



Carolina Farm Stewardship Association STEWARDSHIP NEWS

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Farm Profile:

Millarckee Farm

by Matt Ballard, CFSA intern

Millarckee Farm lies nestled in the lower hills and bottomland surrounding Cane Creek in southern Alamance County. The two cultivated acres show the untiring work of farmer Daniel Tolfree, who founded the farm thirty years ago. Upon visiting the farm, one quickly notices the quaint historic farmhouse beside a towering, century-old black walnut tree stretching out its burly limbs. The log-constructed barn across the way shelters his three goats. Here, Tolfree greeted me with wheel barrow in hand, heaping over with straw, in the middle of a sunny, winter day.

Learning to Mimic Nature

A teenager during the late 1960s, against the backdrop of clarion calls of ecological crises, Tolfree began to see the value of acquiring basic skills that make his own life possible. "My father owned a tire retail store, and I thought, 'You can't eat tires.'" So, for Tolfree, the next step included learning how to farm.

In the early 1970s, he enrolled in a baccalaureate program studying organic agriculture at Evergreen College. This being the developmental stage of organic as an agricultural philosophy, there was a lot of room for exploration about what works. Tolfree remarks, "It showed me how to question what's going on within natural systems in order to mimic or work with them."

One can easily see how Tolfree's farming practices evolved with his



Daniel Tolfree happily showing the soil tilth in his growing beds. photo by Matt Ballard

own ingenuity and attention toward the dictates of the land. On a stroll down toward the lower field, it was clear that Tolfree has an intimate knowledge of the land he farms. "It's remarkable how different the soil characteristics are on both of my fields despite being only several yards away," he comments. Unlike the clay loam of the upper field adjacent to the farmhouse, the lower field has more of a silty loam quality. Not knowing how long the field has been cleared, he attributes seasonal flooding in years past to the difference in soil composition.

The moated field is surrounded on all sides by the large creek bed, freshly replenished by sopping December rain showers. According to Tolfree, the field has only flooded once in the past fifteen years, in contrast with almost yearly flooding before. Relying upon the Cane Creek for pump irrigation, he's noticed increasingly shrinking

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The Tool Shed:

Beyond Grass-Fed

by Shelley Proffitt Eagan, Proffitt Family Cattle Co.

Considering Becoming Certified Organic?

If you already raise grass-fed beef and don't utilize antibiotics or hormone implants on your cattle, you may think that becoming a USDA certified organic beef producer will set you apart from the competition without too much more effort. What could be more organic than not feeding your animals commercial feeds and leaving off the inputs so synonymous with conventional beef? There are a couple of other key differences that you will want to consider before applying for organic certification. All your organic practices need to be in place before you apply and are audited by a certifying agent. The process of becoming a certified organic producer is certainly not easy (it took us 3 years), but we did it and so can you!

Organic Feed

Stop and think for a moment about what exactly goes into the body of your cattle. Let's start with the biggest input: food! What exactly do they eat? If your cattle eat pasture grasses and hay, then you will need to get your grazing pastures and hay fields certified organic. This means no herbicides, pesticides, and commercial fertilizers and all of your seeds must be organic for 3 years. The 3 years will begin from the last application of any of those materials. Keep in mind that a soil supplement, like lime, is okay and chicken litter is also an acceptable form of fertilizer while municipal sludge is NOT organic. If you use a

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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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Become a fan on our Facebook page (facebook.com/carolinafarmstewards), follow us on Twitter [@carolinafarms](https://twitter.com/carolinafarms), or check out our blog at carolinafarmstewardsblog.org.

From the Director

Why We Do What We Do

One of the most impressive things about the local, organic agriculture movement today is the number of new people interested in actually producing food. More than 150 farmers from all across the Carolinas attended our 3rd annual Organic Commodities and Livestock Conference, which took place this January in Rocky Mount, NC. Attendance at our Sustainable Agriculture Conference in Durham last November was almost 1,300 people - a 30% increase over 2010.

We are seeing more new faces at these events, joining—and learning from—the cadre of experienced organic farmers. In some cases, these folks are new to agriculture and seeking more rewarding work; in others, they are people who have been in farming all their lives who recognize the opportunity to ensure the sustainability of their farms for today and for future generations. Local, organic agriculture offers them all a road to a better, healthier future.

It is a good thing we are seeing more farmers coming to our conferences because we need more sustainable farmers. Industrial agriculture claims that organic farming can't feed the world. Research has shown that this is a false proposition. Wherever organic farmers are supported with research and appropriate technology, they meet or exceed the per acre productivity of conventional systems. And unlike industrial agriculture, they enhance soil and water resources for sustained productivity in the future.

But, there is a truth that we must face:



Roland McReynolds, Executive Director

Diversified, management-intensive, low-input farming does require more labor per acre to achieve productivity sufficient to feed and clothe us all. Without more farmers on the land, humanity is at the mercy of mono-cultural, capital-intensive, high-input farming to meet its food and fiber needs. Of course, that is a bad place to be in a world facing climate volatility and the end of cheap fuel.

As a society, we have a responsibility and a desperate self-interest to reverse this trend. The good news: the tide is beginning to turn. To make farming a noble career that will keep the new generation energized and grow its ranks, we need better research and education on organic farming, food distribution systems that allow family farmers make a good living and fair policies that protect farmers, our lands, and our health. And those are the things that CFSA is working to support every day.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Roland".

P.S. To learn more about CFSA's mission and vision for the future, check out our strategic plan at carolinafarmstewards.org.



Beginning and experienced farmers network at the 2011 Sustainable Ag. Conference.

photo by Raymond Goodman

Work an Internship Into Your Spring Farm Plan

As producers across the Carolinas start thinking about spring planting of crops and pastures, we believe it is also the perfect time to think about our collective efforts to cultivate the farmers of our future.

CFSA farm members with knowledge to share, a story to tell, and a need for some temporary help around the farm are encouraged to take advantage of our *Internship Referral Service*, now in its second season.

The *Internship Referral Service* is an online tool, connecting sustainable farms throughout the Carolinas with aspiring farmers looking for hands-on learning opportunities. CFSA members may post internship listings throughout the year at no cost, and openings may be viewed by anyone who visits our website. Applicants apply directly with the farm, giving both parties the opportunity to share goals and expectations before making a commitment.

Over the next couple of months, CFSA will be marketing the *Internship Referral Service* to college and university agriculture departments and career centers throughout the Carolinas. So, now is the perfect time to develop and promote your on-farm opportunity! Not sure what to offer in an internship? CFSA offers a **Farmer-Mentor Handbook** which may be downloaded from the site. Are you interested in applying for an internship but want to learn more? We also offer a **Prospective Internship Handbook**.

The *Internship Referral Service* is a part of CFSA's *Growing Green Farmers* program, which also includes scholarships to the annual Sustainable Ag. Conference, apprenticeships in South Carolina, and farm tours for beginning farmers. Thank you to National Institute of Food and Agriculture (USDA) and the National Center for Appropriate Technology for their support of this program.

> Visit carolinafarmstewards.org for these resources.

More Learn-to-Cook-Local Classes

Cobblestone Farmers' Market might be sleeping for the winter, but that doesn't mean you can't eat locally! December 8th marked the first of the 'Learn-to-Cook-Local' cooking class series in Winston-Salem. Chef Kevin Fisher of Winston-Salem's The Screaming Rooster taught a sold out crowd innovative ways to use locally grown heirloom pumpkins from nearby Shore Farms.

Mary Haglund, of Winston-Salem's Breakfast of Course (Mary's Too) will teach a class about how to cook seasonally appropriate winter dishes using local ingredients on Feb. 7. The class series will continue with chefs from other Winston-Salem area restaurants such as Mooney's Mediterranean Cafe and Jeff Bacon of Triad Community Kitchen. These classes are coordinated by Cultivate Piedmont, a program of CFSA and focus on seasonal ingredients sourced from local farms.

> To learn more, "like" the Cobblestone Farmers' Market Facebook page.

> Register for one of the classes at carolinafarmstewards.org or email Adrienne Outcalt at adrienne@carolinafarmstewards.org.



Johanna Kramer (@durhamfoodie) teaches our Social Media for Farmers workshops.
photo by Raymond Goodman

Winter is the Perfect Season to Grow Your Farm Business

Join CFSA for one of several all-day hands-on workshops designed especially for farmers and taught by social media experts. You will leave with a fully-functioning Facebook and Twitter page (or upgrade your existing pages), the skills to shoot your own short farm video using your cell phone, camera, or iPad, and the training to take better farm photos - everything you need to reach new customers and grow your farm business using social media!

> Details and register: carolinafarmstewards.org

These workshops are funded by a grant from the Golden LEAF Foundation and presented in partnership with BRWIA, Know Your Farms, BioBusiness Center, Blue Ridge Food Ventures, Mountain BizWorks, NC Cooperative Extension, CEFS, Food Corps & the 10% Campaign.

Save the Dates!

**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



ASK THE EXPERTS

This season, CFSA asks about record keeping, spring calving and production planning.



1) What are some tips you have for record keeping?

TOM: We track market sales, income, payroll, sowing schedule and field layout with simple Excel spreadsheets. Richard Wiswall has some more complicated versions in his book – *The Organic Farmer's Business Handbook*.

DON & SUSAN: After 5 years of farming, recordkeeping has by far been the most neglected element of our overall farming operation. We collect our harvest data simply by using a chalkboard in the field shed. Invoices are now duplicated and retained for customer volume and pricing data. Although minimal, it's a good starting point.

CASEY: Record keeping in livestock operations - as in any enterprise - requires discipline and consistency. Especially when profit margins are as thin as they are in meat production, if a producer does not keep good records, they can only guess if they are making money or not. I keep my livestock records in digital files on my laptop and on a very large wall calendar that shows the entire year. The computer files are for archives; the wall calendar serves as a graphic organizer of chronological events such as births, worming, harvesting, breeding, and arrival of chicks. Of course, none of this information would ever make it to the office except for the fact that I carry a tiny notebook wherever I go, making it easy to write information as it happens. A smartphone comes in handy as well; some have a voice recorder which is an easy way to make notes.

JAMIE: We use and like a program called *Cattleman* that helps to organize the cattle records on the computer.

LELAND: Record keeping for the farm

as with any business is a vital tool to measure the success (or shortfalls) of your farm operations. We are a certified organic farm and good records



Born that morning, this newborn baby calf delighted Farm Tour-goers at Rare Earth Farms in Bunn, NC. photo by Dave Darr

are required. I record everything I do in a daily diary both on paper and the computer. Like most farmers, I would rather be out working the land and livestock rather than sitting behind a desk doing paperwork, so my advice is to make it simple. Like Casey, I keep a simple daily calendar, but I keep mine in my truck, not on the wall of my office. Each time I check my herd, feed a bale of hay, repair a fence, discover a new calf, I make a note of it on the calendar. I also make a note of the weather, daily temperature and rainfall. I spend 10 minutes or so each week to transfer everything I wrote on my calendar to my computer so I have a digital copy as well.

Our record keeping for the cattle is rather simple as well. We keep a log book that lists all of the cattle on the farm. Each animal has an ear tag to identify the animal and their herd. Any activity is recorded in the log book such as the birth date of each calf, the ear tag number and date of tagging, and any treatments such as de-wormers or probiotics.

2) What are your best tips for spring calving?

CASEY: Now is the time to make sure you have calving supplies on hand - emergency colostrum, electrolytes, and assist tools that may be needed. I like to keep gloves, lubricant, iodine, a good flashlight, obstetrical chains, a roll of paper towels and some cotton towels in a 5-gallon bucket with a lid. If calves are born on open pasture, try to time your animal movements to ensure cows are moved to the cleanest, driest paddocks you have. Wet, cold, muddy ground is an invitation to infection in newborn calves. Of course, proper nutrition and cow health is paramount, especially in the last 2-3 months of gestation.

JAMIE: Spring calving has been a successful time for our farm. By timing calving for March and April, we can ensure the lactating cows have access to the best nutrition to nurse a baby calf. It also is getting warmer at that time of year so the risk of a frozen calf is minimized. We tag all calves with their mothers tag number so we can keep track of the calves when we move them. We practice rotational grazing and keeping track of

- continued on next page -

OUR EXPERT FARMERS:

Casey McKissick – Crooked Creek Farm in Old Fort, NC

Jamie Ager - Hickory Nut Gap Farm in Fairview, NC

Leland Gibson - Gibson Farms in Westminister, SC

Tom Elmore - Thatchmore Farm in Leicester, NC

Don and Susan Brant - Brant Family Farms near Grays, SC

Ask the Experts...

(continued from page 4)

new born calves can be a challenge. Spring calving also lets you wean the calves in the late fall/early winter so we can dry the cow off to reduce her nutritional needs to get through the winter with less nutritional requirements.

LELAND: Regardless of the season, proper nutrition for the mother-to-be is the most essential part of a successful calving season. Ideally, the mother should be in good condition prior to breeding, which means a body conditioning score of 5 to 7, and she should maintain her weight throughout the pregnancy by having access to good forage grass and mineral supplements. If good forage grass is in short supply, make sure to have plenty of hay on hand to supplement through the winter. Also, the springtime is the time of year when most parasites thrive. Make sure to check the herd regularly and if a dramatic weight loss is noted, make sure to test for parasites and treat as needed. A good rotational grazing program will reduce the risk of parasite infestation.

3) What are some tips for produce production planning?

TOM: Our sales records drive modifications to our sowing list, which in turn drives production. If we sold out of lettuce the second week of August, we plant more this year to mature in that week. If we brought home habaneros week after week, we plant less of that crop. Without good records, it's hard to make those adjustments. For a steady supply of lettuce, we sow an equal amount every other week in the spring, every week around the solstice and twice a week in late summer.

DON & SUSAN: We use a spreadsheet for production planning, which made us realize the importance of upfront planning and our need to drastically increase growing space to meet expected market demand. The spreadsheet requires the farmer to give serious thought to every aspect of the planning process, including products, row feet, seed volumes, planting dates (seed/transplants), harvesting dates, and succession planting. It worked for us in 2011 and will be repeated for 2012. 🌱

Cover Crops in the Carolinas

by Suzanne O'Connell, NCSU

You may remember taking the time to fill out a cover cropping survey at the 2009 CFSA conference. The purpose of the survey was to better understand the practices, values, and constraints of cover cropping in the Southeast, as well as to suggest future research directions.

The majority of NC and SC participants (89%) followed a crop rotation plan that included the use of cover cropping. Farmers reported overwhelming agreement with statements that cover crops: reduce soil erosion; increase soil organic matter levels; break hard pans; suppress weeds, and provide beneficial insect habitat. Additionally, positive associations were made with mining nutrients deep in the soil, reducing nutrient leaching, and providing nitrogen contributions to subsequent cash crops. Cover crops were sown year-round, although fall cultivation was most popular.

Thanks to all the CFSA and SSAWG conference attendees who participated in the survey! 🌱

BY-THE-NUMBERS

- The 5 most popular farm products were: vegetables and small fruits (92%), cut flowers (37%), poultry (25%), livestock (20%), and orchards (16%).

- 18% of operations were USDA certified organic; 15% subscribed to alternative labels.

- Cover crops were cultivated in the spring (46%), summer (55%), fall (94%) and winter (26%).

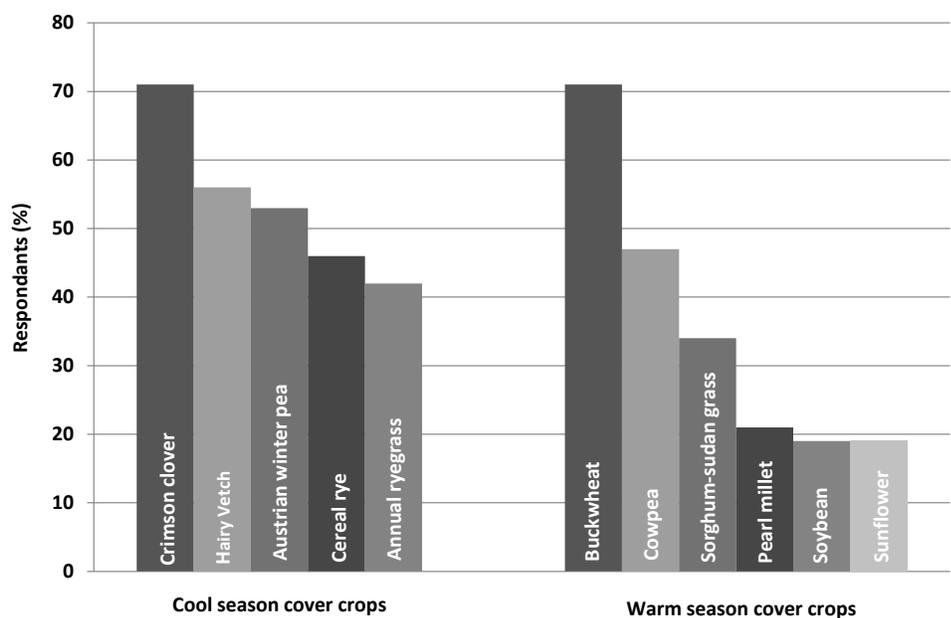
- Less than a third of farmers applied soil amendments (fertilizer, lime) prior to planting cover crops.

- Legume seeds were inoculated by 42% of farmers at every planting. 22% inoculated only when introducing a new legume.

- 65% followed recommended seeding rates; 32% increased it.

- Approximately half of the respondents indicated that a lack of equipment influenced their management decisions. The most desired tools were: roller/crimpers (73%), planting implements (31%), and incorporation tools (20%).

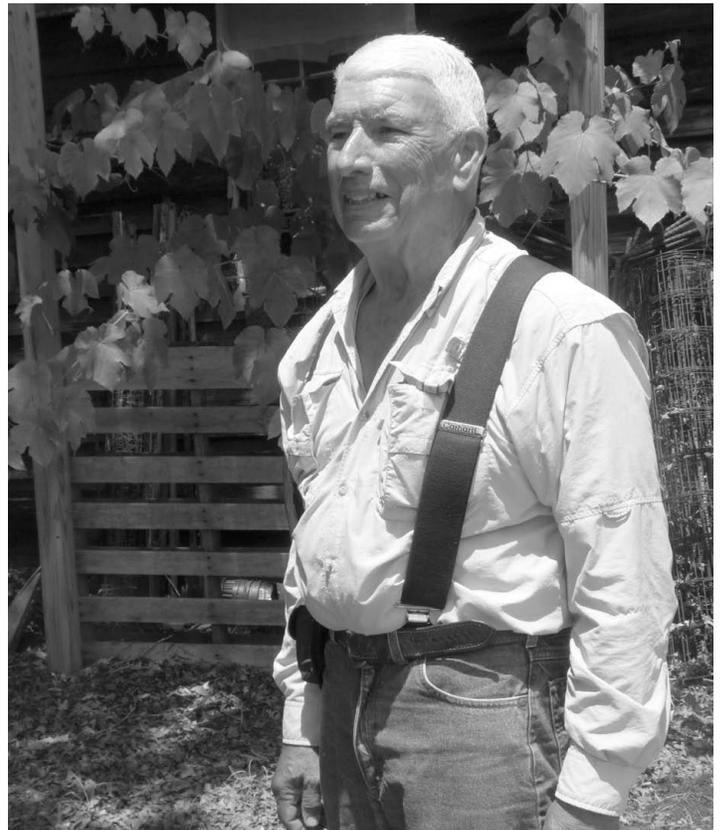
The most popular cover crops reported by NC & SC farmers in a 2009 survey.



The Southeast Farmer Cover Crop Survey was conducted by Suzanne O'Connell as part of her PhD program assisted by Dr. Nancy Creamer, Dr. Sarah Bowen, Dr. Julie Grossman, and Ken Fager of NCSU. This study was partially funded by a scholarship from the Organic Crop Improvement Association.

Farmer Faces

Portraits of the hard working men and women - some just starting out; some who've been at it for years - who grow local, sustainable food in the Carolinas



From top left, clockwise: Gail and Mike Cooley of Patient Wait Farm in Piedmont, SC; Jason Oatis of Edible Earthscapes in Moncure, NC; Suki Roth of Herb Haven in Graham, NC; and Walker Miller of Happy Berry Farm in Six Mile, SC. photos by Emma Hauser, Lura West and Elizabeth Brunner.

> Find your local farmer on CFSA's online Local Food Finder at carolinafarmstewards.org or buy the NC/SC food finder app for your iPhone! We'll be upgrading the Local Food Finder soon...stay tuned for photos, videos, Facebook, and more!

Plant Potatoes Now for Spring Harvest!

by Charlotte Glen, Horticulture Agent
Pender County Cooperative Extension

Potatoes are one of my favorite crops to grow in the spring garden. Nothing is more fun than digging potatoes from the soil – it's like a tiny treasure hunt! And the taste of home grown potatoes is outstanding. To cap it off, potatoes are easy and productive, making them a great crop for any gardener to grow.

When and Where to Plant

Potatoes grow best in cool weather and can tolerate some frost. Gardeners in the eastern part of the state can plant potatoes outside as early as the first of February, especially near the coast. Through the central Carolinas, potatoes can be planted from late February through March, while mountain gardeners should wait until early April to plant, later at higher elevations.

Traditionally potatoes are grown in long mounded rows in the vegetable garden, where they are quite productive – a 100' row can yield between 150 and 300 pounds of spuds. That does not mean you cannot grow them if you have limited space. Potatoes grow well in large, deep containers and can be grown this way on a patio or deck.

Always plant potatoes in well-drained soil. Planting them in wet soil often results in disease problems and crop failure. Potatoes also need consistent moisture and prefer rich, slightly acidic soil that has been well amended with organic matter such as aged horse manure or compost. To grow potatoes in containers, fill them with potting soil rather than soil from the garden and make sure there are drainage holes. Wherever you plant them, potatoes need to get at least six to eight hours of direct sunlight each day to be productive.

Getting Started

For best results, plant only certified seed potatoes, which can be pur-



photo by Steven Walling

chased from garden centers and seed supply stores. Starting with potatoes purchased from the grocery store is not recommended, since this increases chances of disease problems.

Potato varieties that do well in the Carolinas and are commonly available include 'Yukon Gold', a gold flesh potato, 'Kennebec', a white potato, and 'Red Pontiac', which has red skin and white flesh. These varieties are great boiled or mashed and will be ready to harvest 2-3 months after planting. Baking or russet potatoes do not grow well in our region.

For a quicker start, you can pre-sprout seed potatoes before planting. To do this, spread them in a single layer in a warm (60 to 65 degrees) brightly lit area, out of direct sunlight. Leave them there until stocky green shoots start to emerge from the eyes, which should take one to two weeks.

Whether they have been pre-sprouted or not, seed potatoes need to be sliced into smaller pieces before planting. To slice seed potatoes, look for the eyes, which are the dimple like indentations on the tuber from which shoots will grow. Slice each seed potato into two to four pieces, making sure each piece has at least one eye and is about the size of an egg.

Freshly sliced seed pieces can be planted right away, though allowing the cuts to heal for a few days before planting will reduce the risk of rotting. To heal cuts, store the cut seed

pieces in a warm (60 to 65 degrees), dark, humid place for a couple of days before planting.

Keep in mind 12 pounds of seed potatoes can plant around a 100' row, and yield over 150 pounds of spuds. Plant potato seed pieces 4" to 6" deep, 10" apart within rows, with 3' spacing between rows.

Growing and Harvesting

Potatoes prefer a pH range of about 5-7 and fertile, well-drained soil. Lime can be added if you have very acidic soil. Good, rich compost will increase yields and reduce disease problems. The best way to do this is to sheet compost your garden in the autumn. You can also plant a soil building cover crop in the fall. Wait to plant potatoes for 2-4 weeks after turning under your cover crop, to allow time for it to break down in the soil. Hilling, a process of throwing more soil onto the rows, is done 4-5 weeks after planting to prevent the growing potatoes from being exposed to sunlight and turning green.

Small, new potatoes can usually be harvested 50-60 days after planting by digging into the side of the row. If you plan to store potatoes, allow them to reach full maturity before harvesting. This usually takes 80-100 days. Potatoes are mature once the foliage has died down naturally. After harvest, store potatoes in a cool, dry, dark place where they will keep for three to four months or more. 🌱



Local Flavors

These Croquettes were just one of the delights cooked up by CFSA's Kris Reid and the amazing staff at the Sheraton Imperial for this year's Sustainable Agriculture Conference

Roasted Vegetable Croquettes

Editor's Note: Kris is a master of the sustainable kitchen and so instead of using recipes that force you to buy things that aren't in season, her recipes are always written as a guide that you can adapt for any number of servings or for use with whatever ingredients you can find at the Farmers' Market.

What You'll Need:

Equal parts parsnip, carrot, sweet potato, rutabaga, and celery root (a total of 5 oz of each will yield approx 3 croquettes for 8 people)
 Cooked sea island peas
 Smoked peppers
 Egg and Chickpea flour for breading
 Canola oil for frying
 Olive oil for roasting
 Salt and Pepper
 Yogurt for dipping sauce (optional)

Methodology

-Peel and cut vegetables into pieces, and toss with olive oil; season with salt and pepper

-Roast vegetables (roast each type of vegetable separately, as they will require slightly different cooking times) in a 400 degree oven until fork tender.

-In a food processor combine these vegetables with cooked sea island peas to make a firm mixture.

-At this point any seasoning can be added or cheese. The chef at this year's SAC added some spicy smoked peppers, but dried peppers would work well, too.

-The mixture should be easy to handle and not sticky. Make 1.5 oz balls with your hand, roll the mixture into an

oblong shape.

- Put the croquettes on a sheet pan and put in the freezer overnight. (They will be easier to bread if frozen and will cook up nicer for you!)

- When ready to use, set up a breading station using egg wash and chick pea flour.

- Dip each croquette into egg allowing excess to drip off, then roll in chick pea flour.

- Fry in vegetable oil that is at least 360 degrees and is an oil that has a high smoke point such as peanut, canola, or vegetable. The croquettes will be ready within 4-5 minutes.

- Serve hot with a dipping sauce if desired. A tangy yogurt dip would be delicious with these spicy Roasted Vegetable Croquettes!

This recipe is a collaboration of Executive Chef Elhaj Tayouga of the Sheraton and Kris Reid.



Just some of the delicious local food at this year's Conference!
 photos by Raymond Goodman and Grace Kanoy

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- * **Knoxville, TN and surrounding area**
 McBee Dairy Farm - 865-919-7098
- * **Asheville NC and surrounding areas. Loads are being organized to that area 3 times a year. Call Seven Springs Farm for details.**

Millarckee Farm...(continued from cover)

water levels caused by repeated droughts over several years.

“Soil is Most Important”

Tolfree is a self-declared minimalist when it comes to agricultural inputs, although one has to remember that he’s been diligently nurturing the same soil for three decades. After several weeks, Tolfree mows the cover crop, typically winter rye or oats and sometimes clover or hairy vetch, to stimulate further growth for a greater amount of biomass. In letting the crop grow too high, he notes, the mowed biomass would be too lignified to break down as easily for tilling in, as well as changing the carbon-nitrogen ratio for more efficient composting. Once he’s ready to plant a cash crop, Tolfree then adds only two cups of lime, some chicken or goat manure and a bio-activator such as kelp meal into the bed, and then rototills the amendments with his cover crop. Basically, Tolfree composts all the biomass within his beds throughout the year. “No matter what, adding organic matter to the soil is the most important lesson for the farmer,” he asserts. Later at the upper field, he digs his hand into the friable soil up to his wrist, cradling it in his palm and then rolling it between his fingers to display an incredible tilth uncharacteristic of clay soils.

Millarckee’s rotational system focuses mainly upon four, sometimes five, plant families in one year. After his cover crop, Tolfree direct seeds a multitude of peas into the bed, eventually harvesting the delicate tendrils at least once if not twice. The legume also fixes nitrogen for following crops. His second cash crop in the rotation is a variety of mustard greens and other lesser-known cruciferous leaf vegetables, such as tatsoi or mizuna. Next in the rotation are seasonal herbs such as cilantro or basil. Then he plants additional crops like summer squash or tomatoes. Tolfree tends toward crop varieties that can be easily grown without transplanting, preferring to direct seed his crops, mindful of the infrastructure and labor required otherwise.

Tolfree also pays attention to the various nooks-and-crannies of the landscape to grow additional food. In especially shady and moist condi-



tions, oyster mushrooms proliferate on a downed tree along the edge of the field and watercress populates a streambed originating from a natural spring right below the farmhouse.

After the current beds have been through three years of crop rotations, Tolfree breaks the ground of the pathways, alternating back-and-forth every three years. “Permanent” beds become pathways, and vice versa. Tolfree enumerates the many benefits of the bed and path system: reduced leaching of nutrients, better water-holding capacity, addition of biodiversity by pathway weeds, mulching as the paths are trimmed, and temperature moderation. Especially during heavy rains, he doesn’t need to worry as much about soil erosion. He remarked that on many occasions, a heavy downpour will merely transfer topsoil onto his pathways rather than downslope. And he doesn’t worry about compaction as much because he only uses a walking tractor.

Less is More

In general, Tolfree tends not to use spun polypropylene fabric row covers for season extension. He mentions the increase of transmitting pest problems from the fall into the early spring, something he’s certainly noticed in recent years. Also, he does not use any plastic drip-tape, preferring to use overhead irrigation to mimic rainfall after noticing that he sees better growth in his crops. Tolfree does not use any pesticides, herbicides or

A view of Tolfree’s pathway and bed system. photo by Matt Ballard

synthetic fertilizers, stressing that his high-quality vegetables are the result of a healthy soil and farm ecosystem. This is what his reliable customers at the Carrboro Farmers’ Market have come to expect for thirty years, seeing the children of his customers a generation ago become supportive patrons now.

Reflecting back on his thirty years of sustainable farming, Tolfree remarks on how he’s seen agriculture in the area change over the past few decades, sometimes for the worse and sometimes for the better. Many of his neighbors who grow commodity crops have been slowly turning over their larger acreage to distant biofuel conglomerates or spraying sewage sludge on their fields. But he also offers encouragement for beginning farmers and ranchers, seeing an unsaturated market demand for sustainably and locally produced food. And he sees potential collaborations among producers within the region, an imperative to ensure a viable food infrastructure. Anything less, you might say, is pure malarkey. 🐾

Matthew Ballard is working on two Master’s degrees at UNC School of Social Work and Duke Divinity School.

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Beyond Grass-Fed...

(continued from cover)

bag of feed to call them up, even very rarely, it must be certified organic. We find it easiest to use hay for this or organic alfalfa pellets. When you wean your calves, what do you feed them during this time of stress? There are not many options out there if you choose to be grass-fed and certified organic as they both limit using conventional feeds. Organic alfalfa pellets are the only option we have found that meets both requirements.

Organic Supplements

Thinking further about what goes into your cattle, the mineral supplement you use is something you must consider if you want to become certified organic. This is a tough challenge and will depend on the make-up of your soil. What minerals your soil lacks, your grass will also lack. You must know this in order to meet your animals' mineral needs. If they have rusting of hair on the shoulders, your soil might be deficient in copper. Do a soil test of your grazing pastures to know for sure. You can also get a full mineral profile done on the liver of a harvested beeve. This will tell you more precisely what minerals your animals have in abundance and where there are deficiencies. Your local extension agent can direct you to the nearest NCDA Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory. Most conventional pre-mixed supplements contain urea and additives to make them more palatable, but these are not organic.

Organic Treatments and Cattle Management

Another seemingly large hurdle to jump is the de-worming issue. If you are like most cattlefolk, you have been taught that you must deworm your cattle with pour-ons, sprays, or oral applications every year. There are some organic options out there but, again, it's best to manage the cattle so they aren't exposed to the worms in the first place. Move them frequently. Do not allow them to graze pastures too low during the times of year when parasites breed. Use holistic treatments, like diatomaceous earth (DE), as a supplement to make their systems uninhabitable for parasites. DE will also help with external parasites.

The last common input to consider is fly spray. There are organic fly sprays



Shelley's Scottish Aberdeen Angus
photo by Taylor Mathis Photography

available that will do the trick for short amounts of time but genetic selection and whole farm management can make it much easier. Have too many flies? Make more bird houses; have the chickens follow the herd and eat the fly larva from the manure; move the herd away from manure each day and consider where the flies are in the ecosystem of the farm. Ever notice how some cows in your herd have very few flies and some who receive the same treatment and access to the same pastures are covered in them? Take note of such traits when you cull.

Organic Processing

Lucky for you, there is already a certified USDA Organic processor here in the Carolinas! May's Meats, in Taylorsville, NC, can process your organic cattle correctly so that your meat can have the USDA Organic stamp on every package! Back in the spring of 2011, Misty, at May's Meats, and I sat down and plowed through the application for processors. She took it from there and had their plant ready for the audit this fall. The certified animals have their own holding pen, no tool or machine touches them that has not been sanitized, they have a designated hanging space, and

their meat will be cut with tools that touched no other beef! If you have customers who ask about the cleanliness of processing, it doesn't get any cleaner than certified organic. This final organic processing piece adds a lot of value to our product.

Becoming certified organic means you must look at your whole farm

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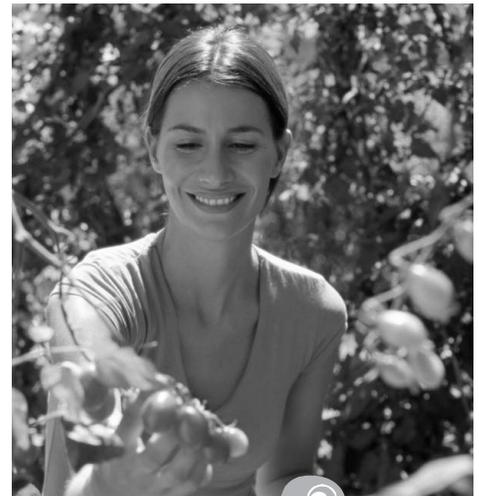
Beyond Grass-Fed...

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practices and management strategies. Many of the obstacles that I mention above can be dealt with in a holistic manner and through proper management. If you decide you want to get certified, your next steps should be to read the NOP standards found at <http://1.usa.gov/wleyaT>, implement the changes on your farm, then find a certifying agent near you and complete their application process. It may be a bit more work, but it's by no means impossible! And the pay off? Healthier animals, cleaner meat, and happy customers. 

Shelley Proffitt Eagan and her family raise 100% Grass Fed, Certified Organic Beef in the Charlotte area. They are the first certified organic beef cattle farm in NC and one of only a handful in the United States that are certified USDA organic and 100% grass fed.

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*Dew Dance Farm
photo by Robert Campbell Photography*