



Pennsylvania
Association for
Sustainable Agriculture

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Food Alliance Certification Gains Steam in the Mid-Atlantic Region

Meet the certified producers so far

In 2009, PASA formed a partnership with the national nonprofit Food Alliance (www.foodalliance.org) to certify farms, food packers, processors and distributors in Pennsylvania and the surrounding Mid-Atlantic region in sustainable agriculture and facilities management practices.

This partnership expands the reach of a highly successful, third party certification label that verifies social and environmental responsibilities in how food products are grown, processed and handled. *(See sidebar detailing certification standards.)*

“PASA sees a need for sustainability certification among regional farmers and food businesses,” says Brian Snyder, PASA executive director, “and Food Alliance certification is an opportunity to have a positive impact on water quality, wildlife habitat, and farming communities in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.”

PASA's role in bringing Food Alliance certification to the East Coast is to focus on marketing the program and helping, where necessary, to facilitate the initial process for farmers and food businesses in achieving certification.

The PASA - Food Alliance partnership will leverage market incentives to improve agricultural practices, promote water quality enhancement, soil conservation, reduction of pesticide use and toxicity, protection of wildlife habitat, and other conservation measures.

Founded in 1997 by Oregon State University, Washington State University, and the Washington State Department of Agriculture, Food Alliance's farm and ranch certification program was launched in 1998 in Portland with a single apple grower selling in three grocery stores. Food Alliance has since certified over 350 farms and ranches managing more than six million acres -- the large majority of which are in the Western states.

“A growing number of companies are marketing ‘natural’ or ‘green’ products – but when you look closely, there's not much behind it,” says Food Alliance executive director Scott Exo. “Consumers know that game and they are increasingly cynical. Third-party certification verifies and substantiates marketing claims. There is an objective and meaningful standard for performance. There is a credible inspection process to ensure

the standard has been met. With third-party certification, you know where the product comes from and how it was produced. That transparency creates trust and loyalty.”

Meet the New Food Alliance Certified Operations

Red Jacket Orchards

Certified in August 2009, this Geneva, New York based orchard is a third-generation, family-run business. Red Jacket Orchard’s certification milestone also coincided with their 50th anniversary celebration. They currently manage 600 acres of tree fruit production, fruit packing and processing.

The operation has grown to include 7 different farms located in an 8-mile radius from the packinghouse, a diversity which helps mitigate damage from severe weather events like hail and frost. Current plantings include approximately 375 acres of apples, mainly on dwarfing rootstock that allow for planting up to 1,100 trees per acre (the original orchards had approximately 75 large trees to the acre). These smaller trees play an important role in their integrated production strategy by not only improving sunlight and air movement to the fruiting wood, which helps reduce insect and disease pressure, but also produce larger, more colorful and flavorful apples.

“Sustaining our family’s business for the future was behind our decision to become Food Alliance Certified,” says Mark Nicholson, Red Jacket’s Executive Vice President. “The range of issues Food Alliance covers – water, labor, waste, energy and wildlife - make it the most comprehensive third-party certification program in North America for sustainably produced food, which is why we chose to work with them. At Red Jacket we believe if you do something, do it properly and with integrity. Food Alliance’s sustainable certification fits these values.”

Food Alliance Certified apricots, plums and prunes from Red Jacket Orchards are available at NYC Greenmarkets, and at retail stores such as Whole Foods, Wegmans, Fresh Direct, Price Chopper, Tops, King Kullen, Food Emporium, Fairway, ShopRite, Red Jacket Orchards farm stand and other Metro NY Gourmet dealers.

The Nicholson family is committed to continuing the family tradition of delivering high quality products and excellent customer service, and look forward to building a company that provides consumers with healthy, wholesome flavorful farm fresh products. They believe if you do something, do it properly, and with integrity. They strive to emulate these values in all farm work, in the products they produce and in their community.

To learn more about Red Jacket Orchards visit www.redjacketorchards.com.

One Straw Farm

Since 1985, One Straw Farm has been owned and operated by the PASA lifetime member team of Joan and Drew Norman. They offer their homegrown vegetables through a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program, the Mill Valley General Store, the Waverly Farmers Market, Boordy Vineyards, Kennilworth Farmers Market, wholesale and via restaurants in the Baltimore area.

The Normans' operation achieved Market Garden/CSA Food Alliance Certification. Their CSA now serves 2,000 families through 1,600 shares. The initiative to certify was spearheaded by Drew Norman after he attended a presentation about the Food Alliance certification program earlier this year. According to Joan, "We were interested in the certification because it is about being a good steward of the land, and was broader than just specific farming practices." Under the Food Alliance program their 175 acres of market vegetables have been certified.

PASA Executive Director Brian Snyder said, "All of us at PASA are very proud to see one of our longest standing member farms step up to the plate and help lead the way for sustainable farm certification in the Mid-Atlantic region. One Straw Farm is also one of the largest CSA programs in the region, with a marketing program second to none in the country, so this will no doubt have a positive impact with consumers and other farmers throughout the Chesapeake Bay Watershed, and at a very critical time for saving that precious resource."

When asked what advice they would give to other CSA operations or others considering Food Alliance certification, Joan commented, "It really isn't as hard as you think. Yes, it took a few hours to get the paper work together and to go through the inspection process, but in the end it made us take a step back and consider our whole farm framework. This was really the first time where all of our farm efforts in terms of water conservation and habitat improvement were used to consider full farm planning."

The certification of One Straw Farm sets a precedent for other market gardeners and CSA operations in the Eastern U.S. To learn more visit www.onestrawfarm.com.

Three Springs Fruit Farm

Located between Gettysburg and Carlisle in Northern Adams County, Three Springs Fruit Farm has been family owned and operated for over 100 years. Operating as a partnership between David, John, and Ben Wenk, the sixth and seventh generations to farm, Three Springs has a wide variety of apples, peaches, cherries, apricots, pears, small fruits, and vegetables available at farmers markets and in the wholesale market.

Members of PASA since 2009, Three Springs Fruit Farm has certified their apples, peaches, pears and cherries. This accounts for nearly all of their production, aside from

some small fruit, berries, veggies, and a few stone fruit crops that are just coming into bearing. Altogether, there are approximately 260 acres of certified tree fruits.

According to Ben Wenk, “It’s one thing to say the right things and it’s another to be able to back up those words with some kind of validity when it comes to sustainable agriculture. I also hoped that having validation regarding our growing methods, among other things, would open new opportunities to expand our business. Food Alliance specifically was a third party certification that could not only provide this, but also support our claims in regards to employee relations and wildlife conservation. Also, Food Alliance certification appealed to me because the guidelines were challenging and the more challenging these guidelines are, the more worthwhile the certification.”

PASA Executive Director Brian Snyder said, “We are excited to have Three Springs Fruit Farm to be one of first farm operations to receive Food Alliance certification in the Mid-Atlantic. The Wenk family has shown dedication to being good stewards of the land, and also a strong commitment to consumer education. They surely will be great ambassadors of the Food Alliance label.”

Farming on 350 acres, the majority of their farm is planted in apples. Three Springs Fruit Farm is committed to bringing the finest quality produce to all of their customers and to being good environmental stewards of their land.

Their fruit can be found at Kimberton Whole Foods locations, The FruitGuys, Greensgrow Farms, Weaver’s Way Coop, Mariposa Coop, Sue’s Produce, Milk and Honey Market, Betty’s Speakeasy, Green Aisle Grocery, Fair Food Farmstand in the Reading Terminal Market, Pumpkin Market, Atwaters and Garryowen Irish Pub.

To learn more about Three Springs Fruit Farm visit www.threespringsfruitfarm.com.

Ayrshire Farm

Ayrshire Farm, based in Upperville, VA, perpetuates a long-standing rural heritage, stemming from Scottish immigrants who settled the land in the early 1800s. The grand stables and stunning mansion house were built in the early 1900s. The land base of the original holdings has waxed and waned over the years, and the current farm consists of 800 acres.

Sandy Lerner, co-founder of Cisco Systems, purchased Ayrshire Farm from descendents of the Buchanan family in 1996. Since that time, the unused and fallowing farm has been reinvigorated and restored. It is now a working manor farm, mindful of the past heritage and with an eye to the future. Ayrshire Farm is certified organic with a focus on rare and endangered breeds of livestock as well as on heirloom fruits and vegetables.

The Farm has goals to move the crop and livestock production toward self-sufficiency and profitability. There is a commitment to achieving these goals using humane, organic, and sustainable farming methods, preserving genetically viable herds of the various rare breeds, and contributing to seed pools for heirloom plants.

Mimi Stein, Ayrshire's Compliance Officer, noted, "Food Alliance Certification was another way to convey that we are dedicated to sustainable agriculture methods. We participate in other certification programs (i.e. USDA Organic, Certified Humane), and we saw this as a way to enhance our marketing profile."

Ayrshire is currently using the Food Alliance Certification seal on their bratwurst. Stein continued, "We chose to use the bratwurst as a test case to see how sales may be affected using the new Food Alliance seal." The bratwurst is currently available in the Washington DC and Maryland area at My Organic Markets and also at Ayrshire's Home Farm Store.

When asked what advice she would offer to others interested in certification she said, "Be patient. The inspection and paperwork takes some time, but we are supportive of Food Alliance expanding their coverage to the East Coast and hope more farms will participate."

Food Alliance Certification is just another step in the Farm's mission "to farm sustainably and profitably, promoting the benefits of locally produced, humanely raised meats and organic produce to the consumer, our community, and our children through education, outreach and example."

To learn more about Ayrshire Farm visit www.ayrshirefarm.com.

Katchkie Farm

Katchkie Farm, located at the upper end of the Hudson Valley, in Kinderhook, NY, is a unique venture – a "farm from scratch" according to Bob Walker, the farm manager, who transformed the never before farmed property and built the essential infrastructure.

Owned by the New York City based catering company Great Performances, the farm represents a commitment to the celebration of local food while concurrently supporting sustainable agriculture and good stewardship practices. The sixty-acre farm, also certified organic, produced its first harvest in 2007. In addition to Bob Walker, the farm staff consists of two, plus part time harvest crews.

Katchkie Farm supplies Great Performances with fresh produce for special events. It also supports a CSA in NY as well as two farmers markets in New York City and one in local Kinderhook. In addition to the fresh produce and occasional egg, the farm produces a range of value added products including Katchkie Ketchup, Thunder Pickles, and the Katchkie Farm Bob-A-Que Sauce.

Currently Food Alliance has certified the market garden/CSA and the chicken eggs. The process is underway to certify the kitchens at Great Performance in addition to the value added products.

According to Bob Walker, “We wanted to do the certification because we have so much exposure in so many areas” which allows them to spread the word to a wide and varied audience. “People want to know that their food is coming from someplace clean” and he feels that Food Alliance certification addresses this component of production and management.

Mr. Walker found the certification criteria made sense and that the inspection, while thorough, was not as difficult or complicated as was his first organic inspection. “It’s a different kind of inspection because it looks at the bigger picture. Organic standards don’t care how you treat your workers or if you are clean. Food Alliance standards do.” The farm also liked the idea of having a private organization involved in the certification rather than a government entity.

Katchkie Farm is also home to the Sylvania Center, an educational non-profit that introduces at risk and needy children to the pleasures and benefits of healthful foods through farm visits, hands on planting and harvesting experiences and cooking workshops. The Farm also contributes 5% of the annual harvest to anti-hunger organizations such as the Hudson Valley Food Bank and City Harvest.

To learn more about Katchkie Farm, visit <http://katchkiefarm.com/>.

PASA is excited to be working with these producers and continuing to expand Food Alliance Certification in the Mid-Atlantic region. Updates about our efforts are available on the PASA website, and will also appear in this newsletter. For more information about this program, please contact certification@pasafarming.org or call 814-349-9856.