

Growing New Farms

The People Inside Food To Bank On

Jean Rogers, CNN Staff

Eagle Valley Farm

Tina Foro of Eagle Valley Farm is only half joking when she says, "our motto is 'anything worth doing is worth overdoing!'" In her first season with the Food to Bank On (FTBO) program, while home schooling, raising three small children, and creating garden fresh meals, she has quadrupled the size of her garden and supplied the Bellingham Food Bank with weekly produce.

Eagle Valley Farm is idyllic, but hard work is obvious in the neat rows of towering corn stalks, berry arbors, and brilliant clustered flowers. While Tina is the one with her hands in the dirt most of the time, the farm is definitely a "Team Foro" operation. Her husband Todd maintains the compost, tilling, and equipment. The kids know each chicken by name, collect the eggs unfazed by the occasional pecked finger, and are right at home in the garden. They're at home with healthy eating too—Karli's favorite vegetable is broccoli, Kristi votes for strawberries, and Katie favors tomatoes (after reluctantly accepting that popcorn doesn't count).

Fall crops at Eagle Valley Farm include beets, carrots, and radishes. Succulent bunches of first-year grapes are enticingly revealed beneath broad grape leaves—a success Tina is particularly proud of. The grapes are warmed by rows of bricks found around the place—innovating and using what's on hand is a fundamental aspect of the farming life.

What's next? A farm stand, a u-pick vegetable operation, or producing organic mushrooms are all potential directions. Tina says, "We've learned every year just by doing the farm.



FTBO taught us how to plan, how much to plant and harvest. We've met a lot of really nice people."

As she showed me each plant variety in the garden and described her fertilization techniques, Tina sounded more like a veteran grower than someone embarking on a new venture. Her passion is contagious—good fuel for persevering through the challenges small farmers face to make their visions viable. Thanks to Tina and our many local growers, we reap a truly precious harvest of healthy food, sense of place, and quality of life.

Uprising Farm

If peace, cooperation, and balance begin at home, Brian Campbell, Crystine Goldberg, and 15-month-old Rowan are doing more than their part. Their farm, Uprising Organics, is in its final year of Food to Bank On (FTBO) and is dedicated to organic practices and healthy food for everyone in the community. A spectacular half-circle of zinnias, sunflowers, and lavender introduces the garden. "We'd grow the flowers even if we didn't sell them," said Crystine. "Even when we're tired—if we sit



down in the garden we can still 'see the flowers through the weeds.'"

Their exciting new project is the launch of an independent organic seed business, Uprising Seed, in spring 2007. Brian explained, "Everyone we know is buying their seed from Maine. Some of that seed is from the West Coast and travels across the country and all the way back again." In collaboration with other farmers they will offer regionally grown seed, with much of it grown at their farm.

Both Brian and Crystine stress the importance of a tightly knit farm community. When their tiller broke, Steve Powers at Big Sky Garden loaned them his. Their neighbor Nick Guilford of Sunseed Farm is close enough to toss a tomato, and has been "invaluably helpful and generous, providing water from his well and the use of his tractor." Their eggplants are mulched with straw from Redtail Farm and they have done work trades with the Holistic Homestead, another FTBO

farm.

Of the Food to Bank On program, Crystine says, "It's a great and worthwhile program. It's a higher level when you take on your own farm, planning everything from start to finish. I really love delivering to the Sean Humphrey House. We believe in good food for all."

Heading back to town, images of Rowan toddling through the bean rows and the simple beauty of the farm were at once a refuge from the sobering daily news and a strong reminder of the power of the choices we're asking the world to make—in

Food To Bank On Invites Farm Applications

Food To Bank On is a three-year program that helps new farms get established while providing quality food for our area's food banks and hunger relief agencies. Participating farmers benefit from a contract to grow food for which we pay Co-op wholesale prices. They also get training and technical assistance by working with an experienced "mentor" farmer.

We are accepting applications from farmers in Whatcom and Skagit counties who are in their first three years of operation pursuing a livelihood in agriculture. They must be committed to sustainable agriculture practices and interested in participating in Food To Bank On's training, mentorship, and hunger relief programs for three years.

Food To Bank On is administered by Sustainable Connections and was founded by the Community Food Co-op's Farm Fund. For more information or an application, contact Shonie Schlotzauer at Sustainable Connections at 360-647-6902.

how we live our daily life and care for our loved ones, our community, and our world.

For more information on Eagle Valley Farm, contact Tina Foro at 360-739-1150 or email tforo@ispwest.com. For more information on Uprising Organics, contact Brian Campbell or Crystine Goldberg at 360-201-0468 or email mcwotos@riseup.net. For more information about Food to Bank On or to make a donation, call Shonie at 360-647-6902 or visit www.sustainableconnections.org.

Photos by Jean Rogers