



Carolina Farm Stewardship Association STEWARDSHIP NEWS

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Farm Profile:

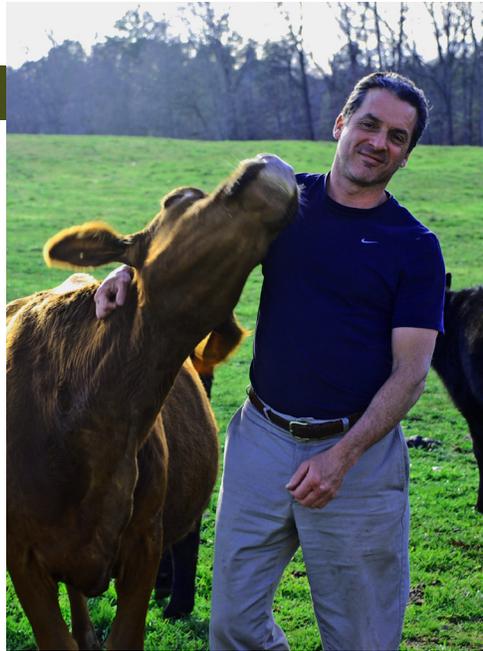
Gibson Farms

by Janette Wesley, Slow Food Upstate

It was a bucolic winter day, with cerulean blue skies laced in high white clouds, waves of purple mountains in the background. Gibson Farms' 180-acres of green rolling hills topped with black and white-faced Angus cattle looked like brides and a groom on a verdant half moon cake. We watched as a big red one strolled by or a creamy white one glimmered in the bright February sun. The visit restored the slow in "Slow Food" – a peaceful and stimulating experience.

Flashback to my youth: "RUN!!!" She screamed at me, and I ran! We knew we shouldn't be there, but we did it anyway. We climbed through the fence into the forbidden zone of the cow pasture, not realizing that sometimes there was also a big feisty bull with the cows. My cousin, Lou Ann, and I spent the summer on her grandma's farm in Ohio, a foreign planet for twelve year olds growing up in the 1970's. We gathered eggs from the hens and watched women iron aprons and pillow cases in the kitchen. We perched on silvery stools like princesses, eating fresh eggs, biscuits and bacon.

Cattle are still strangers to me; I see them regularly on my plate, but when Leland Gibson asked me to climb through the fence to cow-land again, I had reservations. They made sounds like tubas warming up for the high school band and tossed their boulder-sized heads with strings of grass hanging like spaghetti from their muzzles. The shadow of doubt melted



Leland Gibson's cattle obviously appreciate his green pastures. photo by Janette Wesley

with Leland nearby, and I almost understood why in India cattle are considered sacred, a symbol of wealth, strength, abundance – a full Earthly life. He didn't just talk to his friends, Big Boy the Bull and his Boss Lady, he scratched their backs and rubbed their heads, and I trusted I was safe in Gibson's green pastures.

Without a doubt, Leland's father built the farmer into Leland throughout his life, and still does so, stopping over and checking on the property everyday. Leland is a fourth generation farmer. Since 1955, the Gibson's have raised their animals humanely on pasture. "I firmly believe this is the right way to raise animals and raise healthy food. Not just for the health of the animals, but also the people who consume them," said Leland.

-continued on page 9 -

The Tool Shed:

Marketing Your Farm and You

by Devin Swindall, Clemson University

Have you ever heard the saying "sell before you sow?" That's because, just like any small business, the success of a farm heavily relies on marketing. With the rising interest in fresh, healthy, local foods, direct markets are one of the fastest growing opportunities for small farmers. If you don't "sell before you sow" and create a market plan now, you may miss your chance to capitalize.

To develop a marketing plan, you must first understand that marketing is not just signs, flyers, and other forms of advertisement. It also includes everything you do to promote your business. The diversity of your products, the services you provide, and your interactions with customers are all part of marketing your farm. Every activity associated with your farm is part of your marketing because they help potential customers form an image of your business, which becomes your brand.

Building the Experience

People buy directly from farmers for many reasons including quality, healthiness, and sustainability. But the experience you provide should bring in new customers and keep them coming back. Creating a memorable experience not only adds value to your product (or brand), but differentiates your product from your competitors, large and small. There are many ways to develop the customer experience, but generating pleasant memories captivates and engages the customer.

-continued on page 10 -

In this Issue:

Farm Tour Time pg. 3 Carolina Ground Opens the Mill! pg. 3 Ask the Experts pg. 5-6

Local Organizing pg. 6 Healthy Garden Habitats pg. 7 Sausage, Kale, and Lentil Soup pg. 8

CAROLINA FARM STEWARDSHIP ASSOCIATION (CFSA)

CFSA is a membership-based organization of more than 2,300 farmers, processors, gardeners, businesses and individuals in North and South Carolina. CFSA's mission is to advocate, educate and build connections to create sustainable food systems centered on local and organic agriculture.

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From the Director

Standing Up for Sustainable Agriculture

It's been another milder-than-normal winter across much of the Carolinas, and the northward shift of climate zones in the 2012 USDA plant hardiness zone map suggests that maybe milder-than-normal will be the new normal. While this weather has meant opportunities for farmers producing winter crops, and has given farmers an early start on spring plantings, it also means farming risks may increase as the year goes on. Without a good bout of cold weather, insect pests also get a head start, making the organic farmer's job harder. After several years of lower than average rainfall, the precipitation shortfall in most of the Carolinas so far this year is a worrisome indicator. Vegetables and fruits growing fast and flowering early still face several more weeks of frost-risk.

Yet even with such climate concerns, it's hard to be pessimistic about local organic agriculture in Spring, when the promises of new beginnings abound. At this time of year, people's interest in fresh food skyrockets, creating great opportunities for education. Here at CFSA one of the things we do to capitalize on that enthusiasm is to host farm tours. There is no more visceral way to connect the public with the benefits local farms bring to the community and the importance of farming practices that work in harmony with nature than opening farms through events like the Piedmont Farm Tour (April 28-29) and Upstate Farm Tour (June 2-3). It is a personal and grassroots opportunity to explain what it really means to be 'sustainable.'

Corporate agribusiness has become aware that the public wants a connection to farms and an understanding of the impact of what goes on before food gets to their plate. You have probably seen the ad campaign Monsanto is running, America's Farmers, that attempts to show that monocultural, heavily-subsidized, genetically-engineered farming is 'truly sustainable.' Everywhere in the 'production agriculture' media there is chatter about the importance of 'telling our story' and rehabilitating the image of industrialized farming.

With major funding from Monsanto, the American Farm

CFSA's Farm Tours show people what we mean by sustainable agriculture. photo by Amy Eller



Roland McReynolds, Executive Director

Bureau, the National Cattleman's Beef Association, and other industrial agriculture organizations have banded together to form the US Farmers and Ranchers Alliance. The Alliance is a concerted effort to obscure the environmental and human damage that industrial ag. creates behind happy images of farm families and dire warnings about the need to increase world food production. They are working to seize the meaning of the term 'sustainable agriculture.'

Our movement doesn't have the money to mount a slick media blitz. What we do have are people who care, farmers and consumers alike, and better, more satisfying, healthier food. CFSA is working with other farmer-based organizations across the country to harness those assets and put them to work in a concerted, strategic way. Success depends on you, our members, sharing the message with your communities that agriculture can nourish people without destroying nature and without exploiting those who grow our food. By being a champion for local, organic farming and by bringing more folks into the CFSA family, you help make sure we get the research necessary to help farmers cope with our changing climate through natural practices, and make sure that Monsanto's image make-over doesn't co-opt sustainable agriculture.

Sincerely,



Tour Sustainable Family Farms on 17th Annual Piedmont Farm Tour

Come learn about the Triangle's local and organic farm and food scene, meet local farmers and tour their beautiful farms on the nation's largest sustainable farm tour! CFSA teams up once again with our tour co-founder, Weaver Street Market, to open the gates of 40 scenic and sustainable working farms on Saturday and Sunday, April 28-29, from 1 – 5 pm each day. The nationally-recognized Piedmont Farm Tour is a vibrant symbol of local passion for small sustainable farms and healthy food. Three thousand people attended last year.

This self-guided tour features farms in Orange, Chatham, Alamance, Durham and Person counties. You can see a biodynamic fruit farm, a food truck farm, pasture-raised livestock farms with lots of wonderful baby animals, sheep shearing and fiber demonstrations, hayrides, pick-your-own strawberries, two vineyards, an award-winning cheese dairy, lots of organic produce farms, and more! There are 8 exciting new farms on the tour this year, including Boxcarr Farms, which will be selling food from their food truck, Transplanting Traditions Community Farm, which assists refugees from Burma and grows some wild Asian veggies, and Minka Farm, which will have a live sheep shearing demonstration on Saturday!

"Come out to see how Piedmont farmers are working the land in a way that protects our natural resources for generations to come and enjoy a day of fun on the farm," said Roland McReynolds, CFSA Executive Director. "It's a great way to learn about where your food comes from and support the farmer who grows it!" Don't forget to take a cooler so that you can bring home some of the farm fresh products for sale at many farms!

> **Complete information about the tour and the farms, with interactive maps and contact information, plus \$25 advance tour tickets are available at carolinafarmstewards.org.**

> **Want to volunteer? Email Fred Broadwell fred@carolinafarmstewards.org!**

CFSA is Growing Green Farmers

This year, as part of the Piedmont Farm Tour, CFSA is once again sponsoring two half-day VIP mini-bus tours for beginning farmers lead by special guest experts. Beginning farmers interested in horticulture will visit Millarckee, Turtle Run and Harland's Creek Farms. Those interested in livestock will visit Hogan's Magnolia View (not on the regular tour), Coon Rock Farm and Walters Unlimited. Thanks to our funder, the USDA's National Institute for Food and Agriculture and our partner, the National Center for Appropriate Technology.

> **Learn more at carolinafarmstewards.org.**

Carolina Ground Celebrates the Opening of the Mill!

In late February, we finally arrived at the place where we expected to be (months and months ago) -- the mill finally began grinding our first bags of Carolina grown wheat. How to get the machinery running properly and determining the most efficient and effective flow was a major undertaking. But, while we at CFSA's Carolina Ground worked diligently to get the kinks out of the system in order to be-

- continued on page 4 -



*It's Farm Tour time! Don't miss CFSA's Piedmont Farm Tour or Upstate Farm Tour!
photo by Mary Kay Flick*

Save the Dates!

Cobblestone Farmers' Market

Every Tuesday 10-1 PM, starting April 17, 2012
3rd Street and Patterson Avenue
in downtown Winston-Salem

**17th Annual
Piedmont Farm Tour**
April 28-29, 2012

**6th Annual
Upstate SC Farm Tour**
June 2-3, 2012

**27th Annual Sustainable
Agriculture Conference**
Oct. 26-28, 2012
Greenville, SC



gin producing Carolina flour, bakers were gearing up for the 8th Annual Asheville Artisan Bread Festival which took place on Saturday, March 24th.

The rather appropriate theme of this year's festival was "Local Grain, Local Flour, and Local Bread." They plan to bring in Thom Leonard, a professional baker of more than 35 years, and currently a consultant for Heartland Mills in Marienthal, KS, for workshops on milling and baking with local wheat. Professor Stephen Jones, a world-renowned wheat geneticist and breeder from Washington State University, is on the program to lecture on the local-grain movement and recent results in the breeding of organic grain and a perennial wheat. And, CFSA's very own Jennifer Lapidus will share the stage with Sharon Burns, Leader of Bread Alone Bakery, a highly esteemed bakery in New York that has made a strong commitment to using local NY-grown flour.

After a day full of bread tastings and workshops, a small reception is planned at the mill to officially launch this exciting new venture. After cracking a loaf of bread onto the mill, Jennifer Lapidus will give thanks to the many, many people that made Carolina Ground, L3C possible. CFSA's Executive Director, Roland McReynolds, will cap off the evening and speak to the significance of Carolina Ground as an essential piece of our regional, sustainable food system here in the Carolinas.

Cobblestone Farmers' Market Brings Local, Organic Food to Downtown Winston-Salem

Cobblestone Farmers' Market, the only all-local, high-standards, producer's-only farmers' market in Winston-Salem and Cultivate Piedmont's flagship project, will begin its fourth season on Tuesday, April 17th and run until November 20th. It will be on the cobblestones at the intersection of 3rd Street and Patterson Avenue across from Krankies Coffee in downtown Winston-Salem for the 2nd year in a row and we are excited to be there! Find us every Tuesday from 10am-1pm until Thanksgiving for all your local, sustainably raised meats, cheeses, fruits and veggies!

> "Like" the Market at [facebook.com/CobblestoneFarmersMarket](https://www.facebook.com/CobblestoneFarmersMarket)

Farm-fresh Fun on the Upstate Farm Tour

The sixth annual Upstate Farm Tour, happening June 2-3, will be bigger and better than ever, featuring a total of 25 sustainable farms! We are especially excited about our 7 new farms:

- *AgSouth Demonstration Farm* – This new incubator farm's mission is to educate youth and communities on sustainable production.
- *Field & Flower* – The first cut flower grower ever featured on the Upstate Farm Tour.
- *Friends at the Farm* – Friends was one of the first in the Upstate to grow food for their restaurants and catering business. Don't miss the new mobile farmers' market.
- *Gibson Farm* – See this edition's story on Gibson Farm on page 1.
- *Timms Mill* – Their grits are favored by chefs and home cooks all over the region, and now tour guests can see how this corn delicacy is made.
- *Walker Century Farm* – This beautiful 1880 homestead features pastured heritage cattle and pigs.

> **Detailed tour information (including Meal Stops!), interactive maps and \$25 advance tickets at carolinafarmstewards.org.**

> **Want to volunteer? Email Diana Vossbrink at diana@carolinafarmstewards.org!**

Welcome to CFSA's New Organic Transition Coordinator

Our newest addition to the CFSA team is Eric Soderholm, our new part-time Organic Transition Coordinator. His focus is expanding the resources and training available to farmers interested in transitioning to certified organic production in the Carolinas. Eric studied Sustainable Agriculture, Forestry and Biology at Warren Wilson College in Asheville. Since then, he has worked for a number of farms throughout the Eastern US, most recently helping to build a full-diet CSA program in northern Virginia. He is based in Edenton, NC where he also works with Somerset Farm, a mixed livestock and certified organic produce operation run by CFSA member, Frederick Inglis. 🌱

NEW CFSA ORGANIC PRODUCTION HANDBOOK

Invaluable information on organic practices, NOP regulations, EQIP conservation practices, nutrient management, ecological weed management, and more!

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ASK THE EXPERTS

This season, CFSA asks about getting ready for the Farmers' Market, interns, seeds & biodynamics. It's a busy time of year!

1) What are you doing now to get ready for selling at Farmers' Markets?

DANIEL: At the Farmers' Market, we are looking to make a good impression with a nice mix of items. That means right now we're planting varieties with color and flavor that will look great on the stand and taste great when customers take them home. Even though our main product is vegetables, our cut flowers are a huge draw for customers at market. We're planting lots of zinnias, floral basil, gomphrena, and more to start a consistent harvest over the season. Our market starts the first week in May, so we have a few weeks to sell tomato transplants. We count backwards 6-8 weeks from the market dates to determine planting dates for tomato starts. Some of the top sellers that we are planting now are carrots, beets, hakurei salad turnips, arugula for bunching, and head lettuce. Our customers' favorite lettuce tends to be butterhead, and our favorite varieties are Roxy, Pirat (both red), and Sylvesta (green).

TOM: We are: sowing seed, pollinating tomatoes, pruning fruit trees, hiring crew, inoculating mushrooms, installing bat houses, tilling for transplanting, grafting second round tomato plantings, and walking neighborhoods to promote our markets. We'll also be stocking up on supplies and supplements, doing taxes, and writing for the CRAFT farmer handbook. Most mountain markets don't open until mid-April and that's when things get really crazy!

CHERYL: We are planning our "what do we want on the table opening day" efforts. Trying to make sure that we have a full complement of items – despite that fact that much of our product comes in later in the year. We are tweaking our displays and the content of our tents a bit based on



Our experts recommend colorful flowers, vertical displays and other attention-getters at your Market table.

some input we received at the ASAP Business of Farming Conference. Definitely going to try to make our space more vertical. We are going to have a digital photo frame with farm pictures this year. We will also be adding a posted statement about why we choose to be certified organic and why we think it is important.

HARRY: Beausol Gardens actually started preparing for the 2012 Farmers' Market season last year! We planted lots of garlic, strawberry plants and spring flowers that need to experience a winter. We are starting seeds (both vegetables and flowers) for transplanting and direct seeding some crops in the fields.

ANN: Right now we are in the middle of lambing – producing all those wonderful creatures that provide the meat that we sell at the Farmers' Market. The first of our lambs will be ready to process in July. We'll be back at the Market with meat by the first of August. In the meantime, fleeces from our February shearing have been sent off to be made into

yarn, and pelts from the last of the 2011 lambs have been sent off to be tanned. All of these things will be ready for our Farmers' Market customers come summer.

STEPHEN: We've started the baby chicks, repaired the greenhouse plastic and are building more intern housing and a new barn for housing our chickens. We also leased more land to raise more lambs.

ERIC: Fieldwork and lots of it! Contacting market managers to get and fill out necessary vendor paperwork and turn in fees. Obtaining a meat handlers license to sell pork and lamb by the cut. Washing market tablecloths, making new laminated price signs, organizing the cashbox. Pulling out the old Easy-Up tent to assess whether to mend or buying another one.

2) What are the three most important skills you look for in an intern?

- continued on page 6 -

OUR EXPERT FARMERS:

Daniel Parson – Parson Produce in Clinton, SC

Tom Elmore - Thatchmore Farm in Leicester, NC

Cheryl Ferguson - Plum Granny Farm in King, NC

Harry LaBlanc - Beausol Gardens in Pittsboro, NC

Ann Fay - Rising Meadow Farm in Liberty, NC

Stephen Robertson - East Fork Farm in Marshall, NC

Eric Soderholm - Somerset Farm in Edenton, NC (and CFSA's new Organic Transition Coordinator!)

Ask the Experts (continued from page 5)

DANIEL: That's easy. They need to show up on time, work hard, and be willing to learn.

CHERYL: Initial skills aren't as important to us as attitude and aptitude. We can teach skills, and that's the point of an internship. What we really need is: 1) Interest in organic farming - not just a job; 2) Ability to work hard and work fast and 3) Reliability.

ERIC: Honest communicator. Independent thinker. Flexible to the ever-changing demands of the season.

STEPHEN: Positive attitude, honesty, enthusiasm for farming.

3) What new seeds are you most excited about this year? And, where did you find them?

DANIEL: Not a whole lot new this year. I'm planting mostly pelleted lettuce, so I am trying some new varieties from Johnny's list of organic pelleted lettuce seed. This winter I had a salad at the Swamp Rabbit Cafe and Grocery that featured a colorful and tasty slice of watermelon radish, so I'm growing that one for the first time. Last year, I tried Purple Haze carrots, and this year I'm growing those again along with the standard orange Nantes and a gold one so I can provide rainbow bunches for CSA and market. There was surprising demand last year for kohlrabi. This year I'm trying Kolibri because the regular purple was not very consistent last year, and in the fall we'll try Kossak for winter storage.

TOM: Late blight resistant tomatoes with flavor are starting to come out of breeding programs at the NCSU Mountain Horticulture Center, Johnny's, and perhaps elsewhere. We are trying some new Asian greens from Johnny's and some local heirlooms from Sow True Seed in Asheville.

One of the Sow True varieties is a long neck winter squash from Cathy Cleary at the West End Bakery here in Asheville.

CHERYL: We'll be trying some new Italian garlic from Seeds From Italy (Viola Francese and Rossa di Sulmona), Nantahala raspberries from Nourse (This variety is the product of Dr. Gina Fernandez's raspberry breeding program at NCSU. It is supposed to be an excellent fall raspberry. Ray tasted some at the Blackberry & Raspberry Field Day last August - yum!),

and Floriani Flint corn from Fedco (it's supposed to be excellent corn for polenta). We're also trying lots of new tomatoes... Indigo Rose (High Mowing Seeds), Black Zebra, Sugary, Cerise Orange and Italian Tree (all from TomatoFest) and we're going to give Amish Paste (Johnny's)

another try...and Flamingo Pink Chard (Baker Creek) is so gorgeous!

HARRY: This year we are trying to grow ginger and turmeric from Puna Organics and a new tomato named Indigo Rose offered by Johnny's.

4) What biodynamic preparations are you applying this spring and why?

HARRY: As the fields were being prepared for planting, we potentized and sprayed the "500 prep" Horn Manure. The horn manure is a homeopathic treatment to improve the biological activity in the soil. We also spread some of the compost we made last year, treated with the biodynamic compost preps. 🌱

> Don't miss your chance to learn more from Harry and Daniel. Harry's Beausol Gardens is on the Piedmont Farm Tour (April 28-29) and Daniel's Parson Produce is on the Upstate Farm Tour (June 2-3)!

CFSA's Guide to Local Farm & Food Organizing

by Fred Broadwell and Matt Ballard

Let's talk local. In the Carolinas, CFSA wants every county, city and town to have the programs, projects, and budgetary support that are needed for local foods and sustainable farming to thrive. CFSA believes that local activists with good skills can be virtually unstoppable. In some cases, good things at the local level just seem to fall into our laps. But usually change comes from the hard work of dedicated people pushing for a better way. Organizing at the local level can be tough. There can be lots of obstacles to seeing change happen. CFSA's new local organizing guide is your roadmap to success.

For the past three years, CFSA has been researching and testing a model of organizing at the local level. The project began with funding from the Triangle Community Foundation and was called SALaD (Sustainable Agriculture Leadership and Development). After a series of meetings with local food activists, farmers and organizers, we have distilled key lessons for doing local food organizing in the Carolinas into a written tutorial.

The over-arching message of the tutorial is that STRATEGY is very important in our efforts. The problem is often not that we lack inspiration or many case examples from other places. What we lack is strategy. Without a clear and appropriate strategy, we miss opportunities and can easily be out-foxed by those who may oppose changes.

The web-based tutorial will teach you the four key things you and your partners need to do to make maximum progress. It also includes inspiring profiles of the work of important trailblazers, case studies, action steps and a resource library. 🌱

> "How to Organize Locally to Support Sustainable Food & Farms: A Brief How-To Manual" will be available at carolinafarmstewards.org this spring.



Black Zebra, Sugary, Italian Tree..we love the sound of all of the new varieties Plum Granny is planting this year. photo by Emma Hauser

Uncovering Spring Treasures in an Organic Garden

Prepare your beds organically with compost this Spring for vigorous plants and a healthy garden habitat



by Connie Schultz, Master Gardener

Top: Bed with compost and topsoil
Bottom: Bed with only topsoil
What a difference! photo by Connie Schultz

Compost Makes All the Difference

In the spring, as soon as the soil can be worked, the first thing we gardeners do is get our soil ready for planting. Now, ideally, we've done something to prepare in the fall. I like to plant a "green cover" crop that can be turned into the soil in the spring. Spreading partially composted manure over the ground to let it finish breaking down over the winter leaves the soil soft and ready to work in the spring. With unfinished compost, you always have to be careful of weed seeds. The exception is uncomposted rabbit manure, which can be used raw because it is not "hot." (*Editor's Note: You never want to apply fresh manure to food crops right before harvest.*) Another safe bet: partially composted chicken manure is relatively seedless. Letting it stand awhile gives the rain a chance to leach out some of the ureic acid. As an owner of backyard chick-

ens, my own preference is chicken manure.

If the compost is "finished," you can use it as mulch or apply it as a side dressing around the base of the plant at anytime. "Finished" means that it's done breaking down. You can't see any bits that are identifiable, but some things like egg shells and orange peels may take longer to break down and pose no hazard. They'll continue to break down in the soil. My favorite sign that compost is finished is that it smells fresh and lovely – like spring.

In my first year gardening at this site, I had to build beds and fill them with soil. We were fortunate to have a place in the backyard where we could "level" the ground, so taking the soil

didn't leave gaping holes and yielded mostly top soil. But I didn't have enough kitchen compost to dress all the beds. So I ended up with some beds that only had top soil and some beds with top soil and compost.

What a difference! And the composted plants were more resistant to insect depredation. Plus, I discovered some interesting visitors in my beds earlier this month.

Welcome Visitors

As I removed weeds and dead leaves, I uncovered lots of wriggly worms and slugs and a sleepy little toad. He didn't even really wake up as I picked him up and gently placed him in another cozy pile of leaves where he could slumber a little longer. In all, I uncovered 3 snoozing toads. This was awesome because these nocturnal little fellows can eat up to 1,000 insects a night. I was thrilled to find them in my garden. This is good news for me for this coming growing season!

Along with these critters, I also found two argiope egg sacs, looking very battered by the winter but intact nonetheless. This was good news too as these big boldly colored spiders (3-4" across, including legs) have been a major help in my garden, eating many of the insects that eat my plants. To repay her, I protected her egg sac when I found it as I was harvesting last fall, carefully leaving it to hatch in the spring.

These are all signs of a healthy garden with worms and amphibians present and spiders who are also workhorses in the garden. These are treasures of an organic garden - this balance of friendly and unfriendly flora and fauna that create a healthy garden habitat. These creatures help keep my garden green and fruitful without the help or hazards of chemical fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, or fungicides. So compost your garden and keep growing organically! 🐸

Connie Schultz contributes to a blog for Extension Master Gardeners at blogs.extension.org/mastergardener/

Gibson Farms...*(continued from cover)*

Nurturing the Land and Water

"Green" describes Leland to a T. He is the recent winner of the S. C. Cattleman's Association and Beef Council's award for environmental conservation stewardship – yet he passed the credit to his dad's work for the last twelve years. Leland Gibson protected the streams on his property from effluvial excremental drainage, an act swimmers, fishermen and visitors to Lake Hartwell, the Seneca or Tugaloo River or other waterways downstream much appreciate. But Leland has even greener goals in mind. He told me that he wants his farm to be "off the grid" by 2014, and plans to install a geo-thermal system for heating, a wood burning boiler for hot water, and solar panels for the cooling of the farm house and electricity to pump well water to the cattle.

Yet, the green also referred to the "other" farm products: the Coastal Bermuda, Rye, Fescue and Lakota Brome grasses, and how they were maintained with techniques like impact grazing on one field and rotational grazing on another. Leland often moves fences so the cattle eat fresh healthy grass. This reduces the chances of parasites developing, and therefore the need for medication, and has allowed for a chemical-free, naturally well fertilized emerald glowing grass. As the first certified organic and animal welfare approved beef producer in S.C., Leland does not apply antibiotics, steroids or hormones. The lucky customers who buy from Gibson Farms at the Clemson Area Food Exchange, The Clemson Area Farmers' Market, the Easley Farmers' Market, The Downtown Greenville Market, and online shoppers at the Northeast Georgia Locally Grown site enjoy great tasting, all-natural Angus. I can tell you from experience that it's a melt-in-your-mouth beef eater's treat that couldn't be topped if their Scottish ancestors came back to Westminster themselves.

The Gibson Farms is exactly what the Earth Market Greenville seeks to find - a truly sustainable farm, that works in harmony with the Earth, does not destroy water, land or air, gives animals the dignity they deserve, and takes personal responsibility for their work – *Good* in taste; *Clean* for the environment, and at a *Fair* price to the



Photos by Slow Food Upstate, Janette Wesley

consumer and the farmer. Our visit proved successful, and Leland will present his beef at the Earth Market Greenville at the end of North Main and Rutherford Rd. beginning May 17 and every third Thursday afternoon through September. 🐾

Janette W. Wesley is the Chapter Leader of Slow Food Upstate, home of the first and only USA Earth Market, certified by Slow Food International's Foundation for Biodiversity. She is CFSA's Activist of the Year.

> www.slowfoodupstate.com
> www.earthmarkets.net

> Visit Leland, Big Boy, Boss Lady, and all the other characters at Gibson Farms on the CFSA Upstate Farm Tour, June 2-3. Don't forget to bring your coolers to take home some delectable beef!



Marketing Your Farm And You...

(continued from cover)

Ways to generate fond memories include, for example, educating customers by showing kids that potatoes come from the ground or including a recipe for a specialty product such as bok choy. An aesthetic experience gives the customer enjoyment through their appreciation of the setting. So, make sure your farmers' market stand, or your farm, is organized, clean, and colorful. Entertainment can provide a unique experience by engaging the customer; so invite a small band or local craftsman to your farm field day. Be engaging by sharing your knowledge and farm life experiences. The relationship you build with your customer should be a critical piece of your marketing strategy as it provides what a supermarket can't. Further, it can add value, customer loyalty, new customers, and enhance your business image.

Know Your Competitor

To understand your strengths and advantages, you must know your competitors' strengths and weaknesses. Visit your competitor to learn why customers enjoy their products and services. Compare your price, products, and promotions to their "experience" to determine what your advantage is or can be. Unless you have an edge over the competition, there is no motivation for consumers to buy from you. Once you determine and build these strengths, make them the focus of your marketing plan.

Stay Connected

The internet provides numerous ways to stay connected with your customer. An internet presence is becoming more of a necessity every day. You can create a profile using social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) and local food organizations' websites (CFSA's new and improved Local Food Finder is launching later this Spring and will include photos, video, social media, and more!) in under twenty minutes. This is free marketing and provides a link to your customers that you otherwise may not have. You could also collect email addresses and provide a monthly newsletter about product availability and basic activities on the farm. If you are interested in creating a website but are intimidated by the difficulty or cost, you can create a free site using Google Sites. If you know

how to use a word processing program such as Word and how to upload pictures, you can create a website using this tool.

Ready to Sell

Remember to develop a theme with everything you do in your business. The theme should be based on your customer's preferences and your competitive advantages. All of your actions will then become your brand and the experience you are selling to the customer.

Consider these tips in developing your plan:

- Diversify products and markets
- Signs for your prices and varieties (but don't create clutter!)
- Pictures of the farm and its history
- A handout about the health benefits of your products
- Be dependable - if you promise a good, deliver
- Engage with and maintain connections with your customers
- Provide samples, especially to chefs
- Always display your highest quality goods
- Keep your appearance neat (yourself, your stand and your farm)
- Ask your customers what their needs are
- Don't compete with everyone else - find a niche market

Devin Swindall is a Research Associate at the Clemson Institute for Economic and Community Development (www.clemson.edu/ciecd) at the Sandhill Research and Education Center in Columbia. He has owned and operated his own successful business.

> To learn more tips and news for your agribusiness, check out the resources and blog at www.agbizbuilder.com.



Minka Farm's table at the Downtown Raleigh Farmers' Market brands their farm with homey displays of veggies and fruits, a taste of stew made from their pastured beef, and a big smile.

You can visit Minka Farms on this year's Piedmont Farm Tour, April 28-29!

photo by Amy Armbruster

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Who is CFSA?

Imagine a world where local farms grow delicious food and support themselves, the environment and their communities. At CFSA, this isn't a dream - it's the new reality and *with your help*, we can make it grow!

You and CFSA Make Family Farms Thrive

Educating about sustainable farming

We train farmers and gardeners to grow organically. We support new farmers with scholarships and internships. Our tours educate communities about small farms.

Building ways for local organic family farms to succeed

We're re-connecting growers and consumers. Our Organic Bread Flour Project is bringing back local grains. Our online Local Food Finder helps you find local food. Our Organic Initiative provides technical assistance to farmers.

Advocating for fair farm and food policies

We're expanding access to healthy food through our Local Produce Safety Initiative. We are steering policy through the Sustainable Food NC Coalition and local leadership development.

www.carolinafarmstewards.org

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