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Featured Farmers: Dan & Elyse Wulfkuhle

WOOD'S MARKET GARDEN, BRANDON

Dan and Elyse Wulfkuhle's experience as Vermont farmers can be measured in *months*, but their passion for organic farming and their newfound community is boundless.

They purchased the iconic Wood's Market Garden in Brandon in January of this year. It had been operated by the much admired Jon and Courtney Satz since 2000 until Jon's untimely passing in 2021. When we visited the Wulfkuhles in August, it was almost like dropping in on the parents of a new baby: We found them proud, enthusiastic, a smidge tired, but none the worse for wear.

Dan and Elyse arrived here from the Olympic Peninsula in Washington. For many years, Elyse worked for the Quinault Indian Nation on water quality issues while Dan cut his teeth at other farms. Once they had children-Clara and Theo-the dream of owning a farm emerged and the search began in earnest. It took more than five years of looking high and low in both Washington and Vermont, but the Wulfkuhles eventually found their home.

"We're happy to be a part of this awesome farming community," says Dan.

Significant life changes are inherently challenging, but Dan and Elyse attribute the ease of transitioning to a new state and a new venture to their dozen or so employees. **(cont.)**

Wulfkuhle (cont.)

"We have a pretty big crew that is really outstanding, that we can't speak highly enough of," Dan shares. "We're really lucky."

Dan and Elyse welcome all the help they can get in their complex farming operation. Wood's Market Garden sits upon 160 acres of spring-fed land. They grow a wide variety of vegetables, berries, herbs, flowers, and hanging plants. At the time of our visit, summer crops are in full swing, with sweet corn, watermelon, peppers, eggplants, and tomatoes in abundance. Dan and his team intend to be picking all day, every day for the next two months.

They sell much of their yield through their CSA and at their farmstand, which features many other local food and garden products, as well. They also sell their vegetables wholesale to nearby restaurants and grocers, including the Middlebury and Rutland Co-ops.

"Hopefully our little farm can be one of many examples of what you can do to push the envelope at this scale."

DAN WULFKUHLE, WOOD'S MARKET GARDEN

Dan and Elyse grow their bountiful crops with soil health, water quality, and climate change top of mind. Although this is their first growing season at Wood's Market Garden, they have a clear sense of what they're doing today and in growing seasons to come.

They plan to rotate their crops regularly to ensure greater soil fertility and higher yields. Planting cover crops, such as winter rye and vetch, in the fall is on the agenda so that soil nutrients remain in place through Vermont's snowy and wet winter. They also pay close attention to the fertilizer they apply, testing each field to determine the appropriate type and amount of nutrients needed.

If you read our *Featured Farmer* series regularly, you know many of our members, especially our conventional dairy farmers, engage in no-till practices. This looks a little different for the Wulfkuhles because they do not use herbicides to control their weeds.

"We pick our tools and implements quite wisely."

DAN WULFKUHLE, WOOD'S MARKET GARDEN

"We're very cognizant of our tillage, but as organic vegetable farmers, it's a tillage-intensive type of farming," shares Dan. "We try to reduce it as much as possible. We pick our tools and implements quite wisely."

What does that look like?

"We're intentional about the timing of our tillage," Dan explains. "We'll do it right before it's necessary so we don't have to do it over and over again."

He adds, "We primarily use a disc harrow which is a shallow tillage tool that disturbs the soil less. And we avoid using a rototiller."

On the water quality front, Dan and Elyse use drip irrigation with plasticulture, which helps retain moisture, heats up the soil, and relieves weed pressure. Because this practice does involve plastic, they try to limit it only to crops that truly need it.

In future growing seasons, Dan and Elyse are eager to build more greenhouses to extend the growing season and produce higher yields of food throughout the year. They're particularly interested in doing more wholesale and selling to institutions, such as schools and hospitals, to make organic produce more widely available to people, irrespective of their socioeconomic status.

Overall, Dan and Elyse are proud to create a local source of food, which cuts down on **(cont.)**

Wulfkuhle (cont.)

greenhouse gas emissions from shipping. They strive to grow high-quality varieties adapted to our climatic region with the best flavor.

"We're producing something humans need in a less harmful way," says Elyse.

Dan concurs. "Hopefully, our little farm can be one of many examples of what you can do to push the envelope at this scale."

Featured Farmer: Nick DeGraaf

DeGraaf Dairy, Richmond

For the past year, we've been focusing on creating a supportive environment for the next generation of farmers to thrive in Vermont. These farmers face an exciting future with promising new technologies that are both good for the environment and good for their bottom line.

At the same time, they're concerned about profitability and sustainability as prices fluctuate, input costs rise, the labor market tightens, regulations increase, and climate change results in less predictable weather patterns.

One such farmer is Nick DeGraaf, a 29-year-old second generation operator of DeGraaf Dairy in Richmond. Nick, whose primary responsibilities are feeding the cows and overseeing most crop work, farms alongside his mom Anje, dad Harold, and younger siblings Tristan and Renae. Together, they milk 165 cows while raising 150 youngstock. They're part of the Dairy Farmers of America (DFA) Co-op, but all of their milk goes to Agrimark to make Cabot products.

When we visited Nick on a bright October afternoon, the DeGraafs had just finished chopping all 160 acres of corn. They had their sights on planting cover crops and cutting grass,



Nick and Renae DeGraaf

but a surprise 3.5 inches of rain a few days prior put a wrench in those plans.

"We went from finally having dry fields to having standing water again," Nick says.

This is a scenario he and his family have become accustomed to this year, like many farmers across Vermont. DeGraaf Dairy, which is situated near the Winooski River, was heavily impacted by the flooding in July. They had been waiting with bated breath until harvest time to see the long-term effects on their crops.

They initially believed they lost 30 acres of corn, but it ended up being closer to 40. Their yields per acre were about half of what they'd normally see—10 tons versus 20. In turn, they've bought 1200 tons of corn silage to meet their needs. They were able to purchase 350 tons from a neighbor, and found the rest at a farm ten miles away. For farmers like the DeGraafs who try to grow all of their own feed for their livestock, purchasing silage is a significant, unexpected cost.

The July flooding has implications for next year's crops, as well.

(cont.)

DeGraaf (cont.)

"I'm curious what the weed pressure is going to be like next year with the introduction of what the flood waters brought in," Nick explains. "I've definitely seen some weed pressure that came back after the flooding, especially where the corn was struggling."

Whatever the future may hold in terms of soil health, water quality, and climate, the DeGraafs are preparing by continually experimenting with new practices to help them adapt to a changing world.

For one, they were early adopters of cover cropping a dozen years ago, which has required a lot of trial-and-error when it comes to equipment, species, and crop management.

They used helicopters to plant cover crops with mixed results for a couple of years. They eventually switched to a drill, initially borrowing equipment from UVM Extension and then a neighboring farm. Four years ago, they were able to purchase their own drill thanks to the Capital Equipment Assistance Program (CEAP) through the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets.

As part of this, the DeGraafs have tried double-cropping with rye and triticale. While rye has its drawbacks, it has become their preferred crop.

"It's a nice extra source of feed," says Nick. "We like the feed quality, the digestibility, and some of the extra kick it brings in with the higher sugars than a normal grass would have."

"If you keep your land healthy and productive, it will provide you with the feed you need."

NICK DEGRAAF, DEGRAAF DAIRY

And to better ensure their cover crops can successfully take root before winter sets in, the

DeGraafs have also changed what kind of corn they plant.

"We've shortened our day-length of corn so we can get our cover crop on early enough," explains Nick.

While Nick and his family are very pleased with their cover cropping experience, there are a few practices that require further study. For example, this past spring, they applied manure instead of fertilizer to a few acres of double-cropped triticale. They had hoped this would jumpstart the triticale, but the opposite happened. Instead, they ended up with a lower yield on those acres.

"Don't be afraid to ask others about the challenges and benefits they have found"

NICK DEGRAAF, DEGRAAF DAIRY

They've also tried their hand with strip-tilling, which creates an 8"-wide seed bed while leaving the soil around it undisturbed. This helps to warm up the soil for the seed, while maintaining structures critical for soil health. They may return to this practice at some point, but for now, they're sticking with no-till.

"It's been a learning curve, for sure!" Nick is quick to add. "With mixed results every year. Some years have been good, some years have been questionable. We're just trying to find a way to maximize our work."

As Nick and his family look to the future, there are more environmentally friendly practices they hope to implement.

"Manure injection is the next one on our list," says Nick. "We might buy our own equipment, or our custom operator is interested, as well. From a technological standpoint, everything is there to implement the practice, we just need the equipment."

(cont.)

DeGraaf (cont.)

For Nick and his family, all of this experimentation and aspirations for the future serve a greater purpose.

“If you don’t care for your land, it’s not going to take care of you,” Nick shares. “If you keep your land healthy and productive, it will provide you with the feed you need.”

Nick’s advice to his fellow farmers who are looking to try new things?

“Don’t be afraid to ask others about the challenges and benefits they have found,” he explains. “Nobody’s farmland is the same, and what’s needed to be successful might be totally different. But you can take the advice home and find something that works for you.”



Welcome New Members

Thank you to these farmers, businesses, and individuals for joining the Champlain Valley Farmer Coalition to support our mission!

Boundbrook Farm Capital Tractor, Inc.

Thomas Hall
Terry Moore
Amber Perry



SALEM
FARM SUPPLY



1-800-999-FARM ♦ SALEM FARMSUPPLY.COM



OUR SERVICE SELLS SINCE 1953!



SALEM, NY & CLAVERACK, NY

Update Your Nutrient Management Plan

It may feel far away right now, but it will be time to update NMPs before we know it! Make sure to grab a manure sample this fall and get soil samples for all fields with outdated soil tests (greater than 3 years old). And stay tuned for NMP update sessions at the Middlebury UVM Extensions office this winter!



For a refresher on how to take a manure sample, scan the QR code with your smart device or visit <https://tinyurl.com/yxw6p8hj>.

Don't have an NMP and are interested in learning more about nutrient management? UVM Extension hosts a 6-week nutrient management planning course in January and February. If you are interested in attending the class, let them know at your earliest convenience so they can enroll you and work with you to meet the pre-course requirements.

For assistance sampling, interest in the NMP class, and any other questions, reach out to Abby Augarten at (802) 656-7544 or Anna Elewski at (802) 656-7548.

Free Tire Sidewalls

The Vermont Agency of Agriculture has a new tire-slicer, with a mission to reduce the number of waste tires on the landscape, eliminate the mosquito breeding environment, and provide the sidewalls to Vermont farms. Sidewalls can be used for weighting bunk tarps, chicken coop siding, outdoor steps, and more. The first round of more than 2,000 sidewalls were claimed in less than a week. To be notified of future available sidewalls, please email Drew Watson at andrew.watson@vermont.gov with your name and email.



Farm & Forest Viability Program Water Quality Grants

Grants of up to \$50,000 are available through the Farm & Forest Viability Program to help Vermont farmers invest in water quality-related on-farm infrastructure. Projects eligible for funding must make on-farm capital improvements that have direct, positive impacts on water quality. There will be an information session on Zoom on Monday, January 8 at 3:30 p.m.

Applications are now open; the deadline is January 19.

For more information, scan the QR code with your smart device or visit

<https://tinyurl.com/upvk49vs>.



Annual Calendar of Funding Opportunities

Stay on top of all the latest funding opportunities for agriculture! The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets has a calendar available on their website so you can see all of the programs in the year to come.



Scan the QR code with your smart device or view and bookmark the calendar by visiting:

<https://agriculture.vermont.gov/grants/calendar>

Join Our Monthly Board Meetings

Our Board of Directors meets the first Wednesday of each month at 9:30 a.m., with options to attend in person at UVM Extension in Middlebury or on Zoom. All CVFC members are invited to attend; members of the public may join at 10:00. If you would like to attend these meetings, email info@cvfc-vt.com and we'll send you the link.

Learning Opportunities with UVM Extension

Our friends at UVM Extension's Northwest Crops & Soils Program are hosting several upcoming events and webinars related to soil health, water quality, and climate change!

- Webinar Series: Soil Health Training for Technical Assistance Providers (starts Dec. 5)
- Webinar Series: Managing Neonicotinoids in Row Crops (starts Dec. 12)
- 2024 No-Till and Cover Crop Conference (Feb. 22)
- 2024 Grain Growers Conference (March 20)



To learn more and register for these events, scan the QR code with your smart device or visit

<https://tinyurl.com/mtkxmtpd>.



Thank You!

