



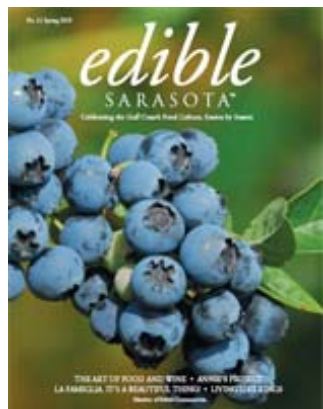
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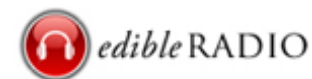
ANNIE'S PROJECT, CLASS OF 2010

Sustainable farming practices for women

By Stacey Anderson

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“For Italians, what they eat is the key to their identity. The flavors of Italian food are expressions of the territory they come from and the cooking of each community celebrates the local character that makes it unique. The immense cultural value of the work the Edible Communities perform is that they identify the regional differences that exist here and provide people with a connection to locally grown foods. It’s an important message that wants to be delivered clearly and appealingly. Our congratulations to Edible Communities for meeting that challenge.”
- Marcella & Victor Hazan

On February 10, 2010, a group of 20 inspiring women gathered together for Florida’s inaugural class of Annie’s Project, a six-week course designed to educate and empower women to be (or become) economically sustainable farmers and ranchers. The curriculum embodies a profound, holistic approach to education, an approach that challenges and nurtures all at once.

In the first class, we were given some sobering information regarding trends in the relationship between women and money. It is common for women to struggle with finances later in life because we tend to live longer than men and are typically less strategic about investing.

We talked about the different regulations regarding taxes, and one of Annie’s students suggested we all read Schedule F to get an idea of what is involved in calculating farm profits and losses. In fact, there is a handful of different tax forms tailored to farmers and dozens of informative links available from the IRS website (irs.gov, search “Forms and Publications to Assist Farmers”). We even discussed the concept of a non-profit farm and the relevant regulations at the state and federal levels. One of Annie’s students, Barbara Richards, is the founder of Project 180, a non-profit that seeks to reintegrate former offenders into community life via a business training school. Their first business school will be an organic farm where residents will learn marketable skills to take into the community upon graduation.

Learning how to run a farm is a useful skill considering Florida has a billion-dollar agricultural industry, albeit we are facing daunting challenges in our efforts to maintain our ability to produce. In 1997, 30.8 percent of the state of FL was farmland, and in 2007 it was down to 26.9 percent (USDA Economic Research Service Florida State Fact Sheet).

If we want to ensure our local food security and contribute to a more resilient food system, how do we do this? This is a big question that requires more than a simple answer, aside from the mantra to buy local (which can mean many different things depending on whom you ask). What Annie’s Project ultimately aims to do is to empower our local network of established farmers and give aspiring farmers the tools needed to be successful entrepreneurs, aka “agripreneurs.”

When I spoke with Sandra Gordon, a fellow classmate, I found out



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Problem w/ factory farms: large-

“The food producers of our community have jewels to offer, and light from Edible Sarasota shines upon them and singles them out.”
- Marcella & Victor Hazan

that after raising her family, she decided she wanted to grow food on her 10-acre plot in Myakka. She is a budding agripreneur, trying to manifest her noble goal of starting up a small farm. She is fortunate to already own land, considering how the cost of starting up a new farming enterprise is prohibitively expensive for many of the aspiring farmers in our area, primarily because of the cost of land.

The long-term goal of Annie’s Project, which is happening in select areas of the U.S., is to “strengthen women’s roles in the modern farming enterprise.” Data compiled by the Penn State Cooperative Extension reported that as male principal operators of farms continue to decrease, the number of female principal operators continues to increase. Many of my fellow classmates commented on the fulfilling effect of growing food, happy to get their hands dirty, work hard, and create just the right environment for healthy food to grow.

Having recently graduated from college into the “real world” (and already a little jaded), I was surprised by the number of times we heard the advice to “talk to your neighbors.” When you consider the lengths that some agricultural companies take to protect their “empire” or super-secret patented method of production, it seems like odd advice. But, to my delight, many of our local farmers support the notion that our neighbors are willing to share their wisdom if you just ask.

If you have any questions about Annie’s Project or small farms and alternative enterprises, contact the University of Florida IFAS Extension Office at 941-232-3090 or send an email to Robert Kluson, PhD, at rkluson@scgov.net. You can also check out their website, sarasota.extension.ufl.edu.

If you have any questions with respect to government financial assistance available through the USDA, contact Annie’s Project alum Brandee N. Williams. She works with the Natural Resources Conservation Service of the USDA, and she can be reached through email or phone: brandee.williams@fl.usda.gov, 941-729-6804.

If you are interested in learning more about Project 180, visit project180reentry.org.

scale industrial farming = sharecropping, lack of gov’t oversight. <http://ow.ly/1CotN@time>

Joan Gussow: arguably the most influential thinker many modern food enthusiasts haven’t read or heard. [@edibleradio](http://ow.ly/1BVaY) <http://ow.ly/1BVaY>

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ANNETTE (KOHLHAGEN) FLECK

Annie's Project is based on the life of a farm woman who grew up in a small town in northern Illinois. Her goal was to marry a farmer and she did. Annie spent her lifetime learning how to be an involved business partner with her farm husband. Together they did great things, but it wasn't easy.



Challenges Annie faced included three generations living under one roof, low profitability, changing farm enterprises, and raising a family. Annie faced pressure from brother and sister-in-laws, and mother-in-law. New regulations for selling processed food directly to the consumer forced many changes. Low profitability did not leave a lot of money to raise a family of four children even though the family worked hard. Annie had to make many painful sacrifices that tested her conviction to be married to a farmer.

There were days of tears, anger and sorrow. There were days of laughter, contentment, and accomplishment. Through it all, Annie kept records. She kept the farm business running, she kept the family running, and she kept her marriage. Annie knew deadlines, reporting requirements, and tax issues. She did the little management jobs that supported big management decisions.

When big decisions had to be made, Annie was there with her records. To increase cash flow, Annie sent her husband to work off the farm while she milked cows and kept an egg route in Chicago. Eventually, her records guided them to discontinue an egg laying enterprise, a seasonal turkey enterprise, and a dairy

enterprise. Other farmers with larger equipment and more resources could better run the farm. So Annie and her husband became the landowners renting to other farmers. She paid expenses, and marketed corn and soybeans.

When others looked upon decisions Annie had helped to make, their opinions were not always kind, and that was very hard on Annie. But she stuck with her decisions. She corrected mistakes, and learned from experience. As an ex-school teacher Annie had never ending patience, and ability to weather bad times.

Annie was married to a farmer for 50 years. She died in 1997, a wealthy woman, and doing things her way.

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