

Paul Winograd

May 6, 2009

Blue Moon Community Farm

Kristen Kordet, the owner of Blue Moon Community Farm, has seen her fair share of hens laying eggs. Still, as I interview her on a chilly March afternoon, she stands over the chicken coup with obvious excitement, constantly checking to see if a single egg has been laid. The scope of Kordet's enthusiasm and passion is not limited to her little hens; it resonates throughout her entire approach to maintaining her CSA.

Currently, Blue Moon Community Farm is situated on 10 acres of fertile land in Dunn, a town close to Madison. The farm grows a diverse array of fresh, organic produce. While the farm does offer the standard types of vegetables like the everyday yellow onion and traditional tomatoes, these are just the tip of the iceberg as far as what is offered. A wide variety of special lineages are available, for example, in the seasonal offering of cipollini and heirloom onions. The farm also offers a handful of seasonal livestock, such as heritage turkeys around Thanksgiving time.

As I talk to Kordet and watch how well she functions around the farm, it comes as a surprise to find out that she has not been involved with farming her entire life. Upon graduating college, Kordet was uncertain about her future. She did, however, know one thing: she wanted a “cohesive” life. To her, this meant that she wouldn't work a 9-to-5 job only to come home and actually start her day. She attempted some alternative options, such as working with a non-profit environmental group, but still failed to find this lifestyle that she desired.

It wasn't until her work with a CSA in New York that she identified her true passion for farming, and the possibility that it could provide the fulfillment she wanted. Looking back on her

days in New York, she realizes that in addition to it being an eye opening experience, it was an amazing way to learn to the ropes of farming. From day one, Kordet was driving the tractor, a responsibility that she confesses she would never put on an inexperienced college graduate simply because of the risks of destroying the crops. More importantly, her time in New York influenced how she believed Blue Moon Community Farm should operate. According to Kordet, extensive communication, which was strongly emphasized at the New York CSA, is the single most important characteristic to her CSA. She claims that this communication must be maintained, whether it consists of stopping by to say “hi” or through the weekly newsletter called “The Moonshadow,” because she and the member are “in it together.”

Blue Moon Community Farm started in 2004, when Kordet and a business partner decided to rent farm property and start up a small CSA. In 2006, only two years after starting the farm, Kordet became the sole owner of Blue Moon Community Farm. Today, Blue Moon Community Farm sits on 10 acres of property, 8 of which are actually tilled, and continues to satisfy its members.

During the “intense” part of the season, June through September, Kordet and four other workers, 2 full-time and 2 part-time, are out in the fields by sunrise, harvesting and picking perishable vegetables to wash and put in the cooler. By the late morning, they begin to weed and transplant seedlings from the greenhouse until the early afternoon, which is when the sun is at its strongest and all heat-sensitive activities must be ceased. This is when Kordet and her coworkers till the fields with the tractor or continue to pick out stubborn weeds. The day usually concludes with the harvesting of the less tender vegetables like tomatoes, cucumbers and summer squash.

Kordet's quick rise to success could be attributed to a number of things, such as her understanding of the processes that are utilized to maintain the natural equilibrium that exists

between her crops and Mother Nature. She uses a crop rotation strategy that allows her to protect her crops by utilizing her understanding of the insect life cycle, rather than simply spraying harsh pesticides on the bugs as conventional farmers prefer to do. In order to retard the growth of weeds on long-term plants, Kordet practices the monotonous task of black mulching (but she claims the pain-staking process is worthwhile because it has such a good payoff!). Cover cropping is used to prevent erosion and subsequent water run off. To replenish the contents of the soil, Kordet takes advantage of Mother Nature's natural ability to recycle nutrients. This basic process consists of growing crops, such as rye or peas, in areas that are devoid of nutrients and tilling them back into the ground. The soil then takes up the nutrients and organic compounds released from these broken down crops. All of these procedures exemplify how Kordet is able to work with, not against, nature in a mutualistic relationship that enables Blue Moon Community Farm to continue to make delicious products.

The success of the farm could also be credited to Kordet's high farm IQ and entrepreneurial ideas. About a year and a half ago, Kordet stopped renting farmland and purchased the plot that the farm currently sits on. Now that she is in full control of her property, she can focus on her long-term goals. This season Kordet plans on installing an irrigation system, a worthwhile investment that will reduce the likelihood of being victim of a drought like she was 2006. Additionally, she plans on adding "hoop houses" throughout the fields. This will enable her to have a longer growing season, which equates to more delicious produce for her CSA members. She also continues to experiment with certain livestock. Last season, Kordet raised 3 pigs (which, in her animal loving attitude says were "personable and pleasant!"), and successfully distributed them to members and high-end restaurants such as L'Etouile.

Kordet states that her farming philosophy is to do as much as possible, but only if it can

be done well. So, while Blue Moon Community Farms continues to grow, the valued quality of this CSA will continue to stay strong.