

## **A Day at Amy's Farm**

In 2006 Randy Bakendam had a crisis. Like many post-World War II Dutch settlers, he and his family ran a 2,000 head dairy farm in Ontario Valley. The farm had survived bankruptcy and the move to concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) but this was different. A gang drive-by shooting in nearby Pomona had killed a local boy, and it forced Randy to “ask some hard questions” about his career, his values and his life. What was he doing to help the planet? What was he contributing to end the spiral of fear and death that was overtaking so many communities? As the result of his soul searching, he transformed his acreage from a typical inhumane factory farm to what he calls “Community Supported Agriculture”, a new vision of urban farming to save the community and replenish the earth. Today on Amy's Farm, one finds not only sustainable growing practices (down to the well-water that irrigates the land), but also such pay-it-forward programs as the giving of 25% of the produce to the local community to feed the hungry, hands-on tours to schools and groups to create the next generation of family farmers, and a focus on youth – especially at-risk youth – on the discipline and rewards of growing food.

### **Enter Waldorf of OC**

Miss Christiani's third grade class went on a tour of Amy's Farm on Wednesday, September 17<sup>th</sup>. The children had no identifying garments or signs, but Randy could detect they were Waldorf students from the way they lined up, the respectful way they approached the farm and the animals, and their general demeanor. He had spent some time at a biodynamic farm in Viroqua, Wisconsin that was associated with a Waldorf school there. OC was the first Waldorf School to visit his farm, and the children, in the midst of an intensive unit on farming, brought out Randy's hope for the future.

The children were first introduced to the daily routine of the farm, and then they met most of its citizens, including a great-grandmother heifer who ate a carrot in front of them. Then they had an opportunity to feed the goats, geese, chickens, hogs and horses and, finally, milk the cows. In each task, they saw how content, respected and purposeful each animal was in doing what they are supposed to do, from the cats who keep the fields from getting overrun by rodents to the hogs who sit in the mud on a hot day. Even the flies that joined them for lunch seemed happy and carefree.

After what was for many children the first taste of what generations of people before them knew as daily living, Randy told his young visitors that not everyone likes the hard life of farming, but if you enjoyed it today, “try growing something and if you like that you can go to college to become a farmer.”

“We need an army of young farmers,” he told them, and added to the adults later “Small-scale organic farming is the future of our planet, and it's just beginning. But where is a child challenged to be a farmer?”

### **The Evolution of a Dream**

“I was 55 before I planted my first seed,” he added, revealing how hard it was to completely change his life's work. Today his farm grows everything from kung pao peppers and purple eggplant to varieties of lettuce and apples you won't find even at Whole Foods. And it's all organic. Or perhaps a better term would be “Organic Plus”, since, as Randy points out “The USDA allows you five pages of chemicals in order to be certified organic. We don't use any chemicals, just sun, water, dirt and our hands.”

Randy spoke as a man deeply content with who he is and what he is doing – the opposite of the cliché of the desperately overworked and underpaid farmer. His comfort at doing the work that makes his soul

sing makes up for the empty swimming pool, the inability to venture too far off the farm to spread his message, and the, yes, long and hard hours required of any farmer. His latest obsession is mulch – and typically he's evangelizing its benefits as he learns. “The large number of ornamental trees grown creates a rich supply of mulch that can be used to make the most tedious and time-consuming part of farming – weeding – much easier.”

As the children prepared to leave, the adults got some respite from the heat by picking out some fresh fruits and vegetables in Amy's small refrigerated produce store. The sign on the wall proclaimed “Amy's Farm operates from the crucial principal of Oikonomos – our individual households as part of the larger household of the earth itself. Our prayer is that every economic transaction reflects the deepest yearnings and motivations of all involved.”

A suitable motto for Waldorf as well.