

Summary & Resources - Flourishing Herbs Farm September 2023 OAK Farmer Field Day



Scaling Up While Lessening the Work: Farmer Collaborations and Efficiencies

Community-building is essential to a farm's success: through a network of local farmers, connections with resource providers, life in the soil microbiome, and relationships with customers. This multi-dimensional network resonated throughout the Field Day at [Flourishing Herbs Farm](#), where Jackie and Larry Berry offered a tour of their certified organic vegetable, flower, and herb production.

From the farm's beginnings in 2007, Jackie realized how much she was learning from other farmers and started to build a collaborative network of farms in her region. The most significant of those collaborations have been with Maxwell Farrar and Davida Flowers at Majestic Greens Farm. The farms' combined [Growing Together Farm Share](#) has allowed each farm to focus on what they're good at growing, provide their customers with greater product choice, and scale up their production and profitability. The Farm Share also sources honey, meats, storage crops, and other items from a network of local farmers.

At the OAK Field Day, the farmer collaboration was also evident on the table of value-added products displayed by Lori Hogue of [Hogue Farms](#). Lori's bakery and commercial kitchen produce various items featuring locally-sourced farm-fresh ingredients, including teas, rolls, and shelf-stable products that feature Flourishing Herbs' and Majestic Greens' harvest.

The ongoing relationship between this network of farmers further builds their collective capacity and knowledge. "Jackie and Larry have taught us so much," Maxwell shared, "including the value of going far together. We wouldn't be farming without them."

"This relational aspect in sustainable farming," Maxwell continued, "is just as crucial between people as the relationship of a farm's plantings to its pollinator population and the health and diversity of life within the soil." Learning from the ups and downs of all these different relationships helps a farm and its local food system build resilience and resources to get through the most demanding challenges together.

Highlighting the health of the soil ecosystem, Jackie and Larry shared their no-till practices at Flourishing Herbs, which included:

- Continual plantings in their 30' beds: [intercropping](#), season-to-season crop planning, and cover cropping;
- Intentional crop rotations, e.g., carrots follow sweet potatoes to allow root development in previously disturbed soil;
- Minimal soil disturbance: tiller (for early bed establishment), broadforks, and [tarping](#); and
- Annual soil testing: to determine the proper balance of soil amendments

These practices follow the management guidelines the Berrys follow for their organic certification, which requires “tillage and cultivation practices that maintain or improve the physical, chemical, and biological condition of soil,” according to National Organic Program Standards.

Using [tools developed for human-scale market gardening](#), rechargeable [electric lawn/garden tools](#), and infrastructure for season extension and weed/pest reduction, the Berrys continue to improve systems in their farming that allow them to work ergonomically and efficiently to produce more than 90 different vegetable, herb, and flower crops throughout the year. Primary among these are high tunnels and caterpillar tunnels, row covers and insect netting, and landscape fabric - all of which protect the plants. High tunnel features at Flourishing Herbs include roll-up sides, automatic vent openers, Tomahook or Hortanova-supported trellising, and cedar baseboards (Note: treated-wood baseboards are prohibited in certified organic production, as they leach chemicals into the soil. The Berrys recommend finding a cedar mill near you to source cedar for wood needs).

With frequent use of cover crops in warm (buckwheat) and cool (annual rye) seasons and regular lawn maintenance around their beds, the Berrys help keep their weed pressure low, using a wheel hoe to eliminate developing weed plants before they establish and spread seeds. Their use of tarps for [occultation](#) and leaf mulch added as a protective layer on the soil (not incorporated but applied as a mulch) add to their weed management systems. Although disease pressure has not been a significant battle at Flourishing Herbs, the Berrys practice [anaerobic soil disinfestation](#) to manage soilborne pests and pathogens.

Favored tools for seed-starting are soil block makers of various sizes, a Jang seeder, and a four-row pinpoint seeder. The Berrys start most of Flourishing Herbs' plants from seed and source these exclusively from reputable companies that can provide a certificate of organic certification. (The National Organic Program [requires](#) that certified organic farms use organically grown seeds, annual seedlings, and planting stock, with little exception and only when previously approved by the certifying agency.) Flourishing Herbs shared their favorite seed sources, listed below.

Jackie uses an annual crop planning spreadsheet she creates each winter to schedule and maintain a regular succession of plantings for direct seeding, transplanting, and intercropping. Having started her farm's learning journey as a student of [The Market Gardener's Masterclass](#), Jackie uses an adapted version of the spreadsheet she gained in the course. She admits it took her a few years to develop proficiency in adapting it wisely to their farm. Jackie has generously shared examples of her crop planning tools; you can find them below.

Learning from others and seeking out resources has allowed Flourishing Herbs to truly flourish, and the resource providers in attendance at the Field Day shared some of those resources.

Representatives from USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) shared their agencies' assistance for Beginning, Socially-Disadvantaged, Veteran, and Limited-Resource Farmers who have been Historically Underserved and are now prioritized within

federal technical and financial assistance programs (see the USDA section below for “A Guide to USDA Resources...” to learn more). Partners from the Kentucky Department of Agriculture (KDA) and UK’s Food Connection offered details on their programs for increasing local food purchases by institutions and distributors, and allies from Glean Kentucky provided information about the statewide network for reducing waste of fruits and vegetables from farms’ excess production. (Details and contact information below)

OAK is grateful to Jackie and Larry Berry for opening their farm to our community and to the Berrys, Maxwell Farrar, and Davida Flowers for sharing their collaborative farm story. We also share gratitude to the network of service providers who shared their expertise and resources with us. OAK appreciates the support of the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service and the Kentucky Department of Agriculture’s (KDA) Office of Agricultural Marketing and Product Promotion, which supported this event through a Specialty Crop Block Grant.

Resource Links:

- **OAK resources:**
 - [Join OAK today!](#)
 - [Find-A-Farm Directory](#) - OAK Family Farm Members
 - [The asterisks below indicate OAK member discounts](#)
 - [OAK YouTube](#) farmer resources/conference and field day playlists
 - [OAK Organic Transition Program](#) - for assistance with or info on certifying organic
 - [USDA's National Organic Program](#) and [OMRI-listed products](#) for compliance
 - [OAK Conference*](#) - **Save the Date: January 25-27, 2024**, at KSU Harold R. Benson Research and Demonstration Farm in Frankfort, KY
- Suppliers / Products
 - [Suppliers and Farm Resources](#) on OAK’s Find-A-Farm Directory
 - Grow Appalachia [Growing Supplies](#)
 - [Earth Tools*](#)
 - Jackie Berry’s seed source list:
 - [High Mowing Organic Seeds*](#) - Vermont
 - [Fruition Seeds](#) - New York
 - [Strictly Medicinal Seeds](#) - Oregon
 - [Garden Hoard](#) - Michigan
 - [Southern Exposure Seed Exchange](#) - Virginia
 - [Adaptive Seeds](#) - Oregon - [Open Source Seed Initiative Archives](#)
- Potential Funding Resources and Service Providers
 - Kentucky Center for Agriculture and Rural Development ([KCARD](#))
 - Free [business planning](#) for Kentucky farms and agribusinesses
 - [Funding assistance and grant information](#) (Kentucky and beyond)
 - Sign up under “GET UPDATES” on [KCARD website](#) to receive e-newsletters
 - U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)
 - Read this first! [A Guide to USDA Resources for Historically Underserved Farmers](#)
 - USDA [Farm Service Agency \(FSA\)-Kentucky](#) - [Angella Watson](#)
 - [How to Start a Farm: Beginning Farmers and Ranchers](#)

- Find your county's office in [West Kentucky](#) or [East Kentucky](#)
 - [USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service \(NRCS\)-Kentucky](#) - [Joe Ulrich](#)
 - [EQIP - High Tunnel Initiative](#)
 - [High Tunnel System - NRCS KY](#)
 - [Microirrigation - NRCS KY](#)
 - [Roof Runoff Structure - NRCS KY](#)
 - [Organic Management NRCS Conservation Practice Standard - Coming Soon; In Development](#)
 - [Conservation Plan Supporting Organic Transition](#)
 - [USDA Rural Development \(RD\)](#)
 - [Cooperative Services \(Starting Farmer/Ag Cooperatives\)](#)
 - [Programs and Services in Kentucky](#)
 - [Kentucky Department of Agriculture \(KDA\)](#)
 - [Organic Marketing Program](#) - [Abigale George](#)
 - [Local Food Purchase Assistance \(LFPA\)](#) - [Lynsey Crumie](#)
 - [Glean Kentucky](#) - Combatting food waste and food insecurity - [Jerilyn Bristow](#) (South Central KY)
 - Grants:
 - [SOAR loan](#) - southern and eastern KY
 - [KSU Small-Scale Farm Grant](#)
 - [County Ag Investment Program \(CAIP\)](#) grant: county-specific! Ask your County Cooperative Extension Agent
- [Soil Health Resources:](#)
 - [Soul Fire Farm's How Alive Is My Soil?](#)
 - [Cover Crops for Sustainable Crop Production](#) - Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE)
 - [Building Soils for Better Crops](#) - SARE
 - [Cornell Soil Health Manual](#) - Cornell University's College of Ag and Life Sciences
 - [Building Soil Health in the South](#) - Organic Farming Research Foundation (OFRF)
- [Crop Production Resources:](#)
 - Flourishing Herbs' crop planning spreadsheet examples:
 - [Direct Seeding Calendar](#)
 - [Seeding and Transplant Calendar](#)
 - [Flower Planting Calendar](#)
 - [General Production Resources | Center for Crop Diversification](#)
 - [Organic Agriculture | Center for Crop Diversification](#)
 - [Crop Rotation on Organic Farms SARE](#)
 - [Community Supported Agriculture \(CSA\) Production Manual](#) of the Organic Farming Unit at the University of Kentucky
 - Crop Planning Software:
 - [Tend - Organic Farm Management Software](#)
 - [COG Pro - Recordkeeping for Organic Certification](#)
- [Market-Specific Resources](#)
 - KDA's [Kentucky Farmers' Market Manual and Resource Guide](#)

- [MarketReady Producer Training Program](#) - wholesale and institutional market assistance
- [CSA Innovation Network](#) - Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) resources and community