

Gee Creek Farm Anchors Washougal Main Street Market This Season

by Liz Pike, Guest Contributor

Lyle Stanley has been farming most of his adult life. Why does he do it? "It's a romantic way of life," says Lyle, "and, there are too many lawyers," he quips. Lyle has two daughters, age 21 and 13. He made a conscious choice to raise them on a farm because he wanted his girls to experience the perks a farming life provides. The benefits of this wholesome life include learning the value of hard work and a sense of connectivity to the earth. He feels that children on a farm develop a work ethic that is rare among their urban peers. There is no idle time for farm kids to get into trouble, spend time watching TV or engaging in the distractions of the internet; activities that can often harm, more than help today's youth.

Lyle is a unique farmer. He cares more about what he's giving than what he's getting in return. Driving down a private paved road in the luxurious Rolling Hills Estates of Ridgefield, one passes by several perfectly manicured lawns surrounding multi-million dollar mansions on large 5 acre lots. Lyle's home and fruit orchard is at the end of the road. In the driveway of his large, but modest home sits a well worn truck. Lyle is certain he is the only neighbor in this community that farms his 5 acre parcel. In addition to this property, he also farms another 15 acres of leased land nearby. The owner of Gee Creek Farm since 1998, he lives and breathes a profound philosophy of natural, organic farming. "I take great pride in growing healthy produce for my countrymen," says Lyle. "For more than one hundred years, American farmers produced a great bounty of food to feed an entire nation without using chemicals. We need to get back to that way of life and that way of farming," says Lyle.

To become efficient and stay competitive, Lyle and his people work smart. Gee Creek Farm is 100% drip irrigated with well water. By doing so, Lyle saves 90% in fresh water consumption. Drip irrigation puts the water where the plant needs it, at its roots, which virtually eliminates the chance of fecal coliform bacteria such as deadly E. coli. Lyle also uses bio-diesel in farm equipment and vehicles.

Beginning May 23rd, Lyle will bring his public crusade of organic farming to the Washougal Main Street Market when he loads up his 1955 Ford two ton truck with fresh, organic produce and low cost, heart healthy meats including grass fed beef, lamb and bison. "I love the people I meet at the market", says Lyle. "I want them to know where their food came from and how it was grown naturally without chemicals." Just as important, Lyle wants to educate Washougal families about the benefits of purchasing locally grown produce. It makes sense. Imagine how much less diesel fuel would be needed if all the produce consumed by citizens in Washington was grown in Washington. Imagine if Californians consumed only produce grown in their home state? American farmers would once again thrive and a new generation of organic farmers would emerge.

Gee Creek Farm has been offering Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) shares for the past three years. For the first time ever, Gee Creek CSA shares are available for sale at the Washougal Main Street Market beginning on Saturday, May 23rd. Families who participate in the CSA share program will realize a 10% savings in food costs and also enjoy peace of mind, knowing they are consuming fresh, locally grown organic produce. Put simply, CSA is a produce subscription plan whereby members get a share of the vegetables grown during a set season. Typically, that season is about 20 - 30 weeks during the prime growing and harvest period, June through late November. At the Washougal Main Street Market, Gee Creek Farm will offer 22 week CSA shares available for \$550 in advance. Other payment options are available and shares can be split between two or more families. Gee Creek Farm has more information about CSA payment options at its Washougal Main Street Market booth or online at www.GeeCreekFarm.com.

Lyle is passionate about his organic farm. Gee Creek Farm is certified organic by the Washington State Department of Agriculture and USDA Organic. Lyle worries about U.S. dependence on foreign food. On any given day in any major U.S. city, there is only a two day supply of food. If for some reason, shipping from South America was interrupted, national chaos would ensue. Lyle understands the economics of non-organic food but is profoundly against it. He believes that too much of the U.S. food supply, a combination of imported food and American grown produce, has been tainted with pesticides and other harmful sprays. "All those toxins that get sprayed on growing plants have to go somewhere," Lyle explains. "Some of it goes into the ground which may eventually seep into underground aquifers and into creeks and rivers. Other bits of chemicals become part of the produce that is consumed. Over time, these harmful toxins build up," says Lyle.

With the use of chemicals and pesticides, farmers in other countries are able to produce more food for less money. These growers compete directly with American farmers and create an even greater imbalance for organic growers in the U.S. It is simply more expensive to grow crops organically. A chemical farmer can manage an acre using \$20 worth of pesticides. Gee Creek Farm hires workers at \$10 an hour to pull weeds at a cost of \$400 to \$600 an acre. Lyle pays his workers a living wage because he believes it is better to give someone a job than a handout. Compare Gee Creek wages with the average salary of 50 cents an hour for farm workers in South American countries. Lyle is blunt and convincing. He believes we need to stop consuming pesticide laden food harvested by unfairly paid workers from other countries.

With so many challenges both nationally and internationally, why does Lyle Stanley keep his Gee Creek Farm going? "Farming is beautiful, it's my way of life and I derive tremendous satisfaction by the fact that I don't hurt people when they eat my fresh, organic food. I am proud to keep American agriculture alive and doing so with sustainable methods," he says. "My workers are proud of what we produce," says Lyle. Over the majority of his farm's history, Lyle has concentrated on product distribution through local, farmers' markets and wholesale customers. Lyle loves the show of working a market. "I am looking forward to making new friends and meeting families at the Washougal Main Street Market." To ensure success, Lyle has practical knowledge, a charismatic personality, enthusiasm and a love of organic farming on his side.

The Washougal Main Street Market is open every Saturday from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. from May 23 through the end of September in Washougal's downtown revitalized "Reflection Plaza" at the corner of Main Street and Pendleton Way. For more information, visit www.WashougalMainStreetMarket.com or contact Market Manager Jordan Boldt at (360) 901-6818 or email at

MainStreetManager@gmail.com. The website offers a complete list of vendors and products along with a schedule of special events throughout the season.