

Farmer Profile
Claire & Rusty Orner
Quiet Creek Herb Farm & School of Country Living

Nestled in the small town of Brookville, Pennsylvania (Jefferson County) you will find the unique farm owned by lifetime PASA members, Claire and Rusty Orner. The Quiet Creek Herb Farm and School of Country Living remains a work in progress after 10 years and continues to evolve.

Both Claire and Rusty grew up with an appreciation for farming. Claire's father, Jim McDaniel, introduced her to organic farming and PASA, while Rusty grew up on a dairy farm. Rusty went on to earn a degree in agriculture from Penn State, while Claire earned degrees in geology and education. The two actually met at a Thanksgiving dinner Claire's sister organized back in [1993](#).

After marrying, the couple moved to Seattle Washington, where Claire worked on a [Doctoral](#) degree. According to Rusty "Seattle is so much more progressive in terms of the programs offered for agriculture. They were the first state to offer the Master Gardener program. Both Claire and I learned so much while attending different workshops during our time there."

In 1996 Claire and Rusty purchased the farm property back in Pennsylvania, which is now their home. "We bought the property while we were still living in Seattle. So we had the luxury of a year to plan exactly how we wanted the farm to be set-up in terms of buildings and classes we wanted to offer. I think that is the closest we actually ever came to making a business plan," said Rusty. "We were sure we wanted to offer programs on the farm that we were passionate about and that also tied into other areas on the farm. We didn't want to waste our energy on programs we wouldn't enjoy," he continued.

On their 30-acre farm, the Orners, in addition to their two sons now grow a variety of vegetables, fruits and herbs, as well as edible and cut flowers. Several of these are then used to make herbal teas, soaps, dried products and vinegars that are sold at the farm.

About four years ago the Orners decided to also make the farm a nonprofit educational facility. They now offer year-round educational classes on topics ranging from Integrated Pest Management (IPM), vermicomposting, the soil food web, bread & soap making classes, raised bed construction, yoga, special craft classes and much more.

During the summers they also offer special education programs for teachers to earn Act 48 credits. "We have about 1,500 kids per year come through the farm. It is interesting to see the teachers come to our programs during the summer and then in the fall they want to bring their classes back to the farm as well. Some of the groups learn about cider making, others plant tomatoes or other vegetables,"

said Rusty.

“This is actually the first year we didn’t offer our Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program,” commented Rusty. “We began the CSA because we both enjoy vegetable gardening. We originally started with seven families, which then grew to 15. But as we began to look at how the farm was growing and what programs were working, we realized the CSA was just breaking even. We also weren’t able to raise enough food to supply the CSA and the increasing number of school groups and others that were coming to the farm for our workshops and tours.”

Since the Orners are so committed to education, they also offer a year-round apprenticeship program and junior internship opportunities. Rusty commented “The apprentices and interns are really interested in what they will be learning how to do on the farm. We have been offering the apprentice program for seven years and based it off a few models we had seen other farms offering.”

A recent intern shared “I came to Quiet Creek with a desire to participate in an entire growing season on a small organic farm. Almost immediately, I was given trust, responsibility, resources, and encouragement. Rusty and Claire are both amazing teachers that understand it is better to teach through hands-on experience. Mistakes don’t upset or scare them; it’s another way to learn and teach as far as they are concerned. I felt as though all of my ideas were realistic possibilities, and received the support I needed to enact them. They don’t have a “script” – they let creativity and innovation rule the farm; they expect to learn from apprentices as much as we learn from them.”

To learn more about Quiet Creek Farm and School of Country Living, contact Claire & Rusty Orner by email: quietcreek@windstream.net, phone: 814-849-9662. To see a list of workshops they are offering this fall, visit www.quietcreekherbfarm.com <<http://www.quietcreekherbfarm.com>> .

Interview

What do you see as some of the critical issues concerning agriculture today? Conventional agribusiness and genetically modified organisms and the influence on consumers and producers.

What is unique about your farm? We solely rely on God for all help and share everything – “there are no secrets at Quiet Creek.” We are all about sustainable

living education from pre-K –Growing Naturally to teacher professional development (workshops in the summer – Sustainable Health and the Classroom, for example).

How has your operation evolved over the years?

Becoming a 501-c3 in 2003 has opened up many opportunities to grow as an educational farm (i.e. grant writing, charitable organization).

Why did you join PASA? Claire's father, Jim McDaniel, was a lifetime member. He encouraged us to attend back in 1996 when we moved back to Pennsylvania, unfortunately he died before we were able to attend in 1998 and shortly after we became lifetime members. We truly believe in PASA's mission and encourage consumers, producers and decomposers to join PASA for the enthusiasm, energy and professional development we all need on a regular basis.