

# Rye Reflections

## ***Family farms foster fruitful fields***

*Supplying natural and organic produce, local farms also improve environment*

*Story and photos by Bill Pappou Drew*

**A 14th generation descendant sells food from the family farm**



*Abigail Wiggin helping customers at the Wake Robin Farm stand, Farmers Market, Portsmouth.*

### **I've lost 40 pounds, with help from family farms.**

During a visit from my 21-year-old "green" granddaughter, Christina, She showed me how to prepare and eat the proper foods, those grown naturally, organically if possible. I have since lost more than 40 pounds.

Active with environmental issues and being involved in all sorts of back-to-nature ways of living and eating, Christina has become a master of preparing appetizing meals with natural ingredients. She has passed the knowledge onto me. The reverse of that statement has been true for 20 years. Now it is time for me to reap the rewards.

Out went the butter, the daily consumption of a half a gallon of ice cream, and the availability of scrumptious bakery items that were always there for nibbling. She has restructured my life and put me into a different frame of mind. As I am a caregiver, I am in full control of planning, shopping for, preparing, serving and devouring the meals I create. Now it is up to me to eat wisely. I also need to heed daughter Cindi's repeated suggestion for increased physical activity by



*Christina Alexa Liakos*

"walking the malls." Now, where am I supposed to obtain these nutritious foods?

### **FAMILY FARMS: Sustainable agriculture and Certified Organic Farms**

#### **HOME GROWN: Sustainable agriculture**

Don Silva of Northwood, for more than fifty years, has had a garden. He even had one in North Carolina when he was in the military right after college. "I grow my own vegetables, because I know the soil, and I know the fertilizer and the quality of the seeds. I grow vegetables, berries, grapes, peaches, cherries, plums, and apples. I know what I am getting."



*Don overlooks his huge garden of vegetables and flowers. He is particularly proud of his work in raising gladiolas*

For me, maybe I should plant a garden. Then again, I live on but a small plot of ground, mostly ledge, as New Castle is that, with a little soil sprinkled over it. That option is out.

### **FAMILY FARM - The Wake Robin Farm, Stratham: Sustainable agriculture**

In 1631 Captain Thomas Wiggin settled in, what is now known as the town of Stratham. He and his family cleared the land, tilled the soil and planted crops. Today, fourteen generations later, Bob Wiggin also cleared part of this same ground, and with daughter Abigail continues the legacy.

His descendants grow products using a mix of various methods to nurture the crops and compete against bugs and disease. As one certified organic farmer told me, Wake Robin Farm products are of the highest quality and taste.

*From seedlings to sales, it completes a cycle.*

Bob and Abigail operate the farm alone, planting, growing, and bringing the fruits of their efforts to market. There is a small farm stand by the roadside, but most of their distribution is achieved by attending various farmers and holiday markets. The latter, held inside during the late fall and in December, are becoming more popular as the demand for local grown products increases, and it also provides another avenue for the farmer to sell his produce, and for the





customer to buy locally grown merchandise.

This year they've added a new approach to marketing their product. They have instituted a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture). Obtain more information about a CSA by clicking [here](#)."

Participants buy a "share," for instance pay \$500 up front, then the grower provides weekly bags of groceries available for pickup at the farm or at the farmer's markets they attend. The effort has been successful, and Bob says they are planning to increase the number of members in the coming years.

Abigail is bringing high tech to the operation. She has created an Internet [site](#) for the farm. It describes their operation, and, of course, she utilizes the Internet in search for sites that describe new ways of doing things.

### **FAMILY FARM -The Barker's Farm, Stratham; Sustainable agriculture**

Whereas the Wake Robin Farm is on a remote road in Stratham, Barker's Farm (barkersfarm@verizon.net) is adjacent to Route 33, the main highway between Portsmouth and Exeter. This makes it readily observable with easy access and exit for their clientele. It is not a stand rather an inside store offering the latest natural products directly from the garden.



*Barkers Farm store as it positioned along Rt.33, with the farm on the hill behind it. On the right, Gordon is involved in a familiar activity known to all farmers, "field frustration time," handling the unexpected with limited tools and no parts. One supply item used is "bailing wire." and with the modern*

*generation, gray tape.*

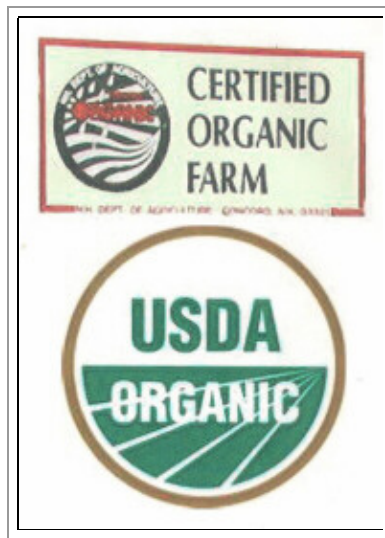
Here, Gordon Barker and wife Edie run an operation that employs up to a half a dozen people during the growing and harvesting season. This year the group included two from Jamaica. Using immigrant labor in farm operations is common in the northeast. They assist in the growing and harvesting of the crop, then move on to warmer climates during the winter season.

Gordon's family, for decades, has supplied neighborhood and some large local grocery stores with fresh produce. With large conglomerate corporations taking over some of these facilities, the paperwork required to meet their standards, and the liability requirements to provide them with verification of safe products, have altered Gordon's strategy for distribution. Now he continues to sell at local farmer's markets. He also supplies other farm stand operations with inventory.

His apple cider, for instance, is sold in Stratham but cannot be sold in the City of Portsmouth due to locally imposed restrictions.

Their product line is a mix of crops grown using organic and non-organic methods. Corn, he says, is not a profitable operation for the pure organic farmer. There is just too much labor required to treat each ear of corn against insects and disease, and some of the equipment required is prohibitively expensive.

### **Organic, natural, and off the shelf products; what do these names mean?**



A website called [A Confused Buyers Guide to Eco Friendly Products](#) relates: "**Organic** simply means that the botanical product was grown in a chemical-free environment.

**Natural**, on the other hand, means a final product has been made solely from botanical resources without any use of additives (fillers) or preservatives. "Natural products can still receive an assist in the growing process with the aid of some chemical support. Also, Natural foods are not regulated and do not meet the same criteria for the growing of products that organic foods do."

State and federal agencies approve a "Certified Organic Farm," regulated accordingly. Organic farms with sales under

\$5,000, are not required to obtain certification. To obtain a more detailed explanation, click [here](#)."

Other farms support a [sustainable agricultural approach](#), and integrate three main goals, environmental stewardship, farm profitably, and prosperous farming communities.

Large conglomerates with huge operations and all sorts of chemical assistance and procedures produce the highest volume of output possible, at the lowest cost. Natural and organic farms are for the most part, small operations, ones devoted to the soil. They nurture their crops with tender loving care. With the latter, whole families are usually involved.

### **FAMILY FARM - The Nelson Farm, Strafford: A Certified Organic Farm**

Shawn Stimson owns and operates *Sustainable Products* supplying locally grown produce year round. He also manages the Nelson Farm in Strafford, N.H. Shawn's email: [sustainablefarmproducts@hotmail.com](mailto:sustainablefarmproducts@hotmail.com).



He says it is a difficult task to operate a certified organic farm. Various official methods do not often produce the best-looking produce. However, where there are no chemicals used in the growing process superior product taste, nutrition and safety are achieved. He goes on to say, all fresh produce is by far better, than that purchased in a grocery store where the source is unknown, unless their source of supply is listed as being from local farmers and labeled as such.



*Nelson Farm Stand in Northwood.  
Family farms are for families and families of customers*



*A birth announcement of new family member, Thesun Phineas Stimpson; note his first name and "at the farm." Older sister Natalie helps Dad out*

#### **A FAMILY EXPERIENCE: [The Free Bird Farm](#), New York, A Certified Organic Farm.**

Ken Fruehstorfer nurtured his love of farming as the saying goes, from the ground up - organically. He was a college graduate intern at a farm in Stratham, then on to an Audubon farm in Lincoln, Mass. and then Gen. Patton's farm in



*Maryellen, Ken, and the family  
(M. Driscoll family photo)*

Hamilton, Mass. He teamed up with Maryellen Driscoll, a professional food writer, and together they own and operate a diverse certified organic farm of 180 acres. It is located in an agricultural community surrounded by numerous Amish farms. They raise a variety of products from garlic to beef, chickens, eggs, vegetables, as well as a couple of beautiful healthy children.

Seven acres of organic vegetables grow along with pasture-raised chickens and eggs. A small herd of grass-fed beef and 100 or so acres of

hay provide plenty of work and require freely given tender-loving care from the entire operation. To maximize the farm's efficiency and output they employ interns, apprentices, and students to assist in bringing their products to market. In addition to participating in large farmer's markets, they wholesale their output as well as supply up-scale restaurants with high-quality products. Products are always available at the farm itself.

### **THE CHALLENGE: Running a farm makes life interesting.**



*Maryellen  
(Courtesy of the  
Taunton Press)*

A large product crop at many farms in the area is the tomato. This year with all the rain we have had, it has been a difficult task to provide an abundance of well seasoned and ripe tomatoes.

In her blog for [Fine Cooking Magazine](#), Maryellen relates the story of "A Sad Tomato," and the experience she and her husband Ken have been through in dealing with the fungus caused by the persistent rains we have had this summer. In growing plants, it's a never ending battle with the weather.

As Bob Wiggin points out, we can control most all of the factors in the growing program except the weather. With

the tomato situation described above, he showed me what he is doing to meet the challenge and the results he has achieved.



*In the field, Bob stands beside one of his sad looking tomato plants. Those he has brought in or started which are under cover too, do not look very healthy. His experiment in grafting shows a full flush of green with the buds just beginning to come out while some plants are growing a few tomatoes.*

The main occupation of a farm is to try different things. A strategy is laid out and within it there are experiments of playing with the parameters to maximize output. Bob Wiggin, fed up with the results of his tomato plants planted in his



field, has brought some indoors. He has gone further.

Daughter Abigail read on the Internet of a process of grafting different varieties of tomato plants (in his case 5) to disease resistant stalk and root systems. The results are obvious as shown in the last picture. Now, the decision will come as to which variety(s) to select for the planting of a large cash crop of tomatoes in the future. It is always a game. Now, what is there next to do?



*Shawn enjoys sharing time with daughter Natalie, and the feeling is mutual. John, another certified Organic farmer, lets the customer decide.*

To assist the population with obtaining a more balanced diet, the Federal government has gotten into the act with the [FMNP \(Farmer's Market Nutrition Program\)](#). Congress established it in 1992, to provide fresh, unprepared, locally grown fruits and vegetables to WIC (Women, infants, and children) participants, and to expand the awareness, use of and sales at farmers' markets.

Other programs of support for farmers and their customers are available. The UNH Extension Service is active. Internet sites as the one Maryellen is connected with; the Fine Cooking Magazine, are abundant with information in all types of areas, buying and preparation and of course, recipes abound. See my article on the New Castle Cook [here](#).

It comes down to availability and interest. Both organic and natural foods have increased in availability and there is a significant increase in interest to buy from this food group over that which is offered in the local grocery store. For people who love to cook, it is a taste factor. They feel these type products have more to offer. For the concerned parent, there is more security in fresh locally grown produce than that from unknown distant locations, domestic and foreign.

For some it is an environmental and economic issue as well. It's "support the local farm community" and the beautiful natural environment around us. Farmland is diminishing and becoming locations for large up-scale housing and commercial projects. For evidence of this situation, take a trip down Route 33 from Portsmouth to Exeter.

As I move through the experience of shopping for wholesome products, then participate in the consumption of creations, I think of having a spoonful of ice cream, or perhaps a hunk of butter on some vegetables. I am brought back to reality visualizing my eight-year-old granddaughter Kianna, whose ever watchful eye is on what I am intending to put into my mouth, and, if it doesn't fit into the program, she immediately cautions me with, "Pappouuuuu.....NO" She is my soul.

Providing and consuming wholesome nutritious food is a family affair.



Notes:

Maryellen Driscoll has strong Rye connections. In addition to "hailing" from here, she is the daughter of Rye Reflections Editor, Jack Driscoll

To reach her blog titled "A Sad Tomato," click [here](#), then move along the screens on the right hand side and click on the one titled, BLOG POSTS. Then click on the line for

Aug 8 in the archive that brings you to the page with the article.

J. Donald Silva; Having brought up a family with wife Lucy in New Castle, and being the former minister of the New Castle Church, he is now a retired professor of English from UNH living in Northwood.

See October's issue of Rye Reflections for Article 2 in the series.

***[Go to Letters in October, 2008](#)***

*September, 2008*

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