

Hannah Silberman
English 201-08
May 7, 2009
Community Project
Final Draft

Primrose Profile

The primrose flower is a native plant to Wisconsin, and one that stays strong during winter. It is no coincidence then that Mike Noltnerwyss and his wife, Cassie, named their farm Primrose Community Farm. Just like the flower, Mike is a native Wisconsinite. He grew up in Middleton and though his father was involved in large-scale vegetable processing, he first became interested in agriculture while taking an environmental science class in high school. Mike's interest in sustainable agriculture increased as he frequented local farmers markets, and even grew his own small garden, which he declared was a "total failure." Thankfully for Madison, his farming techniques have improved since then. While most people out of college feel lost and unfocused, Mike had already been farming throughout his time at UW-Madison and simply continued his success. He and his wife, Cassie, developed a fantastic, ten-acre, organic family farm, which is now in its fifth season.

And like the primrose flower, Primrose Community Farm stays strong and harvests during the winter. When not traveling to exotic destinations, Mike, Cassie, and their two employees tend to the greenhouse and germ chamber during the winter season. Planning and ordering seeds and equipment are all a part of daily winter life on the farm. During the winter, they grow many green vegetables such as lettuce and spinach, as well as beets, potatoes, garlic, and much more. Once summer hits, however, the four farmers tend to spend about sixty hours per week on the farm, growing delicious vegetables in the hot Wisconsin sun. In the summer, the skilled farmers cultivate delicious fruits and vegetables such as strawberries, butternut squash, and tomatoes.

Producing scrumptious organic vegetables in the summer *and* winter can be difficult, but those involved in Primrose are up to the challenge. “We consider ourselves low-tech,” said Mike, as he lovingly thinned out some seedlings. Primrose will likely remain small scale, and maintain the philosophy that building good soil produces good crops. While Primrose has only recently been certified as organic, the certification process required no significant changes: they had always rotated their crops, utilized a cover crop, conserved water, and used absolutely no chemicals. They are hoping to soon move their farm to a different location, one that is even further away from what Mike calls “corrupt land.”

Mike and Cassie maintain great relationships with their employees who also happen to be their friends. “Our farm is at a place where we’re specialized,” Mike stated, and proceeded to list off the different roles each person plays adding, “We have an awesome situation going.” Typically, Mike and Cassie work in the greenhouse, organizing, sorting and preparing, while the two employees tend to work out in the field doing manual labor. Interested in volunteering and participating in the fun? People who volunteer at least four hours a week will receive a CSA share as a reward. This system, known as worker shares, “opens peoples’ eyes up to what it takes,” as Mike says, and will help you get to know the wonderful people who work at Primrose!

MACSAC is an incredibly important component of Primrose’s existence. By buying a CSA from these great people, you will have priority in all things Primrose and will always receive great quality and variety of vegetables. How is it that they can distribute about 180 CSA boxes and not sacrifice the quality of their product? “Honesty,” says Mike. They make sure that they feel great about every single box that they give and every single vegetable in it. The vegetables they put in their boxes have been harvested the day before to guarantee optimal

freshness. So far, they have made excellent community connections via their CSA members and their friendly farmers market customers, some of whom Cassie knows by name.

Along with a CSA share, Primrose occasionally provides fun recipes to try that include the vegetables in the box. These recipes either come from the MACSAC cookbook, or from a friend who exchanges recipes for shares, which proves especially convenient when their box contains what they dub “less glamorous vegetables,” such as celeriac or parsnips. While these funny-sounding vegetables may not sound appealing, Mike assures that they can be used in interesting ways, and can store very easily. A favorite around Primrose is the sweet potato, due to the fact that it is easy to grow and does not have pests...and it tastes delicious! Primrose grows about sixty different crops and the farmers enjoy being able to “change things up and provide something different all the time.”

Primrose embodies what the green, environmentally friendly culture stands for. As more and more people become aware of what massive food corporations are doing to their workers, animals, and crops, people are flocking towards a healthier, more sustainable lifestyle. While many companies are capitalizing on this trend in suspicious ways (what Cassie refers to as “green-washing”), Primrose remains firm in their beliefs that honestly organic is the way to go. Michael Pollan, author of *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*, believes that the way we eat has the power to change the world. He calls on America to begin appreciating the few farmers that we have, and possibly redefine the term altogether as those who are highly skilled and knowledgeable in agriculture and ecosystems. The farmers involved with Primrose Community Farm embody these ideals and wish to share their love of the land with you.