Photos courtesy of Jenna DeRario

ENVIRONMENTAL BENCHMARKING

CASE STUDY: Stick and Stone Farm

Chaw Chang sat down with us recently to discuss how his organic operation, Stick and Stone Farm, in the greater Ithaca area allows our entire community to consume fresh and organic produce every year. With intentional practices, human capital and intervention, he and co-owner spouse, Lucy, grow standard and unique vegetables crops working with all the variability and goodness nature puts forth. Intentional or not, these farmers provide an ecological benefit and land management that often may go unnoticed. Profits are not their only motivation for organic farming; being good environmental stewards and employing safe growing practices serves their family and the consuming public.

This certified-organic farm was founded in 1995 and relocated to its present location between Ithaca and Trumansburg. There are approximately one hundred and twenty acres that make up the total farm, with property both owned and rented, for production purposes. Every year there are about forty acres of vegetables in production. Some tree fruits are being added to the mix. The land that is not cultivated is "resting". These plots are intentionally removed from production in order to manage weeds and to "rebuild" soil fertility, structure and soil health. The rotation of fields, coupled with organic grain cover crops, are considered some of their most important practices that contribute to building soil and weed control. Organic vegetable production requires a great amount of labor to keep weeds under control. Many growers, organic and conventional, use black plastic as one option for weed control. Chaw is trying to move away from using plastic and is incorporating using hay mulch in between

Farm Details

MUNICIPALITY:
Ulysses

FARM SIZE:
114 Acres

PRODUCTS:
Mixed Vegetables

PRACTICES:
Conservation Stewardship Program
Conservation Reserve Program
Cover Crops
Stream Bank Protection
Rainwater Runoff Containment System
Grass Waterways
Field Drainage by Tiles
Field Drainage by Ditches
Field Retention Pond
Mulching
Alley Cropping
Silvopasture
Windbreaks
Double Covering Greenhouse Insulation
Windbreaks at Greenhouse Infrastructure
High-Efficiency Lighting
Fuel Efficient Vehicles
Insulated Buildings
Passive Cooling
Solar Electric

MOST PROUD OF:
Multi Species & Multi-Year Cover Cropping, Delayed Mowing, and Mulching

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plastic, but with mixed results. It is labor intensive and expensive. Even in drought seasons, the crops are watered from two ponds on the property. There are high tunnels and greenhouses on the farm. “High tunnels” are used for growing some of their vegetables under cover, somewhat like a greenhouse, but the plants are usually grown directly in the ground. Chaw said that the high tunnel crops have the best return for the labor involved.

Stick and Stone Farm has applied for and received grants towards solar electric panels and reseeding ditches to control erosion. They plan to build a second fuel storage tank to protect against leaks and fuel escapes. These practices are important to keep private and public waters clean.

The Chang family clan serves the community in many more ways than providing organic produce. Their intentional farming practices and welcoming nature offers opportunities for the public to learn about different farm practices, the challenges farmers face in growing food in a responsible manner, as well as inspiring more people to learn more about how to grow their own food.

This is one of eight case studies created as part of Cornell Cooperative Extension’s 2020 Agricultural Benchmarking Study, funded through a grant by the Park Foundation. For more information or to read more studies visit our website at www.ccetompkins.org/SustainableAg or contact Graham Savio at gs695@cornell.edu

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