

The New

Micro

Eco-Farmers

This is Chapter One from by Barbara Berst Adams' recently published book, "Micro Eco-Farming: Prospering from Backyard to Small Acreage in Partnership with the Earth." See the end of article for purchase information.

"I love co-creating with the earth, as it is so simple and healing to live close to the mother earth that sustains and nurtures me every day with her beauty. I love to hold her in my hands and watch the seeds grow into fullness just by tending to them slowly along with the sun and rain," says Mariam Massaro of Singing Brook Farm of Worthington, Massachusetts.

On less than an acre, Mariam Massaro tends certified organic herb, vegetable and flower gardens, which include more than 78 varieties of roses. Along with this, she raises Icelandic horses, llamas, Angora rabbits and Icelandic sheep in the farm's Berkshire Hills setting of western Massachusetts.

The animals provide offspring and specialty wool for Marjam to create fiber crafts for sale. They fertilize and mow the gardens. In her 1850s New England farmhouse, a workshop overlooks a year-round brook. The herbs, flowers and wool are processed into products sold both locally and worldwide.

On five acres surrounded by woods, Sylvia and Walter Ehrhardt of Knoxville, Maryland created the successful Ehrhardt Organic Farm. From its earliest years, chefs could not get enough of their organic dessert quality blackberries, which bear up to nine weeks in their location.

Chefs also gladly paid premium prices for their fresh picked, locally and sustainably-grown raspberries, strawberries, miniature squash, carrots, tomatoes, herbs and shallots. Thousands of plants were started each spring in the greenhouse attached

to their living room, just a short walk from their growing area.

They grossed \$12,000 an acre on miniature squash alone. Their blackberries produced two tons per acre per season. The farm, still going strong, became a demonstration farm as well, and their reputation as successful organic growers spread nationally and internationally. "Over the years, we found that we didn't need to expand our land but to make it more productive," said Sylvia.

Ocean Sky Farm, owned by Art Biggert and Suzu Cook of Washington State, is a 1.55-acre suburban full-time farm. They have operated a highly successful community supported agriculture (CSA) farm where 75 families "subscribe" to the farm by paying upfront for weekly delivery.

Being microfarmers, they can adapt easily to new interests, and eventually chose to incorporate other farm products including perennial medicinal herbs. "People come to the farm, take what they need, fill out their own receipts and leave cash or checks in the tea pot," Art said.

Baruch Bashan, creator of Gaia Growers Farm in Portland, Oregon, had been a part-time vegetable gardener for more than 25 years. One year, he produced 2,000 pounds of vegetables on two city lots. Not needing it all himself, he ended up donating it to the local food bank.

"That last year I decided I'd had enough of working in an office as a software programmer, and wanted to do farming full time," he said. It wasn't until July of that year that he secured a half acre, but still had a successful growing season and launched Gaia Growers Farm.

He was convinced, as he stated, that "a single, hard-working person can run a successful organic veggie and seed growing business on small acreage, without having to invest a lot of money."

There is a change among those who farm in this century. They are not different than what they used to be. They are more of what they always were. Some come from generations of farmers or gardeners. Some have just joined those who earn a living from the earth. Regardless, they seem to have taken a long-lost power back. Are you one of them?

"After 18 years working in the corporate world, I'd had enough," said Robert Farr, also called "The

