

THE NATURAL WAY



PHOTO BY GLENN M. SHAFER

From left, Mark Palladino and Dave Bristol at Bristol's Farm. Palladino is in his third year leasing land at the farm from the Bristol family and just completed the application required for organic certification.

Farmer seeks organic certification

By Glenn M. Shafer
Staff Writer

Bristol's Farm, located at 541 Albany Turnpike (Route 44) in Canton is seeking organic certification. Recently completing an application to the Bay State Organic Certifiers, owner Mark Palladino, often referred to as Farmer Mark, now waits for an official inspection in April or May. The organic designation, USDA Certified Organic, is expected before June 1.

Palladino is in his third year leasing up to 10 acres at the farm from the Bristol family. David Bristol lives behind the property and ran the farm for more than 40 years. Bristol says that he is very happy the way Palladino is running the farm, a place Bristol has spent most of his life.

Palladino says that with the organic seal, he will be able to sell his fruits and vegetables to organic supermarkets. "The organic term is regulated," said Palladino. "We

farm crops here, following organic farming practices. We don't use any herbicides or pesticides. I think raised organic tastes better. There are people who want to keep the organic brand strong but there are pressures to change the organic labels by the large commercial farms since the USDA got involved. Every year, we will be required to update our application, documenting what we used. The fee was expensive and that is why many farmers don't apply for organic status."

Bristol's Farm is enjoying a resurgence with a significant increase in customers. With a strong belief in the importance of teaching kids where food comes from, Palladino continues to encourage local schools to schedule a visit to the farm. "It is great for kids to come out and spend the day," said Palladino.

Making a career switch a few years back from accounting and finance, Palladino is very pleased

with the progress of the farm over the last three years.

"I was in the right place at the right time," said Palladino. "All you have to fall back on is your training. I am continually keeping myself updated."

Palladino employs a number of teenagers who work in the fields and in the store. He says that many of them are learning how important it is to be friendly to customers and to keep the store stocked with product, not to let the shelves look bare by the end of the day. He said they understand what needs to be done on a farm and are beginning to show more initiative.

For the coming season, Palladino will keep the store open until 7 p.m., instead of 6 p.m., giving his customers more time to shop. He will also be expanding the recipe section in the store, a popular area introduced last year.

"I can look you in the eye and say I love what I am doing," said Palladino.