

# CEDAR CIRCLE FARM

## SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH CREATIVITY

By Michael Feiner

Cedar Circle Farm's Will Allen has been re-imagining the role a farm can play in feeding the community since his earliest days in the fields: Innovating, visioning, combining processes and intentions -- sustainability and resilience require thoughtful, intentional stewardship, education and action.

At Cedar Circle Farm & Education Center (CCF) in East Thetford, VT, Will, Kate, and a dedicated staff have united their passions for organic agriculture, alternative energy, local food, popular education and grassroots organizing for social and political change into one mission -- to build a real sustainable future one new farmer, new idea, and new inspiration at a time.

The 40 acre vegetable and berry farm is always looking for ways to increase productivity, reduce energy consumption and diversify the bounty they bring to the local community. In the last few years, that has included the addition of more grains and beans to the farm's rotational plantings, as well as oilseed crops like sunflowers. By extension the increase in production of local grains also reduces the dominance of commodity agriculture across the country. To accomplish this on a small to mid-size farm, CCF has had to be creative.

The farm needs to dry over two acres of beans every fall. Their multi-functioned wood-burning shop stove, where they largely burn scrap wood, dries a couple hundred pounds of beans overnight.

Luke Joanis, the farm's Operations Manager, and other resourceful folks, they accomplished this task with two 55-gallon steel barrels. One was cut in half with that half welded to the bottom of the second,



Half of the farm's 23 solar cells

whose bottom has been perforated with holes. A tiny "squirrel" fan pulls hot air from the wood heater and pumps it through a section of stovepipe into the bottom of the barrel unit. The hot air rises through the perforations into the main barrel that is filled practically to the top with threshed and cleaned beans of every variety, and escapes through an exhaust pipe at the top. Twenty-four hours later, they have dry beans ready for sale and storage.

Multi-functioning existing power sources to heat, cool or power secondary operations, is key to the way CCF approaches on-farm efficiency and sustainability. It isn't always about going




Cedar Circle Farm Co-manager Will Allen demonstrates how to train high yield tomatoes in a farm workshop

base energy source.

The farm's 24 panel solar array offsets about 10% of the farm's electrical usage. The 1948 Allis Chalmers G has been converted to run off of 8 - 6 volt batteries, and can cultivate up to six inches deep for four hours on a full charge -- another innovation to cut the farm's reliance on fossil fuels, while cutting noise and exhaust at the same time. By retrofitting existing spaces adjacent to the farm's walk-in cooler that, as luck would have it, was mysteriously equipped with a trap door on the side, the farm has tripled their conditioned storage space without drawing on any additional energy expense.

All of these projects has been a group effort, has been 'trial and error,' and has ultimately succeeded because of a tangible shared commitment to sustainability and creativity.

"The type of farm we're going to need down the road, when it's no longer a novelty, but a necessity, is what we're trying to create here," Will insists. "We're innovating and trying new things, but we're also educating. We're training a cadre of people to take real ownership and initiative. If more people were doing that, sustainability wouldn't be an objective, it would be inevitable." 



Operations Manager Luke Joanis cultivating with 'Sparky' the electric tractor

out and buying the latest green energy innovations, or high-end technologies. Some of CCF's greatest successes have come from layering processes and power sources on top of each other to get two, or three times the advantage from a single