

Community-Based Farm Brings Farmers And Consumers Together

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EPHRATA (Lancaster Co.) — Many farmers today are frustrated by the middleman. David and Peggy Fogarty-Harnish found a way to avoid the middleman and give consumers what they want for a reasonable price.

David and Peggy farm Scarecrow Hill Community Farm, a 22-acre farm owned by two neighbors in Ephrata. Scarecrow Hill will be hosting an Open Farm Tour on Saturday, May 6, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

The Scarecrow Hill Community Farm is one of about 1,000 community-based farms in the

United States. Local community members join the farm as shareholders and then enjoy fresh, organically grown produce during the 25-week harvest season.

"Basically, the community is paying us to manage everyone's garden for them," said Peggy. "It is very different from traditional farming. We ask our members for input, and then we plant based on what they want to eat."

The Scarecrow Hill Community Farm is now in its second year of production. About five acres of the 22-acre farm are used for produce. But David and Peggy are hoping to eventually expand so that all 22 acres are in

organic production.

"We're not certified organic yet," said Peggy. "It will take three years. During that time, we have to do everything as if we were certified in order to become certified organic."

David and Peggy use no chemicals on the land, and they use smaller equipment and hand labor in order to avoid compaction. "There is a lot more labor involved in organic farming," said Peggy. "But we don't have the high expenses for chemicals and equipment."

Organic food often costs more in the grocery store than traditionally grown food. But, according to Peggy, their food



Although organic farming is much more labor intensive than traditional farming, David and Peggy have lower input costs. They also have little to no debt because of the shareholders' investments.



David and Peggy Fogarty-Harnish started the Scarecrow Hill Community Farm to give people in the community what they wanted at a reasonable price. Currently the farm has 40 people signed up as shareholders.

costs consumers about the same as traditional food because they eliminate the middleman.

"Our goal is to provide locally-grown organic food to the community at a reasonable price," said Peggy. "If you take away the middleman, the farmer does better and the consumer does better."

According to Peggy, people are drawn to a community-based farm because it is organic. "I don't know how well the farm would do if it wasn't organic."

About 40 families have already signed up as shareholders of Scarecrow Hill Community Farm. David and Peggy are looking for about 35 more. The shareholders pay a share price in the beginning of the season, which is personalized to their family's diet, income, and involvement in the farm.

"We don't have to put out a huge investment or have a lot of debt because we can use the shareholders' contributions as start-up money for each

season," said Peggy.

Shareholders are also expected to help on the farm for at least 12 hours each year unless they plan to harvest their own produce.

"Some of them work in the gardens, but others do administration work," said Peggy. "We also have some that specialize in certain skills, such as painting or carpentry, who use those skills around the farm."

Those who are elderly or disabled are not required to work on the farm. "We have many shareholders who have health problems who want to eat organically-grown foods to help their bodies," said Peggy.

David and Peggy grow about 30 different vegetables, along with fruit, herbs, and flowers, on the Scarecrow Hill Community Farm.

"Since we grow so many different types of crops, planting and harvesting are somewhat complicated," said Peggy. "We

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