

Farmer Profile
Woody Woodruff
Red Wiggler Community Farm
By Michele Gauger

In the early '90s Woody Woodruff was a struggling artist who was working at a group home for individuals with learning disabilities. "A co-worker of mine who had recently returned from a trip to Australia educated me about Biodynamic farming, Camphill communities and Johnny's Selected Seeds" says Woodruff.

Coming from a family of entrepreneurs, Woodruff set out on a mission to find land and begin a farm where people with developmental disabilities could work. In 1995 Woodruff first visited the land that would become Red Wiggler Community Farm in Clarksburg, Maryland.

"I sought out public land that was underutilized by the local park authority. It took a real commitment on my part to develop a long-term contract with the Park & Planning office of Montgomery Co. (Maryland), but we have secured a twenty-year lease" continues Woodruff.

Woodruff formed a board of directors, for what would become Red Wiggler Community Farm, who served as his mentors in learning how to go from the "farm field to the board room" as Woodruff noted. Red Wiggler Farm was officially founded in 1996 as a 501(c) 3 nonprofit organization to create meaningful, fully included jobs for adults with developmental disabilities through the business of growing and selling high quality, home-grown vegetables.

According to Woodruff, the foundation of the farm is in the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program that first started with twelve shares and has grown to 80 this past year. "We also work to provide opportunities for area youth to participate in small-scale farming" he says.

Woodruff was the farm manager in 1996-97, but has since moved into an administrative role at the farm, allowing the hire of a farm manager and a service learning coordinator.

"Our growers are adults with developmental disabilities who plant, care for, harvest our crops and meet the customers who buy their produce. For many of our growers, their relationship with Red Wiggler goes back 8 years and provides them with employment as well as vocational satisfactions they would not otherwise enjoy. Adults with developmentally disabilities are our primary target population," says Woodruff.

"Area youth are our second target population. In 2006 we enjoyed the support of more than 200 youth volunteers and nearly that many adults. Again, the bottom line here is that our growers enjoy a shared sense of accomplishment when they

are working alongside others in the community towards the common goal of producing the healthiest, most delicious vegetables in the area” Woodruff continued.

For more information on Red Wiggler Community Farm, PO Box 968, Clarksburg MD, 20871, info@redwiggler.org, 301-916-2216.

Interview with Woody Woodruff:

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

What is unique about your farm?

How has your operation evolved over the years?

Why did you join PASA?