



GREEN FIELD FARMS HELPS AMISH FARMERS MEET DEMAND FOR HEALTHY, ORGANIC FOODS

Cooperative helps revitalize Amish farming community through sustainable agriculture

FREDERICKSBURG, Ohio, (June 9, 2008) – Henry “Junior” Wengerd’s office has no walls. His coworkers have four legs and respond to commands spoken in Pennsylvania Dutch. On the cool, misty morning when reporters were invited to his farm during a recent media tour, Wengerd, 42, is farming the way his ancestors did for generations—the natural way, in harmony with nature and without chemicals.

Wengerd, a Wayne County Amish farmer and a member of Green Field Farms, a 100-member Amish cooperative that markets organic eggs, dairy products and seasonal produce, says he loves to farm this way. It not only allows him to provide USDA certified organic products that meet consumer demand for high quality, but it enables him to earn a living on the 155-acre farm that has been in his family since 1964.

“I was the eleventh of twelve children,” Wengerd said. “I always wanted to farm, but could not make a living at it when I had to compete with English farmers who have their large equipment and can do more in a day than I could accomplish in a week.”

Statistics confirm that Wengerd was not the only Amish farmer who faced such a dilemma. Forty years ago, 90 percent of the Amish in central Ohio made a living on the farm. In recent years, the number had dwindled to less than 10 percent.

Green Field Farms helps Amish farm

Green Field Farms is helping to reverse this trend by identifying new markets for Amish farmers’ organic cheeses, brown eggs, fruits, vegetables and maple tree distillate—a drink collected during the boiling process that reduces tree sap to maple syrup. Members of the Fredericksburg-based co-op must be Amish or conservative Mennonites who rely on horse and buggy as their mode of transportation.

For Wengerd, the co-op provided him the opportunity to leave the manufacturing facility where he worked and return to the farm where he grew up to raise organic crops and milk a herd of 38 dairy cows. Wengerd raises almost everything he needs for his cattle on the farm, with much of the milk he produces used to make Green Field Farms’ six varieties of organic cheeses.

Farming is definitely a family affair, with Wengerd joined by his wife and four children, who range in ages from 10 months to 10 years.

“I would discourage anyone from going into farming if the wife doesn’t want to farm,” Wengerd said. “It is typical for the whole family to be in the barn during milking. We feel strongly that farming is a family operation.”

David Raber, 34, returned to the family farm after working on a construction crew for several years. He and his wife and children—who now number six—moved back to the rolling 73-acre produce farm in Fredericksburg in 2000. He is presently converting all of his conventional acreage to organic and relies on Green Field Farms to help market the cabbage, cantaloupe, onions, peppers, potatoes and pumpkins he harvests.

“There are two reasons why farmers fail,” Raber said. “They have a good product and not a good market, or they have a good market and not a good product. Green Field Farms is both.”

Sustaining the land for generations to come

All of Green Field Farms producers are focused on sustainable agriculture, using farming methods that assure the land will be fertile and productive for generations to come. Raber is hopeful that organic farming and Green Field Farms will continue to revitalize the land and the Amish farming community.

According to Raber, Green Field Farms not only helped him find new markets for his products but pointed him to educational seminars where he learned more about organic farming and how to keep the soil healthy so it will defend itself against insects and weeds. He uses cover crops, compost, soft rock phosphate, seaweed and hydrolyzed fish to fertilize and protect the soil. A hand-held refractometer measures sugar levels, showing him the sugar and mineral content of his plants.

Both Wengerd and Raber say they see an interest in organic farming taking root among their children, who like to ride along behind the Belgian horses working the fields and are already mimicking certain organic practices.

“When we were transplanting cabbages from the greenhouse into the fields, I noticed that one of my young sons had placed a plant and soil in a bucket near the house,” Raber said. “One evening, we were burning brush and I overheard my one son ask the other if he thought the fire was organic.”

Growing demand for quality, organic foods

Wayne Wengerd, an Amish leader and Green Field Farms board member, believes the demand for quality organic food products is likely to continue to grow.

“Consumers want foods that are good for them and grown locally by farmers they can trust,” Wayne Wengerd said. “Organic foods will probably become main stream by the time the children on today’s Amish farms become adults.”

Wengerd indicated that consumers can easily identify Green Field Farms cheeses, eggs and other products by their logo, which shows three work horses pulling a plow guided by an Amish

farmer. Each product bears the seal of authenticity that guarantees it was produced by Plain Community farms that use horse and buggy as their main source of transportation.

Green Field Farms products are available in nearly 200 stores and upscale restaurants in Ohio, neighboring states and along the East Coast and Florida, including Whole Foods Markets, Buehler's Food Markets, Super Kmart, Mustard Seed Market & Café, and Riesbeck's Food Markets.

For more information about Green Field Farms and its line of organic products, visit www.gffarms.com or call 330-695-2462.

Central Ohio is home to the largest Amish population in the world.

About Green Field Farms

Based in Fredericksburg, Ohio, Green Field Farms is a 100 percent Amish-owned, not-for-profit cooperative comprised of farmers in numerous Ohio counties dedicated to providing safe and wholesome organic food products using traditional farming methods. The co-op includes a 20-member board that oversees the development of profitable markets for member products and building of a local economy that supports and enables the plain community to thrive.

Green Field Farms producers are dedicated to providing the highest quality food products for its customers. Co-op membership is open to all Amish and Conservative Mennonite farmers who use horse and buggy as their mode of transportation and maintain minimum production volumes and product quality standards.

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