

Peaceful River Farm Larry and Lee's New Chapter

This summer our quest to purchase a small farm to grow organic vegetable and fruit ended with the purchase of an 18-acre farm in Orange County on the Haw River. We composed the proverbial pluses and minuses list before making our decision, but it was a serene summer walk along the river's edge that clinched our decisions. Don't most major decisions in life have an emotional dimension? The next Sunday the hymn in worship was the Negro spiritual, "Peace like a River". Lee whispered to Larry, "I love these words - we need to use it to name the farm", and the name, "Peaceful River Farm", emerged like a gift from heaven.

Aside from the beautiful Haw River - there's 900 feet of river frontage - there is very rich bottomland, a good southern sloping exposure for the market gardens, a good western slope for berries and fruit trees, a spacious house with geothermal heating and solar panels for supplemental electricity and water heating. The land was once part of a 500 acre farm and lies four miles from Larry's ancestral home in Alamance County where his aunt and cousin's family still reside and farm. Even closer are the farmsteads of Larry's great-grandfather and great, great-grandfather.

So, you may have noticed we're not spring chickens anymore, and have we lost our minds to begin such a bold adventure entailing lots of hard work? Read on.

Sustainable agriculture and local food have exploded in recent years. While North Carolina leads the nation in the rapid loss of farmland in recent decades, the Triangle has actually seen an increase in the number of farms springing up. Restaurants, colleges and universities, corporate cafeterias, and even school systems are demanding locally grown, sustainable produced food. Area farmers markets are exploding in popularity, and several have begun in recent years. Shares of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA's) cannot match demand with supply. So, clearly there is a market for fresh produce and berries.

The area has one of the strongest infrastructures for sustainable agriculture in the nation. Larry has been taking sustainable agriculture courses in nearby Pittsboro at Central Carolina Community College's groundbreaking sustainable Ag program replete with a student farm.

Pittsboro also is the seat of Carolina Farm Stewardship Association, a trade and support group for small farmers in the Carolinas; the Rural Advancement Fund, a financial and technical support organization for small farmers; Eastern Carolina Organics, a cooperative of organic farmers serving restaurants and niche groceries; Piedmont Biodiesel; and Piedmont BioFarm, where Larry just completed an evening workshop with 30-year small farm veteran, Doug Jones. Some of the best small farms in the region are located nearby - farmers who serve as experts at regional conferences and workshops. And, we are using one of those expert farmers and teachers as our consultant/coach, Tony Kleese.

Tony is fond of showing a map of North Carolina, turning it on its head and comparing it to California. The northwest mountains are akin to northern California's cooler growing climate, the fertile crescent of North Carolina extending from the rich farmland of the northeast to the area around Charlotte is akin to the Central Valley, and southeast N.C. around Wilmington has a nearly sub-tropical growing climate similar to southern California. So, why are we importing billions of dollars of worth of food to North Carolina each year? Isn't the food we grow locally healthier and fresher?

We believe so, and we're voting with our feet and hands. Author Michael Pollan states that what we need is 20 million new farms to create a sustainable food system and viable rural economy replete with a lot of jobs. You can now make that number **19,999,999!**

The farm operation, which will focus strongly on building healthy soil to grow food free of pest and disease, will go hand-in-glove with Lee's Healthy Cooking offering workshops, farm dinners, and special events. The ethos of self-reliance was bred into our ancestors, and we are seeking to go "back to the future" to live out the motto that Ralph Waldo Emerson penned over a decade ago to an upstart nation:

*"We will walk on our own feet
We will work with our own hands
We will speak our own minds"*

-Larry and Lee