



THE SPOKES SPEAK - GEARED TO SERVICE

Rotary Club of the North Fork Valley

POB 1543, Paonia, CO 81428

WEB SITES: rotary.org rotary5470.org northforkrotary.org

Meeting Thursdays at Noon in the Paonia Town Hall

District 5470

Club 1180 - Chartered 12/20/22

Vol 59 Issue 30 - October 1, 2020

LAST MEETING: September 24, 2020 (via Zoom)

President Bliss presided.

Visiting Rotarians: None

Other Guests: Bronwen Barry (2nd visit)

Key Guest: No key guest

(Annette now has the key).

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- We had 52% turnout for the Zoom meeting today.
- Highway Cleanup scheduled for Friday, October 30th.
- The KPP lasagna dinner supporting Friends of Gueoul is October 5th. Event now available for sign-up. Need to raise about \$400, to combine with \$600 already donated by Club members to reach the \$1000 threshold for a matching grant.
- Will begin delivering dictionaries to the third graders around the beginning of November.
- If the Club would like to sponsor an exchange student for year '21-'22, we would need to let them know by November 20, 2020. Contact Greg if you are interested.
- No North Fork Children's Christmas Party this year. Gift bags will be distributed to the children instead along with a frozen pizza for the family. Wrapping will be done by invitation at Memorial Hall in groups of 20 or so, multiple shifts. Contact Pam for more information.
- Senior Connections Fall Service Saturday to be held on November 7th. Meet in Town Park. Cohorts that consider themselves Covid-safe around one another will work as teams.
- Committee Chairmanship positions available for:
 - Public Relations Committee. Facebook familiarity (or willingness to learn) would be helpful.
 - Fundraising Committee. Ideas for non-contact fundraising needed.Contact Pam or Randy.
- Anyone wishing to take over as Newsletter Editor is welcome to do so. Contact a Board Member.

PROGRAM: Small Potatoes Farm
Scott Horner

Bain introduced Scott Horner, who he said was one of the first people that welcomed him and Nancy to the Valley and helped them feel they had made the right decision in moving here. Scott has been involved in organic vegetable farming since 1997. He moved to the North Fork Valley in 2008 and has been farming at Small Potatoes Farm since 2010. Scott has 3 daughters ages 19, 17, and 14. Besides growing food for his community, Scott loves spending time in the nearby mountains hiking and camping.

Scott began with a description of the land that comprises the farm, as that is the basis for everything else that happens on the farm. The farm is 10.5 acres of diverse land with two 2-acre fenced fields where the vegetables are grown along with another 6.5 acres of “wildlands” with deciduous trees and ponds. The irrigation water first comes onto the wildlands via the Minnesota ditch. Water is piped from the ponds onto the fields where the food is grown. Plenty of water pressure is provided by the 50-foot drop in elevation from the ponds to the fields, so no pumping is necessary.

Nothing is grown on the wildlands, and it is maintained as an animal sanctuary. It is not fenced so the wildlife can move across it freely. It acts as a corridor to allow the deer to move from Mt. Lamborn down to the valley floor. It also serves as a nearby getaway for Scott. Having that undeveloped area provides balance with the cultivated fields and helps support the natural systems, like the animals, insects and birds, on which an organic farm depends. Primarily vegetables are grown on the two cultivated areas, with some berries, medicinal and culinary herbs, and flowers. Scott said he considers vegetable growing his calling.

The land is owned by Monica and Wayne, and they have owned it for about 25 years. Their intention is to keep it as a farm and ecological safe-zone to inspire wild things while also growing food for the community. Before they owned the land, it was owned by another couple who ran it as the “Enormous Brontosaurus Organic Farm” for 10 years or so. Monica and Wayne renamed it “Small Potatoes”.

There is also a bakery located at the farm, run by Monica. The bakery features a wood-fired oven.

Scott moved to the valley in 2008 to live in a smaller community than Durango where he and his family were living prior to that with the intention of getting back into farming. Prior to living in Durango, he and his family were farming in Vermont, and before that in New Mexico, on the San Juan Islands and in Port Townsend in the Pacific Northwest. The availability of alternative schooling for their kids was an additional incentive for moving to Paonia.

After a couple of years of living in Paonia, Scott was introduced to Monica who was looking for someone to take over the vegetable growing operation at the farm. Scott and Monica had developed a friendship and had similar ideas on how to take care of the land as well as a shared love of providing food for the community.

Once taking over the farming, Scott began to learn about growing in the local climate, mostly by trial and error. Sustainability, both financially and ecologically, was a primary focus. The challenges presented by both the climate and the variable availability of irrigation water led Scott to understand the importance of farming year-round. Traditionally in farming, growing is done intensively in the Summer until the first freeze, at which time the farmer takes a long winter break. This does not work so well here, as water can



Monica tending the wood-fired oven



Caterpillar tunnels

run out in mid to late Summer, just when the growing season is at it's peak. This led Scott to growing more in the Fall as well as the Winter and Spring. Systems such as "caterpillar tunnels" allow crops to be started in the Fall, either as transplants or direct seeding. The tunnels are moved into place when the colder weather arrives in late October. The tunnels can be closed or opened as appropriate to take advantage of warm days or to protect from cold days and nights, as well as to allow rain in or keep it out as needed . It is a passive solar system requiring minimal material and energy inputs. Since the tunnels can be moved, crop rotation is easily accomodated. Floating row covers can also be used without the tunnels to protect newly transplanted greens and to conserve moisture (foreground in photo at left).

Primarily salad greens and root vegetables are grown in the winter months and can be harvested beginning in February. The leaves of the plants freeze at night but the addition of the permeable row covers close to the plants keeps the soil warm and prevents the roots from freezing. The freezing of some leaves actually enhances the flavor of the salad greens.

Tunnels are also used in the Summer months, growing tomatoes, zucchini, cucumber, lettuce and basil. But the availability of water dictates how much can be grown. Water was particularly tight this year, so only 5-10% of the normal quantity was able to be grown.



Tunnel with interior row covers



Propagation house

Scott is currently in the process of planting the Fall crop. Everything except carrots is started via transplants. He is planting turnups, beets, lettuce, kale and chard. These are begun in a propagation house where a lot of plants can be started in a very small area and require a very small amount of water. The amount of water available dictates how many beds are planted at a time. The plants being set out now will go all the way into the Spring and may be picked up until May.

The tunnels also facilitate earlier planting in the Spring. Snow can be shoveled off the ground and a tunnel moved into place to melt the remaining snow and warm and dry the soil (which had been prepared the previous Fall) so that planting can take place as early as late January.

In addition, the tunnels provide an armature for trellising tomato plants as well as protecting the heirloom tomatoes from too much rain, which can cause splitting and facilitates disease. The plants are also protected from hail, wind and excessive sun by the tunnels.

Scott then talked about how, especially during the current pandemic, it is important for the community to eat more local food as well as to grow our own food. He said he would like to teach more of these methods he has developed for farming in the North Fork. Sustainable farming methods help minimize the external inputs that might otherwise need to be brought onto the farm from far away as well as improving the land. People benefit as well by having an opportunity to connect with the land and improve their mental health by producing their own food. He sees the farm as a place of healing and community.

Q and A:

Q: Do you grow potatoes, and if so, when do you plant them?

A: Yes. Small ones. Generally in April, but not all at once. Most crops are planted in succession to protect from having a single event, such as a frost, destroy an entire crop. The common wisdom is to “plant your potatoes when the lilacs bloom”.

Q: Where can people buy the produce grown on the farm?

A: Produce is for sale only at the farm in the barn. Hours are Friday, 3-7, Saturday 10-5 and Sunday 10-3.

Q: Do you have school children visit the farm to become inspired to participate in the types of regenerative agriculture the farm practices?

A: Yes. Not so much this year due to the pandemic. In the past Scott said he has participated in a program called Teens on Farms that places young people on farms to learn farming and earn some money. There was a garden plot in Hotchkiss near the Fairgrounds where the teens could grow vegetables and learn to market them.



Barn market menu

Q: Have you considered selling to restaurants or through Farm Runners?

A: Yes, in the early days prior to developing the local market and selling directly from the farm, Scott said he sold through Fresh and Wyld farmhouse and through the Trading Post. Some produce was also sold in the Roaring Fork area. Once the local market grew, the farm could barely supply the local demand. Increasing supply complicates the regenerative aspects of production and so has not been a priority. Selling direct is the ideal situation as opposed to selling wholesale or at farmer’s markets. Local demand has grown exponentially, especially in the last few years. And the connection with the local community is of fundamental importance.

Q: Do you grow garlic?

A: Yes, a lot for a small farm. 4-6K bulbs are planted each year. Saved seeds have been used to plant garlic on the farm for the last 20 years.

Q: Do you have a different recipe for the tunnels, as opposed to normal row cropping, like bio-dynamic gardening or square-foot gardening?

A: Some bio-dynamic practices are used, but the goal is to utilize the space in the tunnels as intensively as possible without degrading the soil. Inputs to the soil are limited, so it is a balance. Cover crops are used for soil building, as well as a small amount of organically approved chicken fertilizer, kelp, fish bone meal and even weeds. The goal is a rich, diverse eco-system. Only organic methods are employed, and no insecticides are used. Over time, an equilibrium is reached between the pests and the beneficial insects.



UPCOMING MEETING PROGRAMS:

Date	Speaker	Program	Member
10/1/20	Randal Palmer, PHS Principal	How the school is coping with Covid	John Zachman
10/8/20	Cynthia Houseweart	Princess Beef	Judy Beggs
10/15/20	Luke Reschke	Water Commissioner	Jackie Parks
10/22/20			Bill Bishop
10/29/20		Fifth Thursday	
11/5/20			Sarah Bishop
11/12/20			Norm Lewark
11/19/20			Nick Lypps
11/26/20		Thanksgiving	
12/3/20			Randy Campbell
12/10/20			Annette Choszczyk
12/17/20			John Coombe
12/24/20		Christmas Eve	
12/31/20		New Years Eve	
1/7/21			Susie Coombe
1/14/21			Glenn Dahlgren
1/21/21			Marsha Grant

