

November 3, 2008

re: David Keal shares harvests

Name: David Keal.

Age: 43.

Title: Owner/gardener/farmer.

Company: Field 51 Produce, 1205 S. Buckeye Lane, Goshen.

Online: www.Field51produce.com

Phone: (502) 292-8456.

Education: Bachelor of Science in mass communication, Eastern Kentucky University.

My job is: "I run a 50-share CSA. ... It's 'community supported agriculture' and it is a system that's becoming pretty popular in the U.S. ... It's a way for consumers to be a little more involved with the production of their food. ... It's subscription farming, basically."



By Bill Luster, The Courier-Journal

David Keal fed two of his sheep on the farm he shares with Margaret Shea in Goshen. He runs Field 51 Produce, a "community supported agriculture" farm. Besides lamb, he and Shea sell vegetables, eggs, wool and bison.

How it works: "The consumer pays a fee up front for that season's vegetables. So the idea is that the farmer isn't the only one taking the risk: The consumer is actually taking some of the risk of the farm. ... Every week (for 22 weeks) they get to come to the farm and pick up produce, whatever we're harvesting that week."

Shares growth: "We sold out (of shares) this year and we sold out last year. ... This year we did 50 shares. We doubled what we did last year, so this next coming year we're probably only gonna do 60 or 70 shares. ... I don't want to grow too much, too fast, because there's issues with that. The quality would go down, the headaches would go up. I think the best thing is to grow small."

The one thing I can't live without at work: "Irrigation -- because you cannot count on the rain!"

Farming life: "We pretty much do follow the sun. ... The chickens and the ducks really kind of tie us to the place, because we gotta take care of them, because they're free range and they like to get up at the crack of dawn." ... (Margaret:) "But we do have electricity, so we do stay up after dark."

People are surprised that I: "Had a TV job for 20 years. ... My last 'real' job was at WHAS. I was in the creative services department. I was an editor/photographer. I worked in New Orleans, Austin, Texas. I traveled around doing a lot of production work for close to like 20 years."

Scheming, Gulf Coast to Canada: "When I was in New Orleans, I bought a house and had a big double lot and turned the other lot into a huge garden and just went crazy. ... (Then later I was visiting) some friends in Canada (who) were growing organic peppers and I loved what they were doing. That's when I hatched my plan to be on a farm in five years. ... It took me seven years to get my first chunk of land where I grew shiitake mushrooms."

What I love the most about this job: "The challenge of each growing season, every year is different with different advantages and disadvantages. I love trying to figure it all out."

I got into this line of work: "Because I think it's crazy for a tomato to travel more than I have!"

Branching out: "To be a successful small farmer, you have to diversify as much as you can ... We sell vegetables, eggs, wool, lamb, bison and next year we hope to sell chicken. ... Next year we're going to start carrying grass-fed beef as well."

The best advice anyone ever gave me about work: "Never buy a piece of equipment unless you're sure it will be used and it can pay for itself."

-- Paula Burba

Want to suggest someone to profile in this column? E-mail businessnews@courier-journal.com.
