



Issue #1 2021

Whidbey Farming CONNECTIONS

PRESENTED BY THE WHIDBEY ISLAND GROWERS ASSOCIATION

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A New Approach Inspired by You



Kelsi Mottet

A Word for My Friends and Farmers

Just like our lives this past year have reminded us, change is the only constant. Many of you may remember meeting together for the first time on that cold November evening in 2015 at the Whidbey Island Nordic Lodge in Coupeville. Perhaps the memory is blurred a bit, but over potluck food we circled, a small group of us island farmers and several support organization staff, to seek the answer to our collective question - "How can we continue to evolve in our collaborations, in our marketing of farms on the island to others, to tell our story?"

To read more, go to [page 3](#).

Whidbey Island Growers Association's

Spring Farmer-to-Farmer FarmWalk Series 2021

Highlighting Collaboration & Resiliency

Get to know your fellow island farmers in three outdoor, socially distanced, and small group farm walks. Learn about the ways in which our north, central, and south Whidbey farmers have teamed together during a time of need to develop resiliency for our island's agriculture and the region's food systems. **Pre-registration is required with a limit of 10 individuals per walk. Masks are required to attend.**

1. North Whidbey Spring FarmWalk - MAY 6th "Pioneering a New North Whidbey Market"

Featured Farmers:

Elizabeth Case-Smith, [Case Farm](#)

Since 1898, the Case family has farmed on north Whidbey Island, growing food for themselves, friends, and neighbors. Elizabeth farms alongside her mother Shelia, father Mike, brother Pete, and sells produce through the farmers markets, on-farm honesty stand, and in collaboration with other farms like Māyā Farm.

Elizabeth Agin, Owner - [Māyā Farm](#)

Elizabeth is the owner of a north Whidbey Island urban farm offering land and animal stewardship and goods focused on holistic and sustainable practices, including homegrown honey, candles, cosmetics, textiles, and produce and livestock.



Elizabeth Agin and Elizabeth Case-Smith

Date/Time: Thursday, May 6th, 2021; 5:30 - 7:30 pm

Location: Case Farm, 98 Case Rd. Oak Harbor, WA

Pre-registration required: (limit to first 10 sign-ups) [CLICK HERE](#)

2. Central Whidbey Spring FarmWalk - MAY 19th

"Revitalizing Agriculture at Greenbank Farm through Multiple Strategies"

Featured Farmers:

Tonnelli Gruetter, Manager of [Growth](#); [Growing Veterans](#): [Whidbey Island](#)

Growing Veterans has a farm outpost at the Greenbank Farm where veterans and their family members can find support and learn how to till the soil. The organization, founded by a combat veteran and a former mental health counselor has a mission to end isolation through creating purpose & belonging, striving to accomplish this by growing food, community, and each other. Tonnelli is a cause marketing expert with 10+ years top agency experience.



Tonnelli Gruetter

Dorcas Young, Owner - [Lesedi Farm](#)

Lesedi (Sunlight in Tswana) Farm is a family-owned micro-farm founded by Dorcas Young. Born and raised in central Botswana, Dorcas and her husband Matt moved to the U.S. in 1996 with four children to settle on Whidbey Island. Using seeds from her family farm in Botswana, Dorcas sells produce from her garden, and several other areas - including Greenbank Farm. Additionally she utilizes her skills to create and sell meals and food products to local stores that emphasize unique African cuisine.



Dorcas Young

Central Whidbey FarmWalk continues on the following page.

Featured Farmers:

**Kim Gruetter, Owner -
Salty Acres Farm**

Salty Acres specializes in locally grown flowers, small batch sea salt, foraged ocean greens, and specialty produce. Originally brought to the island by the Navy, Tonneli and John thought their farming roots were somewhere in the past when the opportunity of a lifetime appeared: a new start at a historic farm on Penn Cove. Now Salty Acres Farm is run by three generations on Whidbey Island - Paul, Kim, Tonneli, John, and little Sauvie.



Kim Gruetter

Mark & Melissa Stewart, Owners - One Willow Farm

Owners Mark and Melissa Stewart both have roots in agriculture. Mark grew up on a farm in South Dakota growing corn and soybeans and raising beef cattle. Just up the road, Melissa rode horses on her family's small hobby farm. After a 23-year career in the US Navy, they entered the Armed to Farm course offered to Veterans through NCAT in 2019 and pride themselves in raising poultry in an ethical and humane fashion, leaving the land better than they found it, and being of service to their community.



Melissa and Mark Stewart

Date/Time: Wednesday, May 19th, 2021; 5:30 - 7:30 pm

Location: The Ag Fields at Greenbank Farm, 765 Wonn Rd., Greenbank, WA

Pre-registration required: (limit to first 10 sign-ups) [CLICK HERE](#)

3. South Whidbey Spring FarmWalk - JUNE 21st
"Diversifying Business through Seed Production & New Product Innovation"

Featured Farmers:

**Annie Jespersen and Nathaniel Talbot, Owners -
Deep Harvest Farm**

Annie Jespersen and Nathaniel Talbot have raised vegetables, organic seeds, and flowers together on a beautiful, sunny 10-acre parcel overlooking Mutiny Bay for the last six years, and on Whidbey in general for the past 10. In 2010, they moved from Portland to attend an 8-month, hands-on farm-training program on Whidbey, where they learned the technical and business skills necessary to run a farm business and enjoy diversifying their business and serving their community.



Nathaniel Talbot and Annie Jespersen

Date/Time: Monday, June 21st, 2021; 5:30 - 7:30 pm

Location: Deep Harvest Farm, Shoremeadow Road (between 5527-5401, just south of the Foxtail Farm entrance), Freeland, WA

Pre-registration required: (limit to first 10 sign-ups) [CLICK HERE](#)

Building Our Future Together from Loren Imes, WSU Extension Island County Food Systems

Resiliency. Even before the pandemic hit, that word was heavy on my mind. Resiliency suggests an ability to withstand fluctuations and change. These changes could be in our physical environ-



Loren Imes

ment, our economy, or even in our emotional well-being. With so many rapid changes, I kept considering how I could share the resources of WSU and other land grant Extension programs to help foster resiliency in our farms, farmers, farm businesses and local food system?

Simply stated, resiliency in our soils means adequate levels of organic matter and abundant soil microorganisms for healthy crops. Resiliency in our farm-

land means native plants and undisturbed ground to provide habitat for beneficial species of insects and wildlife. Resiliency in our farm businesses means multiple ways of delivering our food to our customers, utilizing low cost structures to provide a living wage for our work. Resiliency as farmers includes personal connections with each other, our staff and customers, treating all as equal members of one community. And resilience in our local food system means growing and delivering healthy food to all of our community, supporting policies and programs that maintain both our rural lands and economy.

The pandemic allowed us to see where

we are resilient and the areas needing further work. While technology has seemingly made us more connected than ever, there is little substitute for being together, in-person to share a meal and conversation. My hope is that our past Whidbey Island Growers Association events built a foundation for resiliency. My hope moving forward is to continue this tradition of getting together to share ideas and knowledge to further strengthen our connections. We have much more work to do.

Whether you have been farming here for many years and want to catch up with other farmers on Whidbey, or are just getting started and learning what resources are available to you, I hope you will join us so together we can continue to build a resilient farming network and community.

A lot has happened since that evening over 5 years ago, yet here we still remain - a group of our island's farmers who have met monthly to eat



Gathered at the Nordic Lodge learning about National Young Farmers Coalition in 2018.

good food, network, and learn from each other. In 2018, you may recall the group decided to give ourselves a name - the **Whidbey Island Growers Association**. We were wanting to differentiate ourselves as the core farmer group, different than that of the broader initiatives we started. Remember those regular conversations about rebranding Whidbey Island Grown? Those speakers from organizations far and wide who came to share their resources with us? Our committed group set the stage for the broader conversations now taking shape - the cooperatives, consortiums, and brands we now see soaring.



Learning from 3 Sisters Farm about their operation at a summer dessert social.

Working for the Conservation District these past five years - and having worked at Willowood, Rosehip, Kettle's Edge, and Prairie Bottom Farms for several years prior - I feel myself so fortunate to know so many of you. What this past year has taught us is unique to each of us, yet common themes in conversation with you all arise. Wisdom about how life is so finite, how valuable and fleeting time is, and what really matters - **the care and company of others**. A sixth generation islander, I know you as the farmers are the foundation, the heart, the past, present, and future of the culture and character of Whidbey Island. Perhaps it is because my work takes me from north to south, but I realize so many of you have yet to meet one another.



Enjoying a good meal together has been tradition for our group.

Ask yourself, "**How many of my fellow farmers do I know - to the north, to the south, in the center?**" I think it's import-

ant to remember that our island community is unique, there's a reason why we all live here, and that our differences in how we farm, where we farm, and for who we farm, strengthen our agriculture for the future. The innovation and

resiliency I see in each of you, the authenticity, grit, and hope - there's a collective narrative to be told here, of what it means to farm and be a farmer on just one island, in just one area of the world - here in the Pacific Northwest.



Eli Wheat of Skyroot Farm shares about his process installing a manure composting facility.

As you all have likely seen by not seeing, our Whidbey Island Growers Association has been "crickets" for the past few months. Like you, the isolation and

Zoom fatigue has taken its toll, and we decided to reflect on how we could better serve you. I remember in February of last year, when over 30 of you came together, grabbed pints at Penn Cove Taproom, and met many of yourselves for the first time, there was an energy there I hadn't seen, an energy I hear through your feedback to us that

we'd like to re-engage in a new approach to this group.

Over the next year, the Whidbey Island Growers Association is teaming together with host farms throughout the island to **offer four**

seasonal FarmWalk series, each featuring a north, central, and south Whidbey farm. Through the theme of **Collaboration and Connection**, these seasonal Farm-

Walks are meant to provide a relaxed, low-stress break from your busy work lives. Gatherings will be kept intentionally small to no more than 10 pre-registered farmer attendees, as a means to foster new and deeper professional connections. Not only will the farmer hosts share their stories, but we'll encourage you as an attendee to do so, to help us not only learn from each

other but build understanding of who one another is.

This group was originally formed by farmers over five years ago, and has morphed and shifted its purpose and role many

times, but I think we've landed something truly great now - **To provide a space for Whidbey's farmers to get to know each other, to facilitate and foster an environment where differences of approach and opinion are celebrated, and where solutions may spontaneously be found, creative ideas take hold as the result of new conversations, and understandings of one another deepen to strengthen our farming social landscape.**

We will be creating short videos after



Gathering for brews and stories at the Penn Cove Taproom.

each event, which we'll distribute out to all on this list. Our goal is to then **weave together all the videos into one calendar year-long visual narrative of agriculture on Whidbey Island**. Our hope is

that many of you may be inspired to host future FarmWalks as a result of attending one, and be featured in future videos, so that your story is told as part of this greater story of the island's agriculture. Of what it means to form the core of our island's community, of what it means to be to be farmers - to be *us*.

We here at WICD and WSU look forward to remain your steady supporters in the background, and support you as people and professionals, as farmer-to-farmer.

~Kelsi (Franzen) Mottet
Natural Resource Planner
Whidbey Island Conservation District