

Farmer Profile **Eden View Organics**

By Michelle Isham, PASA Member

Cindy and Eric Noel could be described as accidental farmers. Six years ago they were living on a small parcel of land adjacent to Cindy's parents farm in Tyrone when they began toying with the idea of growing their own food. As they learned more about the benefits of eating a diet of organically grown whole food, they became more committed to nutritional self-sufficiency. So the couple made a decision to begin growing as much of their own meats and vegetables as they could in order to avoid processed and chemically treated food. What they couldn't grow and make themselves they would buy from thoroughly vetted vendors.

"It caused us to completely look at the food we need to purchase. We're so much more selective about what we purchase and where we purchase now," said Cindy.

Fortunately for the Noels, they already had experience with gardening and farm animals at the time. Cindy grew up on a farm and Eric had always done small-scale gardening on his own. "He has a total love of the outdoors," said Cindy of her husband. So they expanded the vegetable plot and purchased some chickens. As they talked to friends about their experiment with self-sufficiency, people expressed an interest in buying vegetables, eggs, and chicken from them. "Before we knew it, [the farm] just kind of happened," said Cindy.

The couple expanded their garden again and almost immediately began selling produce and poultry at the Boalsburg Farmers' Market. Today, the list of things that the Noels can't grow or produce themselves is remarkably short. Their product list includes pasture-raised poultry, organically grown produce, whole grain baked goods and bread, coffee roasted on the farm, and a variety of specialty products such as spelt flour pancake mix and vinegar. In addition to a regular rotation of farmers' markets and deliveries where Eden View Organics sell, the farm has a Harvest Shak where patrons can purchase products.

As Eden View Organics grew, the Noels joined PASA. According to Cindy, networking with other farmers keeps them current with new techniques and gives them encouragement. "Meeting other people and talking to other people provides so much support. I also think it helps you to dream a little bit bigger because you hear about what all the other people are doing," said Cindy.

The bounty comes from a remarkably small plot of land. Eden View Farm is comprised of just 10 acres, two of which are planted in vegetables. Cindy said she could think of only one other farmer at the farmers' market they attend who is growing on a similarly sized farm. "You have to be really wise to make a living off just a couple acres of land," she said. The pair is constantly looking for ways to

improve the efficiency of their operation and produce more within the climate and space constraints of their land. Cindy also has plans to do more with the Harvest Shak and hopes to reclaim a disused orchard on their land.

The farm's product list reflects the pairs' interests and eagerness to experiment with food production techniques. "I'll think of something - like the vinegar - and wonder if it's something I can make myself," explained Cindy. Few other farmers are currently offering such a wide variety of products. While such diversity can be hard to manage, it has its advantages such as a continuous flow of products outside the growing season. "Some days we think we're really crazy for doing that ... it's been really beneficial for us at the winter markets," said Cindy.

Cindy also believes that it's an advantage for their customers as well. Some towns in their area, such as Altoona, don't have many small-scale farmers selling at farmer's markets so Eden View Organics is their one stop shop. "It does make it nice for people who don't have a lot of access to farmer's markets," she said.

Interview with Cindy & Eric Noel

What do you see as some of the critical issues concerning agriculture today?

One of the critical issues concerning agriculture today is the desire of our friends, neighbors, customers, and of course--ourselves to have a safe and transparent food regulatory system. This really is a balancing act! We all want the FDA to protect our "food shed", but we also demand the right to make certain decisions on our own—such as raw dairy, and a more recent concern being HR 875 and S 425. It will be interesting, and possibly disastrous to watch and see how these issues are resolved. Our hope is that wisdom will win out over fear! ? ?

What is unique about your farm?

We believe a few things make us unique: 1) we offer whole grain specialty breads and desserts made with organic flours – sprouted spelt and wheat, with mostly local ingredients, 2) we offer many non-seasonal products from our kitchen to include vinegars, granola, trail mix, kombucha, pancake mix, coffee roasted on our farm and sprouts, 3) we support 15 local farmers/producers by either making their products available to our Harvest Share members or using their products in our kitchen, 4) we offer easy online ordering for all of our products with three different delivery/pick up options. ? ?

How has your operation evolved?

Our operation was built out of both necessity and a desire to simply live a simpler and healthier lifestyle. Our initial plan was to simply grow our own healthier produce, eggs, and meat. As our friends found out what we were doing, they encouraged us by being first customers. From there, as we were picking up some garden supplies from Patchwork Farm, we were prompted by Scott to apply for membership in the Boalsburg Farmers' Market—with little or no idea as

to what we were getting ourselves into! After a few weeks at our first summer market, we saw that this was actually a way that we could both make a living and enjoy our workdays. The transition started out with Eric transitioning from a “real” full time job to a part time job, and part time farming, which in a very short time transitioned to full time farming. Cindy worked the kitchen with a full time job for the first couple of years, but has recently transitioned to a part time “real job” and full time in the kitchen. The rest as they say is history!?

Why did you join PASA?

The reason we joined PASA is simple—education and networking! The lessons we have learned from the annual conference, as well as through the field days have helped us to better our operation and better serve our ever-growing customer base. And as far as networking—what we have gained from the friends and other like-minded farmers could possibly be the most beneficial aspect of our membership.