

2020 State of the Farm -250 Years of Family Agriculture

This year marks the 250th anniversary of our family farm. It's been a long time since Captain Isaac Miller was commissioned by King George to survey the area and lay out the town into 100 acre lots. He chose for himself the land we currently farm and succeeding generations have managed to keep it going with sheep, tobacco, dairy and currently, vegetables and flowers! Now we must start thinking about the



Our relatives take time out from farming for a summertime picnic in the early 1900s.

future of Walker Farm and succeeding generations. Fortunately, we have a great family and crew dedicated to continuing the caretaking of the land and business. These folks have been the major reason our farm has been successful. Our staff is divided up into different areas of the farm organization. We have sales teams, a specialist in plant propagation, annual and perennial flower production personnel, farm and retail vegetable plant management, field crews for planting, cultivation and harvesting, and tractor operators. Lots of these folks have been working with us for up to 25 years and either are

family or like family! Looks like we'll be around another 250 years!

To ensure our ability to adapt to climate change we have installed solar panels, developed erosion control planning and will be completing phase 2 of our automatic generator installation this spring to help with power outages from extreme weather events. As organic farmers, we work on increasing our soil organic matter to improve carbon sequestration which helps battle climate change. Planting cover crops and incorporating them into the soil along with crop residues has helped us boost our organic matter which also buffers low and high moisture conditions. The greenhouse number is now up to 25 structures which ensures that production of garden center plants and critical crops will be safe from unpredictable weather surprises.



Thanks to an extremely supportive community, the garden center, vegetable farmstand and Christmas tree farm all had record breaking sales last year. This has allowed us to pay our employees a livable wage and to invest in the infrastructure of the farm like modernizing equipment that helps to reduce

production costs and energy usage. Most of our greenhouse heaters are now the newer 93% energy efficient models. Education at Integrated Pest Management conferences has helped us be leaders in beneficial insect and disease management so we hardly use any organic pesticides at all in greenhouses. This makes a safer environment for our workers and our crops. Our Community Supported Agriculture programs enable us to supply food and plants from April to March. The great customers who trust us by prepaying for these programs allow the farm to finance costs without using high-interest loans. The interest is returned directly to our customers in the form of discounts or healthy certified organic food. The symbiotic relationship we have with the community makes what we do truly rewarding both for owners and employees.



Dustin Reed, our grandfather John Walker's cousin with his prize cabbage patch. Early 1900s.

For any business to succeed, it's essential to continue to learn the latest trends and adapt to change. Our customers are our teachers and they tell us what they would like us to grow for them. For example, the nutritional interest in celery has led us to increase our celery production 300%. Each year various staff members attend horticultural, vegetable, fruit and IPM conferences and trade shows. We learn how to grow better and safer. We are introduced to new crops, equipment and techniques. We participate in programs from the Food Safety Modernization Act, Required Agricultural Practices, Community Accreditation for Produce Safety, Vermont Organic Farmers and the Vermont Department of Agriculture. We're regularly inspected and taught program updates. We're happy to do whatever we can to improve our produce safety and keep our customers healthy. That's one of the reasons we feel so strongly about getting officially Certified Organic.

Even though, as I write this, we are in uncertain times, Walker Farm has been through difficult years many times in its 250-year history. Through the Revolutionary and Civil Wars to the economic depressions, through the influenza and tuberculosis epidemics in the early 1900s, the farm has survived and will continue to do so. For many years our ancestors have cared for the land and it has rewarded them with eggs, dairy, wool, vegetables, fruit and flowers. The owners and crops may have changed but the land is always there and always will be.



Frances Walker Manix, age 13, forking oats from a wagon. Now age 99!