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June 2010 Grower's Notebook News, Tips, and Advice on Things Organic

MEET CRAFT: Crooked Creek Farms



On Saturday, June 13, C.R.A.F.T. members traveled down the mountain to Old Fort, where we toured Meredith, Casey, and Cash McKissick's Crooked Creek Farms. The focus of the June tour was livestock, and boy did we get a true taste of what it means to raise animals on a farm. In

today's world, people are quite removed from their food. It has been observed in numerous studies that the average meal in the United States travels approximately 1500 miles from field (or factory) to table. In the case of the McKissick's, some of their food travels less than 1500 paces from field to table, and with just a bit more when you count the miles to and from the processing plant where they take their animals for slaughter. Meredith and Casey have pastured chicken, duck, cows, and pigs. They have pieced together bottomland for the vegetable production and 21 acres of pasture on which they hope to expand their livestock production slowly over time. They also grow a diverse selection of vegetables and beautiful flowers that Meredith markets for weddings among other things. She sells bouquets, loose stems, or entire design and wedding services. We were given a full tour of the farm, but with the focus being livestock, we got a nice dose of some real practices on a livestock farm.

The quiet mountain views calmed our mind as we coasted down the 140 hill to the valley where Old Fort sits. As we wound up the mountain farm roads following Crooked Creek to Meredith and Casey's home, we started to smell the season in the warm moist air pouring through the windows. As we arrived at the farm, nostalgic day dreaming was quickly snapped back to the present as one of our first adventures for the farm tour was to watch, (or for a select few-- to help) as Casey and Meredith's neighbor Stanley led us through the very real process of steer castration. Meredith and Casey had set aside the three young steers for Stanley, a local man revered for his knowledge about and experience with animals, and once the men helping him caught each steer, Stanley moved so fast and deliberately that the babies were running off to their mothers within minutes. It seemed to scare them to be caught more than it hurt them to be castrated. By the time we walked across the pasture to where they had escaped to their mothers' sides, the calves seemed happy enough to milk, doze, or just be near their mamas.

While meeting the cows at Crooked Creek, we had the opportunity to catch a



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True Nature Country Fair

true nature
country fair



An event of the Organic Growers

glimpse of the pigs, which according to Paul and Alix (apprentices at Crooked Creek) are somewhat like phantoms, coming and going as they please. The pigs put on quite a show, in fact, especially one young sow, who believed she could bully the 1500 pound bull by nipping at its enormous, boney forehead. The multi-species approach to grazing and animal management was a nice reminder that animals, though raised for their meat, are able to lead natural lives and can enjoy playing, running, eating, or just splashing around in the watering trough. Casey smiled and laughed as he talked about the pigs, saying that all manner of techniques had been tried to keep the pigs corralled, but they refused to remain in a pen, and seemed happier to come and go as they pleased.

In addition to raising pigs and cows for pork and beef, Meredith and Casey also raise chicken and duck on the pasture. The poultry are broilers (raised for meat, not eggs), and typically are about 10 weeks when processed on the farm and sold fresh or frozen. They are started at 2-3 days in a large brooder next to the greenhouse, and then moved onto pasture after about three weeks. From that point, they reside on fresh grass for the rest of their lives and are able to forage for bugs and nutritious legumes.

The tour of Crooked Creek was filled with information about the processing of different meats, the importance of the aging process, and the types of cuts that have the highest profit. Any CRAFT farmer interested in animal production came away with some real information, leaving no secrets about the inner workings of small scale livestock production. Following the tour we headed back up the hill to the house where once again, C.R.A.F.T. members in attendance were nourished with delicious foods and drink. Casey prepared meat from their farm, and others brought potatoes, kale, fresh bread, homegrown salad greens, and the first taste of summer in the ripe, juicy



peaches that left most of the children covered in sweet stickiness. Don't miss the next CRAFT tour:

July 24: Value added processing of Food at Camp Celo Gardens
 Questions? Contact hannah@organicgrowersschool.org



News Bits

News Bits are reader-submitted events, info or letters. Submit your bit to:

enews@organicgrowersschool.org

Don't Forget: Family Farm Tour is THIS WEEKEND!

Its your yearly chance to get a glimpse of your food's birthplace. Over 40 farms open their gates to the public this weekend, June 26-27 for the Family Farm Tour. Buy a button and get a carload into as many farms as you can pack into your day. OGS is a sponsor of this great family event. Don't miss this chance to get in touch with farmers and get closer to your food! Buttons available until Saturday at [area tailgate markets and local businesses](#). You can also "pay at the gate" \$30 gets a button or \$10 just to visit one farm. [Check out the map of participating farms](#).

Small Friends (Quaker) worship group seeks centered, seasoned Resident Friend/Assistant Gardener

in exchange for room and board, 25 hours weekly. SAYMA & FGC affiliated. Rural, north Alabama. Permaculture, herbal medicine, solar home, organic farm, intentional community. Sara Rivkah@otelco.net or 205-429-3088 [begin_of_the_skype_highlighting](#) 205-429-3088 [begin_of_the_skype_highlighting](#) 205-429-3088 [end_of_the_skype_highlighting](#)

School
September 25 & 26, 2010

at the Big Ivy Community
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 Barnardsville, NC

Over 40 classes, plant walks, and interactive learning on topics from gardening to primitive skills. Also enjoy live music and dancing, kids program, trade show, silent auction, and MORE.

Visit [our website](#) for details

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Farmer's Corner: Ask Tom



Hi --
 I have been admiring and dreaming of taking courses at the Organic Growers School. What I am really

looking for is a small farm, or acres of land. I have contacted realtors in different counties but no luck..... I thought maybe you can be of some help or offer guidance. I want to be an organic farmer.

-- Maria

Maria --

Your question is common among aspiring farmers in our area. Around Asheville the land prices are so high that it's hard to find something affordable within a reasonable distance of town. Each land search is unique but here are some thoughts that might help direct your search.

Refine the dream – The classic image is to own and work on 100 acres or so near an interesting town like Asheville with a ready market for your crop. That dream is increasingly difficult to achieve, so some fine tuning might make the dream more attainable. The OGS Spring School and fall Fair are great places to check out alternative

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The Western North Carolina Renewable Energy Initiative and Appalachian State University would like to announce our renewable energy workshop series for the summer and fall of 2010, with a variety of courses on energy technologies such as Photovoltaics, Solar Hot Water Heating, Biodiesel, and Microhydro. These are all great educational opportunities with some of the leading individuals in industry and academia. Please see the attached flyer for registration information or visit wind.appstate.edu for more info on the different workshops. Contact Amy Sanders at sandersaa@appstate.edu to register. If you know of anyone that may be interested in the workshops, feel free to forward this information on to them.

Gardener's Corner: Ask Ruth



*Hi Ruth,
My problem is weeds!!! Crabgrass is taking over. I have tried not to spray Roundup for the past three years, but now I have more weeds and crabgrass than plants. I try to use the weed eater but still can't keep up. I work full time so my time in the garden is limited. Right now the weeds are winning and I'm not enjoying my garden. I would like to know how bad is Roundup in the environment and for me. Is there anything else I can do?
Ready to move to an apartment!*

Denise

Dear Denise,

Please don't feel discouraged, and don't give up your patch of ground yet. There are many things you can do to reduce your weeding time, and increase your fun factor. I will assume for the sake of this discussion that we are talking about a vegetable garden. First we'll talk about some alternatives, and then we'll touch on Roundup.

Weeds are a fact of life when it comes to gardening, and an ever-present challenge to most gardeners. **Here are a few techniques** that might lighten your weeding load.

Place your garden close to your house, so you visit it on a regular basis. Out of sight, out of mind...and suddenly weeds have bullied their way into every possible place & it's downright scary to even *look* at your garden.

Reduce the size of your garden to a size that is manageable. It is better to have a small garden that is satisfying, even just in pots, than to have an out-of-control garden putting you in a bad mood.

Or...keep your garden the same size, but plant only ¼ of your space, and manage ¾ of your garden differently. Bare ground invites weeds, so any bare ground should be either planted or mulched. Nature *will* fill in the bare space (probably with weeds) if you don't. *First remove existing weeds*; then plant a thick **cover crop** over ¾ of your garden. This will improve soil structure AND crowd out weeds. Rotate to a new quarter each season. Add space back in, one quarter at a time, as you are ready for a larger garden. Alternatively, instead of a cover crop, **apply mulch** to ¾ of the garden ~ wheat straw, leaves, cardboard, newspaper ... anything to cover the ground. Mulching is one of the *best* labor-saving garden devices, and it also retains moisture in the ground.

Same as above but after weeding, incorporate any soil amendments, and cover the area with heavy-duty **landscape fabric**. Pin it down with sod staples. Determine a garden layout that includes the foods you like to grow, factoring in some versatility to allow for crop rotation. Draw your plan on the landscape fabric, and then cut "x" shapes through the cloth big enough to accommodate planting. After planting, you can mulch with straw, if you don't want to see the fabric. FYI: Landscape fabric is a petroleum-based product, so this approach does have environmental ramifications.

approaches to farming. So is the Farm Tour coming up this weekend ([Click here for details.](#))

Inherit land or use family land – If you are in line to inherit land some day, make clear to the current owners or operators that you want to farm. Great Aunt Millie may be thrilled to hear that you are interested in helping manage her place. More information on farm transition can be found through the North Carolina Farm Transition Network (www.ncftn.org)

Lease land – Compared to mortgage payments land lease prices are very low. Many acres of fertile land close to Asheville are underused or idle. County GIS maps sometimes allow us to overlay property ownership with soils maps. One of our largest organic growers found his land by sending post cards to everyone owning the soil type that he wanted within a few miles of his house. He found land to lease and has farmed it for over 20 years.

Buy less land – Out west, rain is so limited that hundreds of acres are needed to graze livestock but in WNC rainfall is more frequent and we can often get by with less. The amount of land needed varies with the crop as well. Managing three bays of greenhouse tomatoes (one tenth of an acre) is generally considered a full-time job and could gross enough for a reasonable living for one farmer. Livestock will require more acres. Early in our farm career we grossed \$25,000 on one third of an acre. We own ten acres but intensively use about an acre. Deciding on your crop will help decide how many acres you really need. Market farming often happens on 5 acres or less of actively used farmland.

Do I really want to farm? – Before anyone invests in land they should spend time working on a farm. It is hard work by anyone's standards and a fair amount of stubbornness is needed in my view. Many successful growers started working on others farms, both learning and refining the dream. Are sheep still cute at midnight in February when you can't find an escapee? Are tomatoes still beautiful when late blight arrives? There are many easier ways to make a living in a rural area. Farming is a great life but it's not for everyone. Check the OGS apprentice link as one place to find a farm to work on.

Keep your day job – Nearly all farm families have some source of off-farm

Take good care of the fabric and it should last for numerous seasons, possibly decades.

Weed following a good rain. Weeds are way easier to remove when the ground is moist. Alternatively, deeply moisten the ground a few hours prior to weeding.

Loosen the soil with a garden fork prior to pulling the weeds ~ and your job will go even faster.

I am still learning this one the hard way (I work full time too!)...**weed early.** It is easy to eradicate baby weeds. It's a major workout when you need a chainsaw to cut down the overhead-sized lambs quarters or ragweed.

Don't let any of the weeds go to seed, and you will have less weed pressure *next* year.

Plant Jon Jevons /French Intensive style. Stagger your plants in a zig-zag. As the plant grows, very little bare ground will remain. Your garden plants will shade out the weeds, and you will be maximizing your available planting area.



My favorite **garden-scale weeding tools** are: a sharpened hoe, a tool called a Groundhog (pictured at left: a handheld mattock with a cultivator on one end and a transplanter on the other end), a garden fork, and my hands. You mentioned using a weedeater...weedeaters will keep

perennials weeds beat back, but you will have to actually remove the weeds if you don't want them to return the following year. Weedeaters can knock down the weeds until you have time to get to them, however generally when you cut the tops off, the roots just get tougher to pull. Weedeaters can keep the areas surrounding your garden cut low enough to allow for good air circulation, and they're perfect for small-scale removal of cover crops.

Crabgrass is relatively easy to remove. Try working on small sections at a time & follow with mulch before moving on. According to folklore, crabgrass germinates when the forsythia are blooming. Start keeping a sharp eye out for crabgrass after the forsythia blooms have faded, and nip it in the bud while it is easy to pull out. You can also try Corn Gluten as a natural pre-emergent that will also fertilize your soil. It must be applied prior to the weeds sprouting.

If your problem is actually **Bermuda grass**...that is one very mean weed. [Check out this link for some advice](#)

Alternatives to Roundup? My friend, Donna Price of The Dirty Hoe Landscaping, uses a product called Burnout. It is OMRI approved, and its active ingredients are citric acid and clove oil. It should be applied when temperatures are at least 73 degrees. Donna always adds a sticker-spreader (from Gardens Alive) to the mix. For regular use, she dilutes Burnout concentrate 3 -1 and applies it to tender weeds as needed. For Poison Ivy, she dilutes the concentrate 2 -1 and applies weekly. The smaller the weed, the more effective is this product. Donna doesn't recommend Burnout for vegetable gardens because it is fairly strong. **Her advice?** Get an oscillating hoe [hula hoe, stirrup hoe].

RoundUp...When I undertook writing this article, I thought finding straightforward concise information about Roundup would be easy. Google mostly brought up 50-200 page research papers on the subject, and Monsanto's (the product's manufacturer) website is massive. Much of the research has been done specifically on glyphosate, the active ingredient in Roundup, and EPA safety levels for RoundUp are based on tests using glyphosate, not the actual RoundUp formulation. While glyphosate is considered to be one of the less toxic herbicides; research has shown that glyphosate and some of Roundup's "inert" ingredients are troubling, to say the least.

Factoid: Glyphosate is the most used herbicide in the U.S.A. In the U.S., 5-8 million pounds are used every year on lawns and yards, and 85-90 million pounds are used annually in U.S. agriculture.

According to Scientific American EarthTalk, "conventional herbicides such as Monsanto's RoundUp will take weeds down in a jiffy, but the negative effects on people, animals, and the environment may be profound and long lasting. Independent studies of RoundUp have implicated it's primary ingredient, glyphosate, as well as some of its "inert" ingredients, in liver damage, reproductive disorders, and Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma, as well as in cardiovascular, gastrointestinal, nerve and respiratory damage..California's department of Pesticide regulation reports that, year after year, RoundUp is the number one cause of pesticide/herbicide-induced

income to help make ends meet financially. Early on, both Karen and I held full-time city jobs and farmed full time too. We still work off the farm a few hours a week but those full-time jobs helped us pay off the farm early. They also allowed us to buy equipment without a great deal of debt. When a hail storm took out our lettuce that was due to be harvested in 20 minutes, the day job was a big help while we recovered financially.

Find your spot somewhere else –

When we moved here twenty plus years ago downtown Asheville was mostly boarded up and dying. Ten acres with a house, barn and outbuildings 20 minutes from city hall was less than \$100,000. Maybe Old Fort will be like Asheville in 20 years. Maybe Newport or Erwin?

I hope this helps.
Good luck with your search.

-- Tom

Tom Elmore is co-owner of Thatchmore Farms in Leicester, NC. He grows certified organic vegetables and landscape plants with his wife Karen and daughter, Liz. Find Thatchmore Farm at the North Asheville and West Asheville Tailgate Markets.

Commercial Farmers: Got a question for Tom? Email it to enews@organicgrowersschool.org

illness and injury around that state. RoundUp is also blamed for poisoning groundwater across the U.S. and beyond, as well as contributing to a 70% decrease in amphibian biodiversity and a 90% decrease in tadpole numbers in regions where it is used heavily."

Eve Davis, former president of Slow Food Asheville, **responds intuitively** and emphatically to the question of Roundup. "If it makes things curl and shrivel up like that (she demonstrates), it can't be good! Make sure you tell pregnant women NEVER to use it!" Eve's intuition is actually backed up by recent research on Roundup. "In the new study, scientists found that Roundup's inert ingredients amplified the toxic effect on human cells—even at concentrations much more diluted than those used on farms and lawns...One specific inert ingredient, polyethoxylated tallowamine, or POEA, was more deadly to human embryonic, placental and umbilical cord cells *than the herbicide [glyphosate] itself.*" A Canadian study of farming populations in Ontario found that glyphosate exposure nearly doubled the risk of late spontaneous abortions.

According to a recent New York Times article, "researchers found that glyphosate can significantly increase the severity of various plant diseases, impair plant defenses against pathogens, and immobilize soil and plant nutrients, making them unavailable for plant use". No gardener wants to invite these sorts of problems, especially when *improving* soil biology is the very foundation of organic gardening. On a broad scale, many scientists are concerned about the increased volume of herbicide usage on RoundUp-Ready crops, and have documented the development of super-weeds that are resistant to RoundUp as a consequence of the herbicides application on these crops.

All of us have probably fantasized about a magic wand that disappears every single weed without any work. Personally, I think the *risks* of using RoundUp far outweigh the benefits ~ these risks have implications for your own health, your children's health, water quality and the entire environment. We are talking about food that you and your family will be eating. Ultimately, it's up to you to juggle the risks and the benefits of any pesticide, and decide for yourself.

If you decide that the benefits outweigh the risks and choose to use RoundUp, here are a couple of reminders. RoundUp is a broad-spectrum herbicide, so it will kill everything it touches (except RoundUp Ready crops). When you spray be careful that it does not touch the plants you want to preserve. **READ THE LABEL.** Be sure to protect yourself with appropriate clothing, rubber gloves, and other recommended safety procedures as described on the label. There are different RoundUp formulas. Check to see that the formula you will be using has been designated for use on food crops, and how close to harvest it is safe to apply the product. This should be standard procedure when applying any pesticide, whether the product is conventional or organic – as well as determining that the product you are using actually targets the insect or disease causing the problem. If you are interested in doing some further reading, [check out the links list I have supplied at organicgrowersschool.org](#)

Take heart, and I hope this helps!
Ruth

Gardeners: Got a question for Ruth? Email it to us
enews@organicgrowersschool.org

Ruth Gonzalez is a former market farmer, avid gardener, local food advocate, and founder of the Tailgate Market Fan Club where she blogs at www.tailgatemarketfanclub.wordpress.com. In her job at Reems Creek Nursery, Ruth offers advice on all sorts of gardening questions, and benefits daily from the wisdom of local gardeners.
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