

Sarah Paulson and Todd Elliott of Sylvanus Farm, Burkesville, grow certified organic broccoli, kale, Chinese cabbage, arugula, broccoli raab, and several kinds of lettuce in one of several large fields as part of the fall crops. They sell shares, or membership, to customers who are delivered a box of fresh produce weekly from late April through early November. Photo: Joe Imel

GROWING ORGANIC

by **Patrice D. Bucciarelli**

Sarah Paulson and Todd Elliott didn't plan on carving a niche in the nation's fastest growing agricultural trend when they relocated to Kentucky from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. But when they purchased more than 23 acres of good river-bottom land in Burkesville, they decided to take advantage of Todd's skills as a self-taught agriculturist to establish Sylvanus Farm in 1996. Since

then, the farm has grown into a source of organic vegetables, melons, berries, and culinary herbs for a growing number of regular customers in Burkesville, Bowling Green, and Nashville, Tennessee.

"Todd got really involved in horticulture when we moved here. We knew people who were running successful community agriculture programs," says Paulson, who is also an artist, sculptor, and teacher. "So, we put his knowledge of plants, soil management, and crop rotation to go the organic route."

Sylvanus Farm is one of about 30 farms—collectively cultivating 2,000 acres—certified by the State of Kentucky as organic, according to Jake Schmitz, Organic Certification program coordinator for the Kentucky Department of Agriculture. And with organic product sales increasing by 20 percent per year in Kentucky, Schmitz expects the state's certified farm roster to swell.

"Recently, I've had 400 people contact me by phone to find out how to get into organic farming," Schmitz says. "Their

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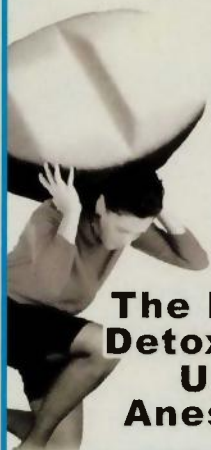
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SHOPPING ORGANICS

Whether craving quality produce or to support local farmers, consumers are embracing organic foods in a big way. In fact, organics accounted for more than 2 percent of supermarket sales nationwide last year according to the Organic Consumers Association.

But the U.S. Department of Agriculture warns that not all organic foods are equal, and with grocers' shelves packed with "organic" and so-called "natural" products, distinguishing truly organic foods from imposters can be tricky.

LOOK FOR THE LABEL. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, foods that are at least 95 percent organic may carry the official USDA Organic label. Farmers certified by their state and the USDA are authorized to attach the USDA Organic seal to their produce. For single-ingredient foods such as milk, eggs, vegetables, and produce, the labels on each item or affixed to packaging attest to their organic farm origins. Supermarkets may also lead consumers to organic items by displaying signage incorporating the official USDA Organic label above displays of certified organic products.

READ, READ, READ. But identifying authentically organic multi-ingredient foods such as cereals takes a bit more savvy. USDA regulations allow food product manufacturers to label their multi-ingredient foods as organic so long as a product contains at least 95 percent organic ingredients.

Foods made of entirely organic ingredients may carry the 100% Organic label. Foods composed of at least 95 percent organic ingredients may carry the Organic label. But foods containing at least 70 percent organic ingredients may only list those ingredients predominantly on the package. And foods that are composed of less than 70 percent organics are restricted to listing organic ingredients only in the package's "Nutrition Facts" panel.

"NATURALLY" SPEAKING. The terms "natural" and "organic" are not interchangeable.

Producers who truthfully claim their foods are "natural," "hormone free," or "free range" may catch consumers' eyes with labels touting those attributes. But without the official USDA Organic label, so-called "natural" foods are not organic.

main reasons are that they know there is a demand for organic foods and a desire to reduce toxins in farming."

According to the Organic Consumers Association, a Finland, Minnesota-based, nonprofit that promotes organic food production and consumer education, organic foods represent a \$15 billion industry nationwide, and account for two and one-half percent of total grocery sales nationwide. Two-thirds of organic food consumers are women, who spend between 10 and 12 cents of every food dollar on natural or organic foods, says OCA National Director Ronnie Cummins.

"It's part of a lifestyle trend in the U.S.," says Cummins. "Parents with kids generally get involved first buying items their kids eat a lot of, such as milk, fruit, and peanut butter. For people with no children, the reasons are usually health, taste, environmental sustainability,

and ethical issues such as fair prices for farmers and humane treatment of farm animals."

Farmer Roger Smith believes most people come around to organic foods because they want to avoid long-term health risks.

"It's all about health," says Smith, who has been producing organic seeds at his Organic Ridge Farm in Bracken County since 1975. "If you consider all the chemicals going into a child's or an adult's system for years, there must be some effects. People are becoming more and more aware that those effects may be harmful."

Making Kentucky's list of certified organic requires that farmers meet criteria mandated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and administered by the Kentucky Department of Agriculture. Certification-seeking farmers must

complete an application claiming that they use no chemical pesticides or fertilizers in their operations, and that their farms are designed to include “buffer zones” and other operational criteria. After that, they must prove those claims are true when Kentucky Department of Agriculture inspectors examine the site.

“We look at the entire operation,” says Schmitz, “every field—all the animals. We look for buffer zones between organic fields and other nonorganic farms, as well as between the fields and road easements to make sure pesticides and other chemicals used by nonorganic farmers or state road crews can’t blow onto or otherwise find their ways onto organic fields.”

Inspectors also examine farm equipment and implements, seeds, and storage areas—even livestock “first aid” cabinets—to confirm that all certified-organic portions of the farming operation are free of chemicals and other unauthorized inorganic substances. Farmers must keep accurate records documenting appropriate use.

Once farms meet certification criteria,

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Todd Elliott empties peppers into the back of his pickup truck that is already loaded with corn, which will be turned into commel to sell to their customers for cattle feed. Photo: Joe Imel

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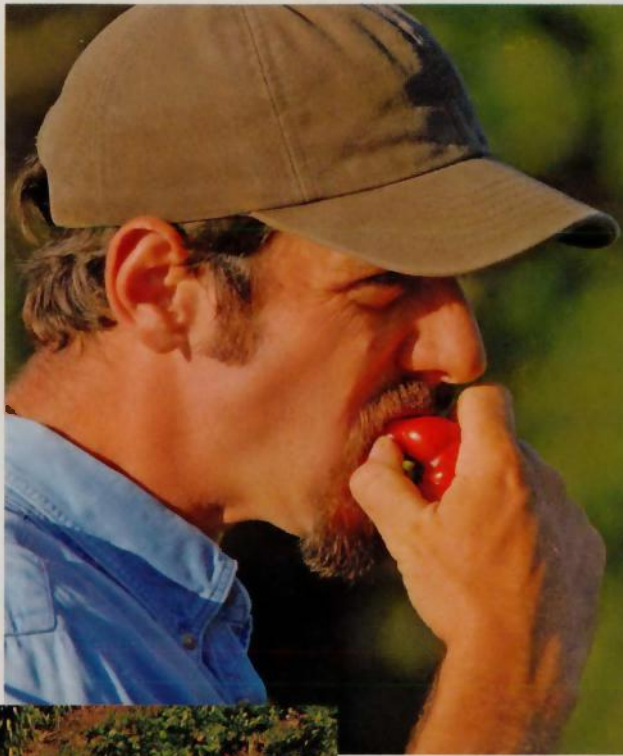
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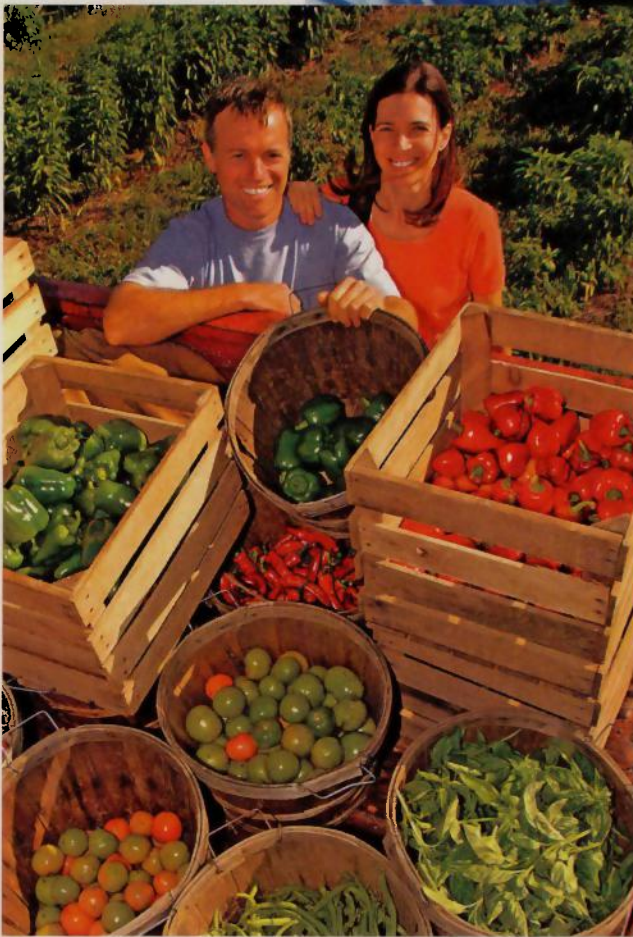
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Todd Elliott of Sylvanus Farm munches on a sweet bell pepper as he takes a break from gathering several different kinds of certified organic peppers for their customers. Photo: Joe Imel



David Wagoner and Arwen Donahue of Three Springs Farm in Carlisle with a truck-load of freshly picked certified organic fall vegetables. Photo: Jeff Rogers



ers and chemical farmers is that organic farmers feed the soil; chemical farmers feed the plant," says Smith, who is a member of KDA's organic certification review committee.

"Feeding the soil" means organic farmers put back into the ground what crops take out by planting cover crops such as rye. Organic pesticides, while approved, are available but expensive. Most organic farmers keep pests at bay by creating eco-systems where plants and welcome insects work together to protect crops from unwanted infestation, such as the friendly ladybug that thrives on the Queen Anne's Lace plant.

"We don't know everything," Smith says,

"but we do know how to do some things such as how to plant the good guys in order to take care of the bad guys."

And they are always learning. Organic farmers keep abreast of advancements in organic farming techniques through

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they may label their produce organic. Staying on the Kentucky Certified Organic list means proving organic farming methods are in continual use by submitting to annual KDA inspections.

"The difference between organic farm-

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Young Americans Bank, www.theyoungamericans.org, owned by the nonprofit Young Americans Education Foundation, issues banking products to customers age 21 and younger, including a credit card with a \$100 limit.

FAMILY AFFAIR FINANCES

Grandparents can be financial mentors. Peggy Houser, co-author of *How to Teach Children About Money*, suggests having grandkids set financial goals, such as an expensive toy, and then show how to save a percentage of their allowance each week to achieve their goal.

As your child grows up, gradually introduce him or her to a variety of investments, such as stocks, bonds, and mutual funds. Make it a family game, with everyone picking a stock for a company with which they are familiar, such as a fast-food chain or a maker of sneakers. Give out play money and track the stocks for three months. You may wish to check out Oneshare.com, through which you can buy a single share of stock. The company also offers OneShare Kids Club designed especially for babies, young children, and teens, which includes projects and guides to investing with membership.

Parents can join with grandparents in encouraging schools to begin or enhance financial literacy programs at younger ages. But experts are divided over whether educational programs alone can influence young people's spending and investing behavior.

What you need to teach your child is not what to do with his or her life, talents, or money, but how to make choices, good decisions outside your supervision. Each family has its own set of values and opportunities, so select the financial lessons you want to share, and help set your child on the path to future financial security.

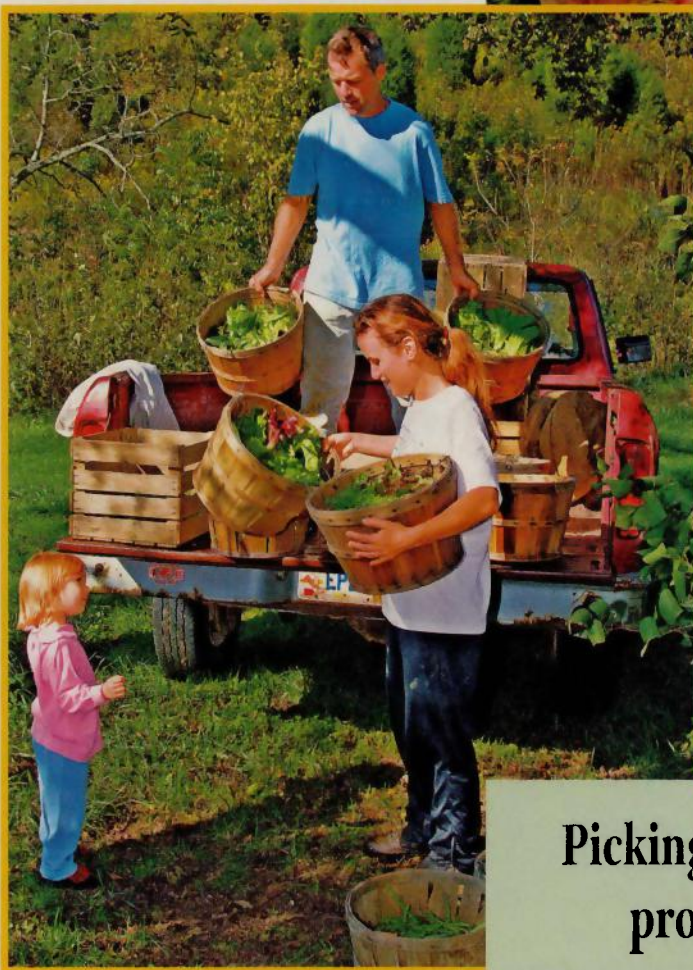


Jim Thompson, a consultant with U.S. Financial Network, will answer questions sent to him at Jim Thompson, *Kentucky Living*, P.O. Box 32170, Louisville, KY 40232.

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academic research findings, specialty publications, experimenting with plants, soil management, and conservation techniques to improve yield and minimize crop threats. Then they share what they learn. Organic farmer David Wagoner of Three Springs Farm in Carlisle also shares his knowledge with apprentices



Daughter Phoebe learns how to farm organically at Three Springs Farm in Carlisle, shown with her father David Wagoner and farm worker Wendy Cegielski. They unload baskets of salad greens and radishes, which they hand wash and spin before delivering to customers. Photos: Jeff Rogers

Picking perfect produce

For tips on how to pick perfect produce, whether it's organic or not, go to www.KentuckyLiving.com and type "picking produce" in the Keyword Search box.



programs, organic farmers' customers purchase monthly shares or annual subscriptions in exchange for seasonal vegetables, fruits, and culinary herbs. The arrangement helps CSA members eat more healthfully

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who work with him, with wife Arwen Donahue, and daughter Phoebe on every aspect of farm operation, including orchard management, beekeeping pasture rotation, and food preservation.

"Organic farmers network with one another constantly, sharing ideas, finding better ways to do things," says Schmitz. "It's amazing to listen to them debating with so-called 'chemical' farmers. You see how well-read and learned they are."

Farmers' efforts are not lost on the people who buy their produce. Through Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)

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and support local farmers at the same time.

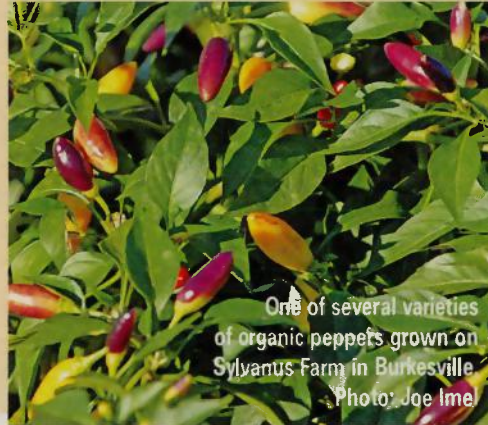
"Our CSA members are a diverse group," says Wagoner, whose farm also maintains a small herd of Nubian dairy goats that produce milk and cheese. "Some are great cooks who want fresh food and herbs. Others are people who just want to support a local farmer. Either way, people experience good eating. They become connected to the food and to the farmers who grow it."

ORGANIC FARMING AND FOODS

The Internet has lots to offer when it comes to learning more about organic farming and ways to choose organic foods. The following Web sites connect consumers with local organic farmers, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs, and even recipes that feature organic products.

KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, www.kyagr.com, helps both farmers and consumers go organic. Just scroll to the "Organic Program" under the "Go to Division or Program" pull-down menu for links to farmers, retailers, and other useful information.

LOCAL HARVEST, www.localharvest.org, has been promoting organic foods and support for local organic farmers since 1998. There is a list of Kentucky organic farms and CSA programs, as well as quick facts and publications aimed at helping consumers make more healthful food choices.



ORGANIC TRADE ASSOCIATION, www.ota.com, offers links to local organic resources nationwide. The site also lists recipes featuring organic products and offers an overview of organic farming and consumerism. Check out the Organics and You section for "10 Good Reasons to Go Organic" and "15 Ways to Celebrate Organic Everyday."

AGRICULTURAL MARKETING SERVICE of the USDA, www.ams.usda.gov/nop, uses text and photos to help consumers easily identify organic foods on supermarket shelves through the National Organic Program. Consumer fact sheets and organic standards and quick facts are offered there as well.

ORGANIC CONSUMERS ASSOCIATION, www.organicconsumers.org, offers consumers links to local organic food producers and retailers, as well as information about food safety issues.

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