



North Columbia Environmental Society Green Business Award

Wild Flight Farm

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This week's Green Business Award goes to Wild Flight Farm. Co-owners Hermann and Louise Bruns supply Revelstoke with produce organically grown on their farm in Mara, located on the Shuswap River. This week I had a chance to ask a few questions that many grateful Revelstokians have been wondering about Wild Flight Farm.

What inspired you to begin farming organically?

After working in the mining industry for several years, both of us felt the need to do more meaningful work with direct benefits to our community. There was no question from the beginning that if we were to start farming we would do it organically. I (Louise) had no experience in agriculture, so I did a one year apprenticeship on an organic vegetable farm in Chase before starting our own venture. Hermann grew up on a dairy farm, so he had plenty of practical skills though not specifically for vegetable farming.

What do you think of ideas like the 100 Mile Market, local food, slow food?

I think the 100 mile diet is a good concept to strive towards as much as possible, but to follow it strictly is not realistic. I think we should do our best to get products local and in-season if they are grown in our region, and that our winter diet should be very different from our summer diet to reflect our local offerings. I'm happy to see that more and more people are paying attention to where their food comes from and making choices based on the distance travelled from farm to plate.

Give us an idea of what you do to make your farm organic.

We are certified with the North Okanagan Organic Association and follow B.C. Organic Standards in all our farming practices. We are inspected annually to verify that we are meeting the standards. We use only non-chemical, organic methods for pest and disease control, and we don't use any chemical fertilizers. Our main method of insect control is to use mesh screens over sensitive crops which prevent bugs from getting through. Putting the screens on and off is time consuming and sometimes awkward, but they are very effective and worth the effort. Our main method for maintaining (or improving) soil fertility is to plant "green manures" which are combinations of nitrogen fixing plants. Green manure crops are left to grow throughout the season before being tilled back into the soil, providing many nutrients and organic matter in the process. Fortunately we have enough land (20 acres) to allow us to plant green manures in a rotation. Only half of our acreage is used for vegetable crops in a given season.

Where do you get your labour force from?

From wherever we can get it! Sometimes we have people come from other parts of the province or from other parts of the country and occasionally we have people from other countries such as Japan, Germany and Australia working here. Finding reliable employees who are willing to commit to working the entire season, from May through October, is one of the most challenging aspects of our business. We need 6 or 7 full time employees for the growing season and 3 or 4 during the winter to keep things running smoothly.

What might surprise our readers about Wild Flight Farm?

I guess the surprising thing about Wild Flight Farm is that has survived and thrived over the years despite a shaky and dubious beginning. Many eyebrows were raised when we started 16 years ago with very little capital, no hope of a bank loan, no equipment and minimal knowledge or experience with growing vegetables. Our chosen piece of land had no house and no out-buildings, and we had our first baby on the way. Neither of us had any outside source of income. I wouldn't recommend this approach! But, with the support of extended family close by we persevered and learned from our many mistakes and have gradually grown a successful farm. We also have our enthusiastic supporters in Revelstoke to thank for the fact that we are still doing this.

In the last ten years consumers have become increasingly wary of many food products that have been contaminated by intensive industrial agricultural practices. From Melamine, e-coli, BSE, to listeria; there are plenty of questionable practices out there. The love, sweat, and tears that bring Wild Flight Farm foods to our community guarantees us products of outstanding quality. Furthermore, organic foods have a substantially higher nutrient content than corresponding foods commercially available. Nutrient poor soil and industrial fertilizers both serve to grow food that is of lower caliber taste wise and nutrient wise too. Food has become cheaper in the last half century as well. In 1950 the average Canadian spent 20% of their income on food, and now we spend only 10%. Spending extra on safe and nutritious food is well worth the effort and we are fortunate in Revelstoke to have Wild Flight Farm provide us with most of what we need, all year long!