.

They'd settle at an idyllic piece of land on the banks of Brice Creek, with Rocco selling produce first through Ruby and Amber's Organic Oasis to the farmer's markets in Cottage Grove and Creswell. Over time, Rocco became a stalwart presence and friendly face at the Cottage Grove market, which at the time took place at Coiner Park on Wednesdays in conjunction with the Chamber of Commerce's Concerts in the Park series.

Some farmers have deliberately chosen a more solitary life, and as such they aren't out to sell their wares directly to the public — Rocco is exactly the opposite, and she showcases a warmth and charm that makes her the perfect salesperson of her own pro-



photo by Jon Stinnett

Val Rocco harvests sweet corn at Brice Creek Croft, which offers its wares at Cottage Grove's Farmers Market each Thursday.

duce and ambassador of the area's farmers.

As time marched on and the farm's output increased, Rocco believed it was time to expand, and the couple leased land nearby to further ramp up production. Now, they've reined things back in a bit as Rocco's teaching job at Dorena has taken shape and the demands of expecting a new addition to the family have dictated. But cutting back hasn't been easy.

"It's hard to stop selling people food," said Rocco. "We have an intimate relationship with our customers, who we see every week."

Two years ago, the Chamber of Commerce elected to move the concert series to Bohemia Park, leaving the farmers market without an obvious home.

"Having the market move was really sad for the farmers," Rocco said. "We stopped having a place to vend, a place to show our face to the community. Now, we have our face again, and I'm super stoked."

Now, Rocco and other area farmers bring

their goods to the farmers market at the corner of Seventh and Main streets each Thursday afternoon as part of a concerted effort to reach out directly to their customers, neighbors and friends.

"For each of us to make the commitment to be there each week is huge," she said. "We've focused on feeding ourselves and grown food because we love working on the land. It offers a healthy lifestyle, which is super important to me."

Rocco and Hutcheon say there's no specific formula or secret to their farming success aside from the time-tested method of keeping animals to consume vegetable waste, then allowing the animals' waste to fertilize the vegetables.

"All that's required is a lot of muscle and time," Rocco said. "But every year, you learn something new. Last year, we learned all about pigs. This year, it's been about bees and making a human baby."

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