

Girard Farm

Mission

To provide high quality organic produce to customers that live in our area. To create a financially successful, community based, small business that creates value here, in town.

Products

Girard Farm grows over 40 different kinds of vegetables. Some of the most popular are heirloom tomatoes, salad greens, lettuce heads, carrots, onions, potatoes, zucchini and cucumbers. We also produce flowers, herbs, and eggs.

The farm is establishing perennial crops such as asparagus, blueberries, raspberries, rhubarb and kiwi berries.

Market

Girard Farm uses three main avenues for marketing its produce: Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Programs, wholesale accounts with local retailers, and farmer's markets.

Our main CSA programs are 20-week vegetable shares. Customers sign-up and purchase their CSA share in the winter/spring. Beginning in June, CSA members take home a selection of vegetables each week until the final week of the program in October. We offer *half* (6 weekly items) and *whole* shares (12 items), customers choose their own items each week from what is seasonally available.

We offer add-on shares for eggs, flowers, and the fall season. We partner with Three Charm Farm in Alfred to offer cheese and yogurt shares.

The goal of our marketing strategy is to develop relationships directly with the customers. We also work with small retailers like the Maine Homestead Country Store and New Morning Health Food Store. These relationships with small retailers and directly with customers benefit our business in two ways: greater loyalty is created when customer relations are shared directly with a local farm, the farm captures a greater percentage of the retail price of produce compared with large-scale wholesaling or distribution.

We accept SNAP, WIC, and work with the state of Maine Senior Share program to help people access our food.

Farming Methods

Girard Farm uses organic farming principles which focus on soil health. The land at 385 Main Street had never been used for farming and had very shallow topsoil. While this was a disadvantage, we have made progress in building soil fertility. We do not till the soil after establishing our permanent beds. By avoiding tillage we protect the soil structure and organic matter. We amend the soil with compost and use cover crops.

We do not use any chemical fertilizers. We manage pests with crop rotation and floating row covers. We choose not to use any pesticides, even those which are approved for organic farming operations.

We grow high-value, heat-loving crops in our unheated greenhouses. These 30 by 96 foot structures allow us to extend our growing season in the spring and fall so that important crops like tomatoes and cucumbers are available for a longer growing window. We are also able to make salad greens available through most of November and December, and early spring.

The property had an existing 40' well that we use for irrigation in the field.

We use a smaller heated greenhouse at the front of the property to start our seedlings in March.

Laying Hens

We also produce chicken eggs. The flock is currently about 300 hens. During the summer months they live in an "egg-mobile". This is a chicken coop built on a hay wagon frame with roosting space and nest boxes inside. The chickens free range during the day inside a large paddock of mobile fencing. At night they roost in the egg-mobile and we close them in to protect them from wildlife. Each week we move them to a new area of the field. This system distributes the manure over the pasture and fertilizes it. The chickens also have a healthier diet because they always have access to fresh grass and bugs.

Long Term Goals

Our long-term goals include developing more small on-farm enterprises and building a house for the farmer's family.

We are currently establishing blueberries and raspberries which could be marketed through you-pick sales.

We hope to build a house on the property in the future. When building a house with new water and electrical service we will consider incorporating more efficient infrastructure for the farm. We may be years from this project, but we think it may include an "in-law" apartment, small commercial kitchen, and farm store.

We do not currently have plans to add other livestock.