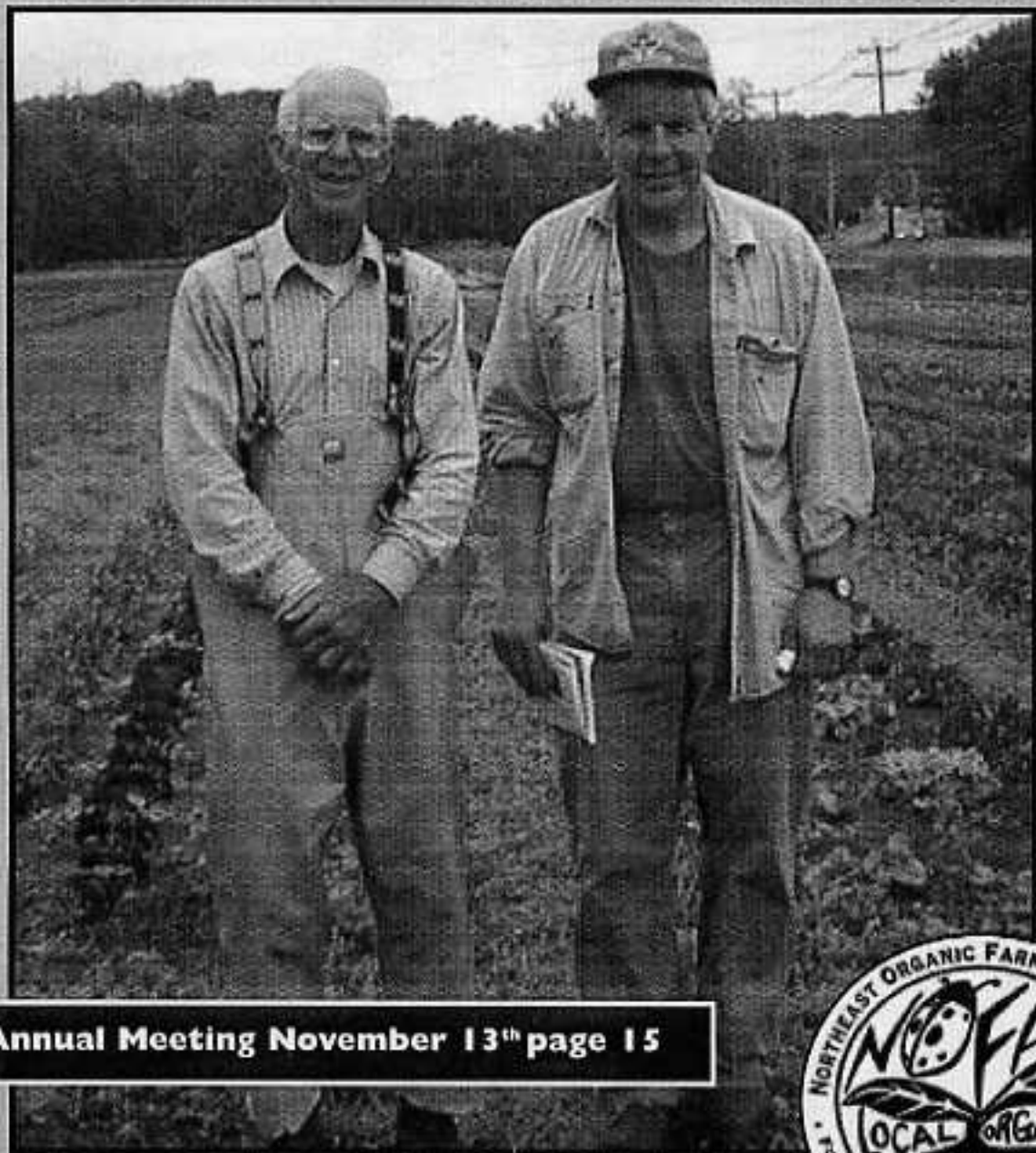


GLEANINGS

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Annual Meeting November 13th page 15

Bristol's Farm and Wild Coast Farm/Share Land and a Vision of Farming; page 3



CROPS, KIDS, AND COMMUNITY: A DREAM MADE REAL AT WILD CARROT FARM

by Elizabeth Fleming



Mark has a keen interest in educating children about farms and food. He emphasizes this in his mission statement and is working to develop relationships with local schools. He is seen here with Jordana, the author's daughter, after taking her on a tour of the farm.

Nestled between the strip-mall sprawl of Route 44 west of Hartford and the rushing waters of Satan's Kingdom lies an agrarian oasis of organically grown vegetables and flowers. This is Wild Carrot Farm, the new enterprise of Mark Palladino, former Deputy Finance Director of the Town of Cheshire turned farmer. Although Mark downplays the enormity of farming over four acres with only two years of apprenticeship under his belt, to this aspiring farmer he is more than an inspiration — he is living proof that dreams can indeed become reality.

Mark had stumbled on the budding farm-to-school movement, and had at last found what he felt to be his true calling. Not one to be daunted by the fact he'd never grown a vegetable in his life, Mark contacted NOFA farmers David Blynn and Laura McKinney of Riverbank Farm in Roxbury (www.riverbankfarm.com), whom he'd had occasion to meet on a NOFA farm

tour some years earlier. Thus began two years of training in which he learned all facets of organic farming, from starting seedlings in the greenhouse to selling at market. Mark holds Riverbank Farm up as his gold standard for organic farming. "They have it all together there at Riverbank", he says wistfully, recalling how every aspect of organic vegetable production was honed for maximum efficiency. Mark also helped out at NOFA members Jim and Sue Short's farm stand in Sandy Hook where he acquired the skills necessary for running a retail operation. Mark was now ready to move on to the next step: a farm of his own.

Enter David Bristol of Bristol's Farm. His farm had been in the family for generations, and had only had its 120 acres reduced once, when his grandfather sold off 8 acres for a few houses in the early 1950s. The farm transitioned from dairy cows and sheep to sweet corn in 1942, and had garnered

WILD CARROT FARM'S MISSION STATEMENT

TO PROMOTE SMALL AND MODERATE-SCALE FOOD PRODUCTION USING ECOLOGICAL PRACTICES THAT MINIMIZE THE NEED FOR SYNTHETIC INPUTS AND MAXIMIZE STEWARDSHIP OF RESOURCES AND, TO EDUCATE SUBURBAN AND URBAN ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL CHILDREN ACROSS THE CURRICULUM THROUGH PROGRAMS AT THE FARM AND IN SCHOOLS THEREBY FOSTERING POSITIVE NUTRITIONAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL ATTITUDES AND PROMOTING RESPONSIBILITY AND SELF-ESTEEM.

Welcome to
NEW MEMBERS

BANTAM BREAD, LLC, BANTAM
 PEGGY BORLAND GILLEN, BETHEL
 SANDRA WILSON, BETHEL
 JANICE COCCHIOLA, CHESHIRE
 JAMES SOKOLOSKI, COLCHESTER
 MACK AND MARY YVONNE
 FAULKNER, DARIEN
 JONATHAN BUDD, EASTFORD
 CHRISTINE COOK, EASTON
 CHIEF WARD, ELLINGTON
 ISABELLA FREEDMAN JEWISH RC,
 FALLS VILLAGE
 GORDON BEDNARZ, GLASTONBURY
 I.P.L.P. GREENWICH
 ALCHEMY JUICE BAR CAFE,
 HARTFORD
 HENRY LINK, HARTFORD
 ANNA MARIE NICOLAYSEN,
 HARTFORD
 SHANNON RAIDER, HARTFORD
 MATTEO DI TOMMASO, IVORYTON
 ALAN MORRISON, LEBANON
 CAROL CAVALLARO, MADISON
 BARBARA YEAGER, MADISON
 STEPHANIE GREEN, MANCHESTER
 JOAN BAILEY, MERIDEN
 ELEANOR POOLE, MIDDLEFIELD
 JOANN THOMPSON, MIDDLEFIELD
 RACHEL LINDSAY AND ASHER
 ISFAELOW, MIDDLETOWN
 VERONICA KRISAVAGE, MILFORD
 MARY TREAT, MILFORD
 BARBARA WAGNER, MILFORD
 JUSTIN MURPHY, NEW BRITAIN
 PATRICIA LAVERY, NEWINGTON
 DOUGLAS RANKIN, NORWALK
 BRENNIA CHASE, OAKDALE
 CHERYL PLACIDO, POMFRET
 VICTORIA YOLEN, RIDGEFIELD
 LORI-ELIZABETH STICKNEY,
 RIVERTON
 CHRISTOPHER CLOW, SHARON
 MICHAEL SIMMONDS,
 SOUTH WINDSOR
 JANNA BOETTCHER, SOUTHBURY
 DOLORES MILLER, SOUTHBURY
 PETER AND MICHELLE ZICKFELD,
 SOUTHTON
 BRIANNE CASADEI, STONINGTON
 SUSAN DOLCE POLLOCK,
 STONINGTON
 PENNY AND REBECCA BARTON-
 ZUCHERMAN, STORRS
 DAVID MURRAY, TOLLAND
 DONNA CENERIZIO, TRUMBULL

continued on page 5

WILD CARROT FARM *continued from page 3*



Mark sells his produce in the store adjacent to the farm in Canton. He also sells at the Farmington farmer's Market and wholesales to some grocery stores.

a local reputation for superior quality corn. Throughout his farming career David Bristol, a NOFA member since 2003, has farmed "as naturally as possible", using minimal chemical inputs, on-farm produced compost as fertilizer, and cover cropping for fertility and erosion control. David "retired" in 2001, decreasing the amount of land he farms from 18 to 8 acres. After leasing 10 of his acres to a conventional farmer and being unhappy with the way the land was treated, David approached the Connecticut Farmland Trust looking for someone he could trust to farm his land. Only a few days earlier Mark had contacted CT NOFA and Bill Duesing, CT NOFA's education and advocacy coordinator and CT Farmland Trust board member helped connect Mark with David and the match was made. Mark and David signed a one-year lease and Wild Carrot Farm was born.

The morning of my visit Mark had his farm crew hard at work in the fields. His nephew Jacob was hilling potatoes, and both his mother and his mother-in-law were wielding stirrup hoes in the zinnias. Mark relies on an assortment of friends and family, including his wife Debbie who works full time as an analytical chemist in Danbury, for all of his farm labor. Despite the lack of mechanical cultivation equipment, adapting to a newly purchased irrigation system, and a touch more crabgrass than he would like, Mark's optimism about the 2004 season has been borne out. Mark is successfully selling his abundant

harvest at the farm store adjacent to the farm, at the new Farmington farmer's market at the Lexington Gardens nursery on Rte. 4, he's and even wholesaling a bit to a nearby grocery store.

Meanwhile, Mark has not forgotten what led him to farming in the first place. Recently a group of homeschooled children visited Wild Carrot, learning about agriculture while participating in the work of the farm. Mark is also pursuing a relationship with Cherry Brook School in Canton and is enthusiastic about participating in NOFA's farm-to-school efforts. Wild Carrot Farm's mission statement (previous page) bears witness to the fact that education and community involvement are just as important to Mark as growing healthy food in a sustainable manner. And these are not mere words. As I stopped to speak with David Bristol about the farm's history, Mark took my daughter Jordana on a private tour of the farm. Recognizing in him the gentle spirit of one who truly loves and understands children, she happily traipsed off, then proudly returned bearing the small treasures they discovered on their walk — a bouquet of wildflowers and a robin's eggshell of an impossibly lovely blue. I have no doubt that Mark and Wild Carrot Farm will enrich many more children's lives in the years to come. ■

Elizabeth Fleming is a NOFA board member and aspiring farmer.