



Carolina Farm Stewardship Association STEWARDSHIP NEWS

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Farm Profile:

Leggett Organic Farm

by Lindsay Lassiter,
Past CFSA Intern

Ben Davis never dreamed of being a farmer. He graduated from UNC in 1994 with a degree in Anthropology. Then, in 1998, he was given an opportunity to live on his grandfather's farm in Washington, North Carolina. Washington is a small town 20 miles east of Greenville, NC and is affectionately and accurately referred to as "Little" Washington by its 10,000 or so residents. With no intention of farming the land, Ben took the chance and moved back East.

This was the unassuming start of Leggett Farm Organics (which gets its name from Ben's great-great grandfather who first farmed the land). The 40-acre farm, surrounded by a hardwood forest and small creek, has been in Ben's family for 150 years and includes the original farmhouse built by his great-great grandfather in 1872. Ben began restoring the old farmhouse in 2000 and then started on his grandfather's house next door. His grandfather, like most others in his day, used the land to farm tobacco.

From the start, Ben was committed to growing produce sustainably and without the use of chemical pesticides and herbicides. As a beginner farmer he read all the literature he could get his hands on to learn the methods that now inform his farming practice. The



*Ben on his farm holding a bucket of beautiful crimson okra
photo courtesy of Bobby Davis Photography*

farm started as a big garden, as Ben recalls, "I figured, I live in the country now, might as well have a garden." That garden progressively turned into dozens of acres of carefully managed and nurtured organic, heirloom crops. As one can imagine, this transition was no easy one, especially not for someone who believes in the power of healthy soil. Transitioning a 40-acre sandy loam tobacco farm into a fertile

vegetable mecca took years of hard work, tons of compost and rock powder, seasons of cover cropping, and the special attention to detail that Ben brings to his farm.

One way in which this attention to detail is apparent is through the collection of charts that have recorded the Brix value of each and every vegetable grown at Leggett Farm Organics over the past 15 years. Brix is a measure of the percent solids in a given weight of plant juice and also equals the percentage sucrose. Higher Brix values mean better flavor, as well as improved pest and disease resistance. With this information, Ben has been able to amend his soil to achieve the full, complex flavors in his produce.

Ben, perhaps jokingly, laments that with the seed catalogue's ever-increasing marketing prowess, it has become all too easy to over-order and over-plant. As a result, and luckily for his customers, Leggett Farm Organics offers an extensive selection of produce. This includes almost every kind of heirloom vegetable imaginable, blackberries, blueberries, peaches, apples, and pears, as well as honey and eggs from the hundreds of bees and over 100 chickens who call Leggett Farm their home.

One product that Ben is particularly proud of is a dehybridized Sungold cherry tomato, which the farm refers to as "Bengold."

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CAROLINA FARM STEWARDSHIP ASSOCIATION (CFSA)

CFSA is a membership-based organization with thousands of member 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.

CFSA Main Office

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From the Director

A Proud Moment for CFSA

In June the Carolinas' sustainable ag community received an unwelcome surprise. The Elma C. Lomax Incubator Farm in Cabarrus County, NC, one of the few organic certified incubator farms in the entire nation, which had been operated by county government for six years, abruptly lost all county funding. Not only was staffing for new farmer training programs eliminated, but the farmers-in-training were to lose access to all farm resources and the farm was to go under lock-and-key. The crops tended faithfully on the site since the Spring were doomed to wither and die, sacrificing the farmers' investments of time and money, and giving the farm incubator concept itself a black eye in our region.

The Carolinas have seen a tremendous growth in interest over the years in establishing training farms like Lomax, places where new farmers can learn the nuts-and-bolts of practical farm management, and be empowered to launch their own farm enterprises. When CFSA conducted the first inventory of such facilities in the region back in 2008, Raft Swamp Farms in Raeford, NC was the only such site in operation. Six years later, at least seven are up and running, and incubator farms such as the Dirt Works on Johns Island, SC and Breeze Farm in Hurdle Mills, NC, which were just in development back in 2008, have established successful track records of graduating sustainable farmers.

Lomax, too, has graduated real farmers, helped spur the region's local food system, and become a point of pride for sustainable agriculture in the Charlotte area, and so when county funding was terminated the public outcry was immediate and vociferous. When community leaders asked CFSA if we could help, our board and staff recognized the importance of the moment right away. We were able to work out a temporary agreement with the Cabarrus county government whereby CFSA has taken responsibility for operating the farm and managing the land where it sits, which is still



Roland McReynolds, Executive Director

owned by the county, so the current crop of farmers can harvest their produce and the community garden and other educational programs can continue for the rest of the year.

It was a proud moment for me that CFSA was able to step up to assist. When we did our farm incubator inventory we learned a great deal about the costs and challenges of running such a program, and based on that information if you'd have asked me four years ago I would have said that CFSA just didn't have the capacity to run an organic training farm. That we can today, even on a temporary basis, is a testament to the talent and dedication of our now increased staff, the vision of our board of directors, and the confidence of our funders and members. We've long recognized the importance of farm incubators as a thread in restoring a sustainable food and farming web, and it feels good to have a tangible role in weaving that thread. And the location of the Lomax farm in the Charlotte area, a traditional commercial hub for North and South Carolina, makes it strategically important in building a regional sustainable food network.

Of course education and training are just one link in the chain. Providing new organic farmers a start at an incubator farm doesn't do them any favors if the regulatory environment makes it impossible for new farms to succeed; if farmers can't access markets that will compensate them fairly for their labors, or access land to farm at a reasonable price; or if agriculture researchers don't investigate solutions for the unique challenges organic farmers face. CFSA

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CFSA Steps In to Save Lomax Farm

As mentioned in the Executive Director letter, CFSA is proud to be the new fiscal sponsor of the Elma C. Lomax Incubator Farm in Concord, NC. CFSA stepped in to ensure the vital work of training new farmers would continue, and that all farmers could complete the growing season and capitalize on the investment they made in their crops. Lomax is the only certified organic incubator farm in the Southeast and is doing important work training farmers, closing the production gap in the local food system and providing access to land in the vital first years of farming. The farm consists of 30.6 acres donated by Mrs. Elma C. Lomax and most farmers spend 3 – 5 years on the farm before moving on to their own farm or food business.

The biggest need for Lomax now is continued funding to sustain operations of the farm. If you would like to make a gift to the farm, please give us a call at 919.542.2402, or mail a check to: CFSA, PO Box 448 Pittsboro, NC 27312 with “Lomax” in the memo.

Join us at the 2014 Sustainable Agriculture Conference!

The 29th Annual Sustainable Agriculture Conference will be held in beautiful Greenville, SC on November 10-12, 2014. The keynote speaker this year is Mark Shepard, author of *Restoration Agriculture: Real World Permaculture for Farmers*, and the owner and farmer at New Forest Farm in Viola, Wisconsin, which is considered one of the most ambitious sustainable agriculture projects in the nation.

Featured speakers also include mob-grazing expert Greg Judy, southern food historian and USC professor, David Shields, and Richard Wiswall, owner of Cate Farm and author of *The Organic Farmers Business Handbook* (see page 5).

The conference will include 55 workshops, 3 pre-conference tours

and 9 hands-on intensive workshops in addition to the 56 table exhibition hall and seed exchange. For all the details and to register, visit www.carolinafarmstewards.org/sac or give us a call at 919.542.2402.

NC Tobacco Trust Fund Makes Triad Farm Tour a Success

The First Annual Triad Farm Tour took place June 7-8, featuring 17 farms in the greater Winston-Salem and Greensboro area. Around 300 individuals made 1,250 farm visits.

Thanks to the Tobacco Trust Fund for providing the financial support necessary to launch the Triad Farm Tour this year!

Farm tour attendees were able to visit a winery, truffle farm, and several vibrant livestock and vegetable farms. We hope you will join us next year on the second annual Triad Farm Tour!



Brandon and Kevin at Harmony Ridge Farms in Tobaccoville, NC on the Triad Farm tour

photo courtesy of Elizabeth Read

Good Agricultural Practices (GAPS) Video Series Online

CFSA has launched a series of videos to supplement the “Good Agricultural Practices for Small and Diversified Farms: Tips and Strategies to Reduce

Risk and Pass an Audit” manual. This video series continues to document real-world examples of how small, diversified farmers can employ these tips and strategies to meet GAP certification requirements. The eight-part series can be seen on our website: www.carolinafarmstewards.org/food-safety-videos/

CFSA Bids Farewell to Diana Vossbrinck

We send best wishes to Diana Vossbrinck who is moving on from CFSA. Diana joined the CFSA team in the spring of 2009 and brought her tremendous passion and enthusiasm to developing local food and sustainable agriculture throughout South Carolina. We appreciate her service to our members and her instrumental role in developing the Upstate Farm Tour into a thriving event. Diana has taken a new position with Clemson University as the Program Assistant for the SC New and Beginning Farmers Program, and she continues to work in the community through the SC Food Policy Council, the Anderson Area Farm & Food Association, and the Tuesday night Community Farmers Market in Anderson.

CFSA Welcomes New Staff!

We are pleased to announce two new staff hires at CFSA. Leah Joyner joined CFSA as the Education Coordinator in June, taking over for Laura Stewart who was promoted to the position of Education Director. Leah recently graduated with a MS in Sustainable Tourism from East Carolina University, where she worked closely with Carol Kline to create an Agritourism Curriculum, coordinate the first annual Greenbrier Valley Pasture Network Farm tour, and promote cyclist farm tours for Velo Girl Rides. In addition to organizing all five of CFSA’s farm tours across the Carolinas, Leah will also be responsible for aspects of CFSA’s Sustainable Agriculture Conference and other educational events throughout the year.

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Mid Season Tune-Up

by Richard Wiswall,
Owner of Cate Farm in East Montpelier,
VT and author of "The Organic Farmers
Business Handbook"

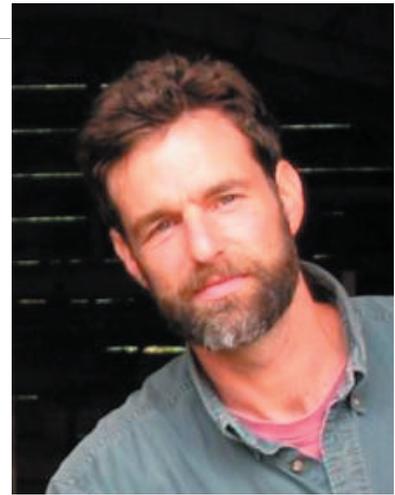
Feeling a little overwhelmed? Is the needle on the stress-o-meter topped out? Need one more thing to do in August?

It's been a busy season up until now and yet there is still the second half of the season to finish up before work slows down. Mid season blues are common this time of year.

It may be hard to think of January right now, but that's where the farmer's story usually starts. Having rested from the previous growing season, seed catalogs appear in the mail and thoughts of Spring instill hope that *this* year will be a banner year. Excitement centers on new varieties to trial, and new ideas, systems or tools to test out. Optimism prevails on every front with lots of new things to experiment with. Spring is a fresh beginning.

Seeds are ordered, greenhouses fired up, plants started. Fields dry out and crops are planted in the ground. Warm weather and the long days of Spring coincide perfectly to get the myriad of farm tasks accomplished. With some good weather, the farm is off and running.

But around July and August in Vermont, the reality of earlier optimistic planning finds most farmers without enough time, juggling a few too many balls at once. The chaos level rises, and a ball or two get dropped. The farm moves at full bore and planted acreage is at the max. To boot, multiple plantings of succession crops (like greens) require preparing beds, planting, cultivation, harvesting and tilling in of crops all within a week's time frame. And these different succession crops stand next to long-season crops that have another one to three months in the ground. Besides being fully planted with crops, fields may be overridden with of a bonus crop of weeds. Knowing that the end of the season is closer than it once was desire for weed free fields wanes.



Richard Wiswall
photo courtesy of Cate Farm

Focus changes to getting crops out of the ground and sold - and putting money in the bank. Weedy fields contribute to the overall chaos that mid-summer can bring. Projects that were planned for this year fall hopelessly to the bottom of the To-Do list. Farm stress can be at an all-time high.

In the fall, fields begin to empty out, cover crops are sown, and the hectic-ness of farm management lessens. There is still no shortage of farm work to do, for crops need to be harvested, packed and marketed. But the end of the season is in sight. Once everything is harvested and fields are put to bed for the winter, farmers can finally EXHALE, as their slower winter season begins.

For those of you readers who are familiar with my writings, you know that I keep a farm crop journal. This journal details inputs and yields on crops I grow so I can figure out how profitable they are. But another aspect of the crop journal is to record events and the pulse of farm life during the course of the year, much like the familiar daily diary. I may write, "Four frosts in late May" or for last year, "Rained for 8 weeks solid." I review these notes in January before I plan for the next season, to refresh my memory, which tends to be habitually short. By January, it seems my mind has been reformatted by

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Greenhouses at Cate Farm in East Montpelier, VT
photo courtesy of Cate Farm

winter's amnesiac effect and I forget how hectic the preceding season was (just a few months earlier!) or what things went drastically wrong. It took me a couple of decades to realize this pattern, hence the diary entries in the crop journal as a reminder. One year, I thumbed through the previous season's crop journal, and there was a page that had big letters in magic marker scrawled across it saying, "OMG! Never do THIS again!" I paused, and wondered where it came from. It kind of *looks* like my handwriting.....

Obviously, I need help remembering, and I need help to change habits so I don't find myself in the exact same frustrated and chaotic situation during the next growing season. Because plans that are made in January manifest themselves mid season, *now* is the time to think about plans for next season. It seems counterintuitive at first, but now is when you clearly see the need for changes. You are surrounded by your work. Although the slower pace of winter makes it a good time to plan, it is easy to forget the feeling of mid-season.

Ask yourself, *is everything the way you want it to be on your farm? Do you want to be in this situation next year at this time?* If so, great. You can duplicate your current strategy for next year. But if you see the need for changes, then now is the perfect time to take 10 minutes and write them down. It need not be detailed or lengthy, just a rough sketch of what would be different next year. Put it in a place with other papers to review next winter, like your seed order file, or tax documents. It may be as simple as: "reduce escarole by half, no summer spinach (but maybe more in fall), step up mechanical weed control, need to reduce overall workload in May (fall fertilize? buy in transplants?), weeds and deer out of control, need more help in June."

Another way to plan for future changes is by listing all the crops you now grow and commenting next to each crop, such as "more" "less" "OK" or naming varieties that work better than others. Keep it short and simple.

Change is hard. The path of least resistance is doing what is familiar and what you have done for years. But if you recognize that something is amiss now, and you want to make positive changes, action needs to be taken to make those changes real. What will change? Who will make the changes? When will the changes take place? Besides being hard, change can be scary, but remember, you can always change back the following year to the way things are now. That's not a huge downside for the prospect of some real positive steps forward.

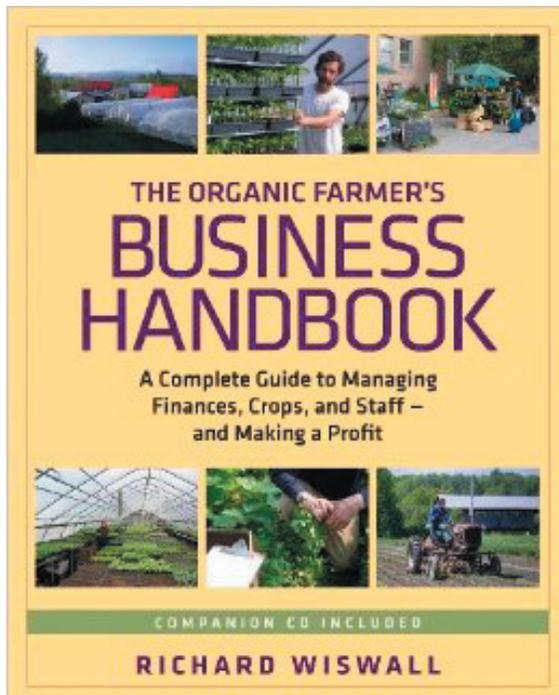
Besides quickly penciling out some plans for next year, another useful task to do right now is take a field inventory. Since most crops for the season are in the ground (or have been

harvested) you can roughly project what your year-end sales will be. Grab the page of crop yields from the front of a Johnny's Seeds catalog and walk your fields with a pad of paper and a pen. Estimate the row feet of each crop and figure what the yield may be. Next, figure what the anticipated price you'll receive for the crop, and write down the result. You'll end up with a total field inventory that you hope to sell, but also get a feel for which crops are worth more per row foot than other crops. Taking field inventory isn't too time consuming and it will help you decide where to put your efforts if your time is spread thin.

And for just a little more time invested, you can project what expenses you will have until the end of the year, resulting in a projected net profit for the year. Payroll will probably be the biggest expense: estimate how many workers and work weeks are needed to finish out the season. Look at last year's books as a gauge for other projected expenses. You can get a pretty good idea where your net profit will be at the end of the year.

My last piece of advice is to take a break. Go on a mini vacation, even a day. And give your employees some time off as well. Getting out of Dodge for a little R&R is refreshing for all, and gives needed distance from the farm. Working too hard for too long creates tunnel vision and lack of perspective. You'll return to work fresh and see things differently. Life is short, take time to enjoy it.

Originally published in *Growing For Market*, Fall 2010



Leggett Organic Farm...(continued from cover)

The farm is also famous for their Japanese turnips and yellow cabbage collards, which are a staple in Eastern NC.

Leggett Farm originally sold its produce at the on-site farm stand, but quickly grew to include a CSA with pick-ups in 4 locations and tables at several of the area's surrounding farmers markets. The farm also sells to restaurants such as Kinston's Chef and the Farmer and Greenville's Starlight Inn.

While the organic movement has been growing nationwide, Ben acknowledges that Eastern North Carolina isn't always the easiest market. Though Leggett Farm is one of the few organic farms in Eastern North Carolina, a wide customer base who understands the value of organic produce is not easy to come by and restaurants who value locally sourced, organic foods are few and far between.

Even so, the addition of the Uptown Umbrella Market, the growth of the Pitt County Farmers Market, and the appreciation for restaurants like Chef and the Farmer (and its PBS documentary, *A Chef's Life*, which was picked up for a second season) all indicate that the sustainable, local



In addition to livestock and many organic fruits and vegetables, Ben also grows flowers to attract pollinators and for sale to consumers

photo courtesy of Bobby Taylor Photography

food movement is here to stay.

Ben considers himself a natural entrepreneur; he started a sailboat chartering business after college and has more recently founded the Carolina Environmental Group, an environmental consulting firm concentrating on water resources management, solid waste reduction,

and sustainable land development. Like a true entrepreneur, he approaches farming with a desire to constantly evolve and a readiness to adapt to the ever-changing market.

The farm is currently looking to increase its flock of pasture-raised chickens, add heritage breed hogs, improve its efficiency of production through methods such as standardized row spacing and better weed cultivation, and to add a wholesale component for a few of their best crops. Ben recently moved another house to the farm in hopes of utilizing the growing cohort of beginning farmers looking for experience on sustainable farms.

For internship opportunities contact Ben at ben@leggettfarmorganics.com www.leggettfarmorganics.com

Lindsay Lassiter recently completed a 1-year internship with CFSA through her MSW program at UNC. She earned her degree in May and moved to the Wilmington area to pursue her passion for a just, sustainable food system for all.



The original farm house, built in 1872 by Ben's great-great grandfather

photo courtesy of Bobby Taylor Photography

Executive Director Letter...

(continued from page 2)

members, board and staff, and allies are working on all these fronts, and we look forward to growing the impact of the Lomax Farm as a contributor to a strong local, organic agriculture future.

The financial needs of the farm are urgent, both to operate the farm through the end of the year and into the future. We are thankful that the band the Avett Brothers, Concord locals, have stepped up and contributed to the Lomax Farm Fund. The musicians have given the plight of the farm nationwide exposure.

However, the needs of Lomax are great, and part of the financial puzzle includes donations from supporters like you. To donate, make checks out to CFSA and designate Lomax in the memo. Checks can be mailed to CFSA: PO Box 448, Pittsboro, NC 27312. Thank you!

Sincerely,



Association News...

(continued from page 3)

We are also excited to introduce Stephen Nix as our new South Carolina Food Systems Coordinator. Stephen grew up in rural South Carolina and graduated from Clemson University with a degree in Geology. Stephen and his wife, Heather, currently reside near Travelers Rest, SC where they have a small farm. As a farm owner, Stephen brings the hands-on experience of a small-scale farmer to CFSA in addition to 17 years of experience as an environmental consultant.

Eastern Triangle Farm Tour This Fall

The 9th Annual Eastern Triangle Farm Tour will take place September 20-21 and will feature 27 farms including 9 new farms! Load up your car and hit the road using the interactive google maps tool on the CFSA website to plan your adventure.

Tickets are \$25 per vehicle (or cycling group) and can be purchased at the link below, or at several local Whole Foods stores in the triangle.

www.carolinafarmstewards.org/etft/

Sign up for CFSA Policy Action Alerts!

When state or federal policy changes will impact farms or food in the Carolinas, CFSA's Action Alerts provide you with the information you need to impact the outcome.

CFSA used to provide this service through a listserv. As CFSA modernizes communications, Action Alerts will now come through a web-based system connected to our website. The new system will enable you to select the types of alerts you want to receive (Federal, NC, and/or SC).

But you will only receive the Action Alerts if you sign up (even if you were signed up for the old listserv). Type this link into your web browser and sign up today: <http://bit.ly/axnalerts>

Save the Dates!

Eastern Triangle Farm Tour

September 20 & 21

Retail Ready Workshops

October 28

December 10

Sustainable Agriculture Conference

Greenville, SC

November 10 - 12

Organic Commodities and Livestock Conference

Rocky Mount, NC

February 12, 2015

For all the details & more events:
www.carolinafarmstewards.org/events

Support Beginning Farmers



Make a donation to the William W. Dow Memorial Scholarship Fund and help send a new farmer to CFSA's Sustainable Ag. Conference.

919-542-2402 | Send check with "Dow" in the memo to P.O. Box 448 Pittsboro, NC 27312

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