

Women, Food, and Agriculture Network <http://www.wfan.org/>

An Interview with Pam of Twin Oaks

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What is your main work at Twin Oaks?

I manage our garden program. Our goal is to provide as much of the vegetables and fruit for the community as we can, for as much of the year as possible. We aim to provide a wide range of fresh produce and also some to be processed for off-season use. My job includes training lots of people in organic gardening.

How did you acquire your gardening/farming skills?

I've learned by a "hands-on" process. I do a lot of reading, and I talk with other growers. I have grown food for 32 years, in England and America.

What makes you continue to choose to do this work?

I enjoy planting seeds and watching them grow, cultivating plants, and harvesting food. I also value local, fresh food for myself and for my community. I think it's important to be part of a movement that reduces the number of miles that food travels, and reduces the amount of chemical pollution used.

How does your work as a gardener/farmer interact with your life in an intentional community?

It is because we share all the work at Twin Oaks that I'm able to do this as my full-time work. I can rely on other people to take care of other tasks (earning money, making meals, etc.), so that I can focus on producing the food. I don't need to market it, which is one aspect of being a grower I don't enjoy, so I get to do the parts I do enjoy.

You've organized several seed-saving workshops. How was that experience?

I enjoyed meeting other people who were growing seeds. I found the movement to have more small-scale seed production that was focussed on crops that grow well specifically under organic cultivation, which is very important to me. For several years, I've also been the coordinator for the Central Virginia chapter of the Virginia Association for Biological Farming. I like that both of those jobs help bring together people who work in sustainable agriculture.

What are your hopes for women and food?

I would like enough of both! (laughs) I have noticed and appreciated a tendency to take women more seriously as farmers, and I hope to see that continue and flourish. I hope to see women fully represented at conferences and panels and in books about farming. I'd like to see more women in jobs at the USDA and the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and in government bodies related to agriculture that make grants and give funds. I think that when it's mostly men in those jobs, most of the funds end up going to men.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

I would like to encourage women who are interested in agriculture to get involved and not be intimidated. I'd like women to know that tractors and implements can be used as much by women as by men, and that information about agriculture is easier to access thanks to the internet than it used to be, so you can make up for a lack of formal agricultural training, if you're determined.