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Down to Earth: Reports from the field

Innovative Small Farmers' Outreach Program (ISFOP): East Central Region

Farmer Profile: Carl Saunders, Yellow Dog Farm

By Janet Hurst

Lincoln University Cooperative Extension (LUCE) Farm Outreach Worker (FOW) Janet Hurst first met Carl Saunders at the Warren County Extension Office. The meeting was facilitated by the county program director, Shelley Bush-Rowe. At that time, now three years ago, they discussed the first session of the Grow Your Farm classes in Warren County. Carl was brought into the picture as "The only farmer I know who has a business plan," according to Ms. Rowe. Little did they know what a fruitful relationship would begin that day and that Carl Saunders would become an invaluable resource to the program.

Carl Saunders pictured above at the Great Plains Growers Conference in St. Joseph, Missouri

Carl and his wife, Robin, purchased land in Warren County a number of years ago. Carl's business background set him in good standing to enter farming with a professional and well-planned approach. He wrote the business plan and has been utilizing the fluid document since the beginning. He says, "Our business plan is a vital part of our success. It has provided a road-map and when we refer back to it, we see if we are on track—making decisions that are in keeping with the overall plan. It is easy to get sidetracked, and the plan helps us to remain focused."

Photo courtesy of Yellow Dog Farm

Carl and Robin farm about three acres in a traditional outdoor setting. Asparagus, tomatoes, and other vegetables are grown as spring and summer crops. The crowning jewel of the farm is a series of three high tunnels which allow for the production of early and late season crops. The Saunders are known for their salad greens and a more recent product—microgreens, a shoot of a standard salad plant. The microgreens are a great companion product to offer alongside the salad greens. Chefs love them. The miniature leaves add a layer of complexity and flavor when added to the salad mix. Zesty bites of radish, mustard and arugula provide an unexpected burst of flavor. The greens pack quite a punch for their small size.

Robin's talents are showcased in many areas. "We work together as a team," Carl states. Picking, cutting and washing of vegetables is down to a science, and each task is efficiently managed. Robin also makes their Focaccia bread, a flat Italian bread typically seasoned with herbs and olive oil, for each and every market with Carl as the front man. He offers some to each person to enjoy the enticing fragrance of the bread. Many a loaf has been sold on the scent alone! His winning sales techniques, such as calling his regular customers by name, providing a high-quality product on a consistent basis, and offering old fashioned customer service, keep loyal customers coming back to the Yellow Dog Farm booth. And about that Yellow Dog? "Yes, there is a real yellow dog who serves as the official greeter at the farm site."

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Inside this issue:

Growing Microgreens

By Joyce Rainwater

As the local foods movement is growing, new opportunities are opening up for small producers to expand. One relatively new item of interest is microgreens. Microgreens are young, tender greens that are used to enhance the color, texture, or flavor of salads, or as a garnish for main dishes. Microgreens can have surprisingly strong and intense flavors for their small size. Usually these greens are harvested at around two inches in height, but that is dependent on the plant variety. These miniature greens differ from spouts; only the top of the plant is harvested and the roots are not used.

Growing microgreens can be relatively easy, because of the short growth time involved in production—one-to-three weeks for most varieties. There are few pest and disease problems. Microgreens can be grown using soil or soilless media.

To grow: Use a tray filled with a growing media such as peat, vermiculite, and perlite, about 1-2 inches deep. Spread seed over the top and cover with a light layer of soil. (Some growers do not cover the seeds with soil media; it depends on the type of watering system a grower plans to use.) Mist the seeds gently to keep them moist, but not over wet. To grow in soilless media, different items can be used, including burlap materials, paper towels, or even Sure Grow pads, which are manufactured for this specific purpose. On this media, the seeds are spread and then kept moist as well. Each medium is a little different, and growers will need to do more research to determine which type best serves their purpose.

Lettuce varieties are not usually used because they are too delicate. Cabbage,

Burpee's Microgreens pre packaged mix shown above. This mix includes chard, beets, peas and more. (Photo courtesy of Burpee's Seed Catalog)

beet, kale, kohlrabi, mustard, radish, swiss chard, and amaranth varieties are good species choices. Other varieties have been used successfully as microgreens, including carrot, broccoli, beet, lemongrass, popcorn, basil and onion. This list is continually expanding as more growers try new species. A variety of seeds can be planted in the same tray if they have similar germination rates. Many seed companies are knowledgeable about which types of crops grow best as microgreens and may even sell a microgreen mix. The mix may be more expensive, but it is a good way to start and learn more.

Growing microgreens can take anywhere from seven days to several weeks, depending on the speed of germination and the growth rate. Once the microgreens reach the first true leaf stage, usually around two inches tall, they are ready for harvest.

To harvest: Hold the tray vertically and use clean scissors to cut the stems above the soil. This is the most time-consuming part of microgreen production. Because of the short growing time, there is a quick return on the small farmers' investment in seed, labor and other materials. Microgreens sell for a very high price in upscale grocery stores, and restaurant chefs are also showing interest. Chefs will often use these microgreens as garnish to enhance the dining experience.

According to a local grower, Carl Saunders, small farmers looking into growing microgreens first do their research and start out small. He recommends starting with a budget and knowing first where you are going to market your product because microgreens have a short growth cycle. He also says he particularly likes the book; *Microgreens: A Guide to Growing Nutrient-Packed Greens* by Eric Franks and Jasmine Richardson, published by Gibbs Smith in 2009.

If selling at a farmers' market, it is a good idea to offer samples and have recipes available. This will encourage customers to try a new item such as microgreens. Find a local chef or store that is interested in buying locally-grown microgreens and then discuss what price they are willing to pay for the product. There may also be a certain crop or mix that they would prefer be grown. Be sure to be knowledgeable about the product. Do your homework before meeting with a chef or a store manager. Figure your seed costs, other materials, labor and processing to be sure that this is going to be a profitable venture. Also, be sure not to over-commit yourself—start small and expand slowly.

Growing Salad Greens (Photo courtesy of Yellow Dog Farm)

Farmer Profile: Carl Saunders, Yellow Dog Farm *(cont'd from page 1)*

Carl is quick to share his growing techniques, and assist new farmers with good advice and cautionary tales of the true nature of farming. He jokingly states, "I am training my competition!" as he presents information on microgreen production to a waiting group of entrepreneurial growers. It is Carl's willingness to share that makes him truly an outstanding farmer in his field. There is nothing like learning from someone who actually does the work each day and knows firsthand the ups and downs of food production.

Carl sells at the Wright City Farmers' Market and through area CSA's. The Saunders provide produce to several area chefs as well. Known for quality, Yellow Dog Farm has become a leading producer in Warren and surrounding counties.

THE IPM CORNER

Community Gardens: Policy, Planning and Management

By Dr. Jaime Piñero: LUCE Integrated Pest Management State Extension Specialist

As many of us know, community gardens promote healthy communities and provide food security for many low-income people. In an urban setting, community gardens are part of the open space network. The gardens, and those who participate in community gardening, contribute to the preservation of open space, provide access to it and create uses for the space. Community gardens strengthen community bonds, provide food and create recreational and healing opportunities for a community. They can also promote environmental awareness and provide community education.

Gary Hollis of Hope Build in St. Louis community garden

Public community garden programs are generally administered by the community development or parks department. Other gardening programs involve public and private schools and other institutions. Some areas are changing policies to encourage residents to plant vegetables and other edible foods and allow a limited number of farm animals, such as chickens, in the city. An example of policies and procedures can be found in the Community Gardens Handbook of the City of Eugene, Oregon. You can access it at http://www.eugene-or.gov. Then, type "community gardens handbook" in the search box to get a PDF version of the handbook.

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) can also be practiced in community gardens. As an example, community gardens in the City of Eugene, Oregon, are designated within the IPM policy of the Parks and Open Space Division as "no pesticide zones." No registered pesticides can be used within a community garden or within 25 feet of the outside perimeter of community garden sites, according to this designation. The goal of the city's Community Gardens Program, with respect to IPM, is to provide space for and facilitate the production of vegetables, flowers or other desirable crops within a manageable and well-maintained area, and to foster the responsible stewardship of shared community garden spaces for a long time. Emphasis is placed first on the prevention of pests. Subsequent, combined management strategies will rely heavily on cultural practices for management of pests and may also include one or more physical (mechanical or manual) strategies. Materials other than registered pesticides may also be used when action items have been reached as elements of an integrated approach. The policy and manual on IPM for the city's Parks and Open Space Division can be found here: http://www.eugene-or.gov. Then, type "IPM policy" in the search box to get a PDF version of the IPM Policy and Operations Manual.

As you will see, IPM is the official policy for pest management in all public areas of the City of Eugene, Oregon, including, but not limited to, prairies and savannas, forests and woodlands, waterways, vacant lands, landscape beds, medians and other right-of-way plantings, community gardens, playgrounds, etc. Under this IPM policy, the Parks and Open Space Division commits to implementing an IPM program that incorporates the **five fundamental principles of IPM (as taken directly from the manual):**

1. **Set action thresholds.** Before taking any pest control action, first set an action threshold, a point at which pest populations or environmental conditions indicate that pest control action may be taken. Sighting a single insect pest does not necessarily mean control is needed. The threshold level is critical to guide future pest control decisions.

2. **Monitor and identify pests.** Perform these tasks accurately, so that appropriate control decisions can be made in conjunction with action thresholds. This monitoring and identification reduces the possibility of implementing control methods when they are not really needed or that the wrong kind of method will be used.

3. **Prevent.** As a first line of pest control, work to manage the garden to prevent pests from becoming a threat. For example, using mulch in planting beds to suppress weeds, planting desired plants at densities that preclude weeds, selecting pest-resistant varieties, proper site preparation prior to development, and planting pest-free

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Community Action Agency of St. Louis County (CAASTLC) community garden in Spanish Lake, Missouri

About our Program…

ISFOP

If you are a small farmer and need information, please contact an ISFOP Farm Outreach Worker (FOW). FOWs live and work in your community. They can provide information on ways to better manage your resources, reduce expense and increase income. They can also provide information on other programs and resources that may increase your income and the overall quality of life for your family.

You are eligible to participate if:

- ☑ Your family lives on a farm, rural or urban.
- ☑ Farm products or income from the farm are necessary for you to live where you do.
- ☑ Your family provides the management and most of the labor for your farm.
- ☑ Your total annual family income is less than $50,000.

How to Contact East Central Regional ISFOP Farm Outreach Workers:

- **David Price,** Lincoln and St. Charles Counties

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(636) 358-7097

- **Janet Hurst,** Franklin and Warren Counties

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For general information call the LUCE ISFOP office at (573) 681-5312.

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Publications are available upon request. Contact Pamela Donner, Media Center Coordinator at: DonnerPJ@LincolnU.edu

USDA United States Department of Agriculture National Institute of Food and Agriculture

IPM Corner: Community Gardens *(continued from page 3)*

rootstock are examples of prevention techniques. These control methods can be very effective and present little to no risk for people or the environment. Prevention may also include managing weeds at small population densities before the weed becomes established, thereby reducing the input of resources. Catching a weed population while it is small is a way of preventing a larger problem in the future. For example, a single purple loosestrife plant along the river can produce over a million seeds. For this reason, controlling invasive plants at low densities may be identified as a prevention tool. Trap crops can also be effective in managing insect pests of vegetables, as discussed in a previous issue of this newsletter.

Did you know that the University of Missouri Extension published a Community Garden Toolkit? This is an excellent resource for gardeners, garden organizers, Extension staff, and other agency professionals who want to start a new community garden, enhance an existing garden, or help community members start and manage their own community garden.

http://extension.missouri.edu/explorepdf/miscpubs/mp0906.pdf

4. **Control, only if needed!** Once monitoring, identification, and action thresholds indicate that pest control is desired (or even better, required), and preventive methods are no longer effective or available, the next step is to evaluate the proper control method, both for effectiveness and risk. Effective, low-risk pest controls are chosen first, including mechanical controls, such as mowing, weeding or trapping. If past experience, further monitoring, identification, and/or action thresholds indicate that low risk controls may not be effective, alternate pest control methods may be employed, such as biological controls or targeted spraying of pesticides. Broadcast spraying of non-specific pesticides is usually a last resort. Chemical control methods will utilize the least toxic and most effective chemicals and adjuvants available.

5. **Evaluate the effects and efficacy of control treatments**. After a control method is implemented, the efficacy of the treatment is evaluated. Based on this evaluation, methods will be modified in an effort to continually improve outcomes and refine best management practices (BMPs).

SAVE THE DATE!

HIGH TUNNEL 101 will be hosted by the Warren County Extension Office. The workshop series will be a collaborative effort between the University of Missouri and Lincoln University Cooperative Extension. The first of a series of five sessions is set for Thursday, September 27, 2012, from 6 p.m. - 9 p.m. and will run for five consecutive weeks (10/4, 10/11, 10/18 and 10/25). University experts, farmers, and those in the high tunnel industry will speak on topics of basic construction and maintenance, growing in a high tunnel, managing the environment, and more. The class will conclude with a twilight tour of a working tunnel. The cost is $50.00 per farm. Contact the Warren County Extension Office for more information or to sign up (636) 456-3444.