

Seeking Apprentices

Kent Family Growers – Daniel and Megan Kent

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Kent Family Growers produces a wide variety of fresh, certified organic vegetables, flowers and fruit on 117 acres in Lisbon, NY. We serve markets in St. Lawrence County and across NY State. We are looking to hire three apprentices for the 2012 season. Our work takes place in the field, growing and harvesting, in the packinghouse, washing and sorting, and in Canton and Potsdam, marketing.

Our farm, family, background, experience, goals and interests:

We began KFG in 2003 after completing apprenticeships in various Northeastern states. Beginning with 1/2 acre and hand tools we've grown over the past 9 years so as to justify organic certification, a recent move to a larger and better farm, and now serve a wider variety of customers, production methods and worker involvement. We have grown in numbers too; our three children are Maggie (age 11), Silas (age 6) and Hazel (age 4).

One of our goals is to reach a "plateau" where farm work and non-farm work achieve a balance so that market gardening can sustain us financially on a year-round basis, but also afford us opportunities for recreation, continuing education and various creative enterprises, such as writing and biological research.

Another goal is to make the farm efficient and profitable enough that one or more of our children would be tempted to consider market gardening as a career choice in their adulthood.

The farm's setting and community:

We are located a few miles East of the St. Lawrence River and an hour West of the Adirondack Park. In between are many wonderful rivers. Recreational opportunities abound. Twenty minutes away lie Potsdam and Canton, our two market towns and also the site of four universities and colleges which provide much in the way of social, educational and cultural programming.

We are within a day's drive of some longstanding and highly regarded organic market farms in NY, VT and Quebec.

Production methods:

We rotate between cover crops and a wide variety of vegetable and cut flower cash crops on 14 acres. We also continue to try to master the production of berry crops, but aim to produce small volumes. Production methods involve hand tools, horse and tractor drawn machinery, and a high tunnel for tomatoes and peppers. We grow primarily for our 130 CSA members and the Finger Lakes Organic Growers Cooperative, but also serve the Canton Farmers Market and the Potsdam Food Co-op. 2012 will find us extending our marketing season through the winter as we begin using a NYS licensed kitchen to freeze produce and a new year-round packinghouse.

Insect control involves the use of row cover and a few species specific OMRI listed insecticides. Disease control is more difficult and achieves varying degrees of success with the use of

mulches, rotations, plant spacing and field hygiene efforts. Weed control is done with wheel hoes, hand hoes, flaming, horse and tractor cultivators and during our fallow year with three cover crop successions.

How many apprentices are we seeking?:

3

Date we want our apprentices to start and end working:

05/7/2012 - 11/15/2012

The type of work we have available:

Apprentices will be involved in all aspects of production, packing and marketing. An individual's limitations or preferences may pare down their overall list of activities, but not to exclude harvesting and packing work, which involves lifting weights up to 45# and working in rain, heat and cold at times. From mid-June through November we harvest three days per week. These activities set a pleasant rhythm to our weeks. We use the remaining two-and-a-half days to perform various production related tasks and to attend the Farmers Market in Canton. A week in July might go as follows:

Monday - Harvest, wash and pack Peas, Broccoli, head lettuce, cherry tomatoes, zucchini and young onions for 75 CSA shares. Tuesday - Deliver CSA shares. Spread compost then roto-till ½ acre. Transplant cabbage, broccoli then apply rowcover. Cultivate carrots. Wednesday - Harvest, wash and pack kale, chard, beets and carrots for wholesale. Thursday -Deliver wholesale items. Harvest, wash and pack Peas, Broccoli, head lettuce, cherry tomatoes, zucchini and young onions for 55 CSA shares, as well as these and other crops for farmers market. Friday - Distribute CSA shares and sell to general public from the farmers market. Clean up from the week's work and attend an afternoon crop meeting and discussion. Attend to personal projects (flowers? repairs? carpentry?). Saturday - Lay out drip irrigation, horse cultivate corn, beans, potatoes and celeriac.

We also host groups of children for two weeks of summer "Farm Camp" in August. Area schools also send classes for pumpkin picking field trips in the Fall.

Work week and compensation:

Monday through Friday, 8a.m. - 5 p.m.. Up to one hour off at mid-day. Saturday, 8a.m. until noon. We offer a \$300 per week stipend plus on-farm housing (electricity and phone not included).

Room and Board Benefits:

We have a mobile home with three bedrooms and two baths, located directly across the road from the farm. The kitchen is furnished to allow apprentices to prepare their own meals. It would be expected that the home would be kept reasonably clean and that noise levels be kept in the "polite" range. Smoking is not allowed anywhere on the property. Consumption of our produce is encouraged as is the use of our wonderful pond.

How we will provide you with education about farming and our specific farm practices:

Readings will be recommended for those who request them, but lessons will largely be learned on the job and during Friday afternoon crop meetings, where we walk the fields discussing each crop and make decisions about the upcoming week's to-do list. Each apprentice will also be given the opportunity to take responsibility for a crop or project of their interest which will lead to a deeper understanding of the particular subject. Weekend visits to area farms and Cornell facilities will be encouraged as well so as to offer a wider perspective on agriculture. We will also take a trip together to visit a respected organic grower to observe their operation in action.

We require a visit by apprentices before final arrangements are made.