

Let the Sparks Fly!

Market farming: hard work but the rewards are many

Kristi McCrae and Paul Keays are busy growing Barndance Farm in Lund and raising a family. While it's not economically sustainable yet, they're determined it will be soon.

Tell us about your businesses.

Paul • We're drawn to farming because it's a moral way to make a living. Sometimes I think we are absolutely crazy! It is a lot of work; you don't get rich farming. We have an advantage because we farm on family property that had some infrastructure in place.

Kristi • We grow food for ourselves, and see the difference in our healthy kids. Sharing it with others is a blessing. We are part of a vibrant local food movement; farming is a lifestyle choice.

Paul • We started at the market with just greens; but we kept saying to each other "We have to do something with that greenhouse!" It was overgrown with blackberries and alders. With the help of friends, the greenhouse was resurrected and we began market farming.

Kristi • We don't do it alone; we can't. There are many skills needed, and we have been fortunate to have an amazing trickle of people come into our lives. Our "farm angels" seem to show up at the right time with just the right knowledge.

tire crop of garlic. It's challenging, but we are getting there.

Kristi • Profits are reinvested to build infrastructure; we also invest in others' for things we can't provide for ourselves, such as manure and cover crop seeds. We are organic farmers, so sustainability is in the forefront, as is quality and consistency.

Paul • Sustaining relationships when farming is also challenging. You are working at all times of the day and night, weekends, weekdays ... it is hard to find time to be together, to parent, to live outside of farming.

What are your ideas to cultivate a thriving economy?

Paul • We can thrive if we use our resources wisely, such as build the sustainable forestry industry and develop the aquaculture industry by enforcing closed marine zones to act as nurseries for the fishery.

Kristi • We need to connect knowledge with land. I would like to see land owners allowing young people to farm their property, and support the young agrarian movement. Instead of 'cashing in' on property, pass it on to those who are willing to farm it.

What advice would you share with Powell River of the future?

Paul • Buy local food – buy as much as you can. It's cheaper and better quality than you will get in the stores. Food should never be driven back to the farm



GREEN MACHINES: Kristi McCrae and Paul Keays encourage locals to support farming by buying regionally-grown food and lending land, when possible.

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– Paul Keays

How do you incorporate sustainability principles?

Paul • Economically, our business is not sustainable now, but it will be. We both work off the farm at times. It is a slow process – building infrastructure, and developing our knowledge, as we are self-taught. Some lessons have been hard ones, like when we lost an en-

WHAT IS GROUNDSWELL?

Groundswell, the January 2014 conference at VIU, brought 160 community members together for a day of inspiration, creativity, ideas, and relationships that focused on a positive future for our region.

Participants expressed a strong interest in creating a better understanding of the dynamic links between economic, social, and environmental wellbeing.

They were also eager for the conversations that started at Groundswell to make their way into the community, and to see these efforts result in concrete actions. This series is part of that effort.

To learn more: read the full Groundswell conference report: wordpress.viu.ca/ddcc/groundswell-conference/. Please join the conversation on Facebook: facebook.com/ddccPR

after the market. Better yet – grow your own food!

Kristi • Use technology as a tool, don't make it your life. Putting your hands in dirt is more important than what your hands will find on your smart phone. Don't get lost in the virtual world because the real world is so beautiful.

What about Powell River makes you proud?

Paul • We are fortunate to have opportunities to engage in the cultural traditions of the Tla'Amin First Nation; it's special, especially for our children. We also have world class musical opportunities through Kathaumixw, PRISMA, and local musicians.

Kristi • I'm grateful for our multi-generational community, especially in Lund. I'm proud of the efforts parents are making to bring sustainable education to our schools and preschools. I appreciate how supportive Powell River is of small business; that support grows our local economy.



GROUNDSWELL:

inspiring creativity, ideas, and relationships
that advance the wellbeing of our community

Join the Groundswell conference planning group.
Contact alison.taplay@viu for more information.


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