

History of pigman's produce patch

By Jared Snyder

English 306: Academic and professional writing

Spring 2019

Pigman's Produce Patch began as Jan Pigman's dream. She grew up on a city lot in southern California. The backyard was shaded by a huge walnut tree and the front was landscaped. Wishing to garden, she had to look outside of her small yard. Eventually she managed to start a garden in the vacant lot across the street. Years later, she married Dean Pigman and shared her dream with him. They would often joke that they would do his career for 20 years and then hers.

So, after 21 years of service as an army officer and paratrooper, Dean Pigman retired from the military. The Pigmans began looking for property they could farm that had good soil and was close to local markets. In 1990 they bought a lot with ten acres of pasture in the Nisqually Valley along Medicine Creek. They built a house and started their Organic Produce Patch. Their first harvest was three acres, as they learned the skills of farming.

The Pigmans sold their produce at the Olympia Farmer's Market. It was there that they met fellow farmers who supported and advised them. In the following years, the Pigmans expanded to six and a half acres. They began growing pumpkins, planting only one row with three varieties at first. Now, they grow 15 different varieties, attracting young visitors every year. Over time, the Pigmans learned about the local ecosystem, soil conservation practices, how to maximize productivity, and so much more. Their goal in learning is to understand how to respect the earth.

Since day one, the Pigmans have practiced organic farming. Their farm was certified organic for 25 years. Recently, the federal government increased the documentation needed to be certified organic, and the Pigmans, who already worked from sunup to sundown, had no time. The Pigmans did not pursue certification in 2016 but have maintained their values; they still practice completely organic farming.

Mrs. Pigman stated her philosophy to be: "First you feed the soil." The Pigmans do this by creating their own compost, infusing the soil with beneficial microbes. They never use petrochemical fertilizers, herbicides, or pesticides. This prevents poisons from reaching the soil and maintains a healthy balance of beneficial and non-beneficial insects.

Weed control is a constant issue when farming. Any unused land quickly becomes rife with weeds. Since the beginning, the Pigmans have hired laborers to help and several have worked with the Pigmans for over 26 years. In 1999, the year their last child left for college, they decided to buy cows and lambs. The animals effectively mow the untilled pasture by grazing. To this day, Mrs. Pigman is trying new techniques to fight back the thistles, pigweed, chickweed, and others. This includes wheel hoeing and flame weeding, torching the weeds. The weeds are then composted.

In 2017, Our Common Home Farms (OCHF) began farming two fields of the Pigmans' land and expanded to three the next year. Both the Pigmans and OCHF value farming that is responsible to the natural world, creating a synergistic relationship focused on organic practices. Moreover, the Pigmans want to spread their knowledge. So in addition to hosting OCHF, the Pigmans allow a plot of land to be run by the Children's Learning Garden, managed by OCHF's Amber Holland

and volunteers. Here, parents and their children can get firsthand farming experience. The sight of children running around and digging in the dirt brings Jan and Dean great joy. They are achieving their dream of helping others see the value of farming and the natural world. Organic farming continues to grow in the Pigman's backyard.