

The Fields

When Robyn and Arlo arrived at Olala Farms in 1974, the land was heavily damaged by the use of its previous owners. Even though there is southern exposure and spring water, the many years of cattle and sheep ranching had left the soil in a bad condition. Because other solutions were too expensive, Arlo planted over a hundred fruit trees "practicing natural farming methods taught by Japanese Farmer Masanobu Fukuoka" (Petersen 2016) that aimed at healing the soil and breaking the wind. It was a success and Arlo has been using organic practices ever since. There are still about seven acres of those fruit trees left on the property, many are still producing heavily: apples, pears, plums, apricots, prunes, peaches, persimmons, grapes, figs, chestnuts and walnuts among others.

In the beginning, they went to local growers markets in Nevada City and Grass Valley, along with friend and fellow farmer Rodger Rawlings, and sold whatever they could: vegetables and fruit, medicinal plants, native herbs that Robyn harvested, but also but also the medicinal products such as salves and lotions she made (cf. Bess 2013). Often they shared or traded produce and meat with other farmers from the area. Also, the kids had to help out with farming as well, Aero remembers a little chicken house that was too small for adults to enter, so he and his siblings took turns cleaning it.

The farm reached peak production in the late 1980s / early 1990s. There were a number of people living in tipis or trailers on the property, such as farmhands, interns, WWOOFers and others. Arlo and his helpers grew tomatoes, cucumbers, different kinds of squash, corn, soy beans, kitchen and medicinal herbs, all kinds of fruit and chestnuts that have been their biggest cash crop. Over the years there were also different kinds of farm animals around: cows, chickens, turkeys, rabbits, pigs, goats, horses and a donkey, and for a short period of time Robyn was even thinking about growing frogs, but ultimately decided against it. At that time, they started selling to grocery stores and wholesalers such as the all organic Mother Truckers.

By the mid-1990s, Aero and Kara thought about taking over the farm and lived in tipis on the property for a while, before Aero started building his cabin. However, farm life did not work out with both of them having jobs in the city, and being too dependent on the farm house for food and showers. For a number of years, it was unclear what was going to happen once Arlo and Robyn retired. For a long time they had this vision that all of their children would live on the property and make use of it, but, how live goes, Orb lives in

Washington with his family and has a successful job, thus having no intention of working the land like Aero and Zeno who both have successful arborist businesses and families and therefore have no interest in taking over. Because of this uncertain future, Ana decided to move back to the family farm when her partner Jeremy showed interest in taking over the farm - and they have been doing a great job ever since.

Even though Arlo had been difficult to work with, as we heard from a number of people we talked to, he was ready to retire and to pass his knowledge on to someone. According to Ana, Arlo treated Jeremy differently than other people he used to work with, being grateful for Jeremy's interest in learning how to farm the land. With the help of Arlo and Rodger, Jeremy learned everything he needed to know about the land and the plants. Today, Jeremy works in the fields and Ana takes care of the paperwork. They sell to "restaurants like Peterson's Corner, Ridge Stop Café, Three Forks Bakery and Brewing Company, and also to locally-owned grocery stores like BriarPatch Co-op, Natural Selection and SPD." (Petersen 2016). Arlo is very happy they took over: "They're doing fantastic", he told us in the driveway.

Ever since Ana and Jeremy's son Aksel was born in 2012, living on the farm makes even more sense to the little family: "In a lot of ways it was an ideal up-bringing, a beautiful place, that's why I came back, a wonderful place, with something about it", Ana told us. Even though it's a beautiful place that helps create the lifestyle they like, "farming is not profitable at all, especially not on the small scale. The only reason we can do this is because I have a good job." For the future, Ana hopes to keep her job as Executive Director at FREED Center for Independent Living for some time and then to find a niche, allowing the family to live off the land, just like her parents did: "My parents were very innovative, forward thinking, always ahead of their time, having the courage to have a dream and live that dream is pretty cool, having the vision of buying a property and live off the land, they are kind of trendsetters without knowing it, they care about their community and are giving back, trying to make the community and the world a better place, they were involved in some many things in their community and they always got involved when they didn't like something, so they been kind of role models...".

Reference:

- Bess, Patti. 2013. "Test of time". In: The Union. Accessed 08.06.2017.
Petersen, Laura. 2016. "A Vision realized". In: The Union. Accessed 08.06.2017.