

ECUMENICAL MINISTRIES of OREGON

Interfaith Food & Farms Partnership

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Farmer Profile: NW Organics

By Kate Sheridan

Visit to NW Organic Farm Garlic and Heirloom Tomato Festival
Saturday, September 19, 2009

End-of-summer rains failed to keep away the crowds at NW Organic Farm's Sixth Annual Garlic and Heirloom Tomato Festival. After a morning of torrential showers, Saturday afternoon opened to sunshine, complete with food and festivities at the farm. By the time we arrived at 2pm, the parking lot was full and the farm crowded with CSA members, family members, neighbors, and farm stand customers. We were greeted by Joyce, farm matriarch, with several young family members and dogs running underfoot. Joyce was exuberant and seemed to be in her element, with a front yard full of food vendors, live music on the front porch, and plenty of guests.



NW Organic Farm is comprised of seven acres in Ridgefield, WA, about a 45 minute drive northwest of the Portland Metro region, and is certified by Oregon Tilth. I rode to Ridgefield with St. Andrew members Ginny and Gary Link. Ginny and Gary are avid gardeners, growing the majority of their own vegetables as well as donating fresh produce to local food banks. Ginny is the congregational liaison for St. Andrew's CSA with NW Organic Farm, and had visited the farm early in the spring.

The farm looked very different to Ginny from her initial visit, as the summer season was nearly over and fall crops of peppers and tomatoes were at their peak. There were at least six hoop houses full of heirloom tomatoes, a specialty at NW Organic. We found Greg in one of the hoop houses harvesting tomatoes, and he took a break to give us samples of several, including Zapotec, a Mexican Indian variety. He encouraged us to explore the rest of the farm. In addition to the tomatoes, we saw lettuce and Lacinto and Red Russian kale starts in another hoop house, plus rows of strawberries, peppers, raspberries squash, and sweet peas. Basil and potato plants were also identified, along with a small Asian pear orchard closer to the house.

Before returning to the festival, we peeked into a storage shed, where hundreds of pounds of garlic and onions awaited dispersal. The CSA members visiting the farm were fascinated by all aspects of it, and it was a good reminder of the importance of allowing customers an opportunity to see farm operations and talk to the farmer face-to-face. Labels and certifications are an important symbol of trust in the grocery store, mediating between farmer and consumer. Grocery

store customers cannot meet the farmer or visit where the food is grown, but they are able to get an idea from the labeling and buying practices of the store. However, farmers are increasingly returning to an older method of ensuring trust with their customers by instituting an open invitation to visit and converse about farming practices.

Before leaving, we filled Ginny and Gary's Subaru to capacity with the week's CSA shares.



Joyce brought out flats of lettuce, tomatoes, and jicama (which a visitor at the festival offered to buy from us), as well as mixed flats of string beans, Asian pears, bok choi, and beets. Most of the CSA shares at St. Andrew are half-shares (which, according to one couple, take work to get through in a week – a testament to the abundance of the season's harvest. The variety of produce (both fruit and vegetables, as the Green Team at St. Andrew wanted in their ideal CSA farm) has challenged CSA members to get creative in their cooking; it has also encouraged them to pay attention to exactly what they receive in their shares each week.

Joyce is available at the pick-up site on Saturday afternoons to answer questions about, first of all, what they are getting, and second, what to do with it!