

Thundering Hooves – Winner of the 2005 Vim Wright Stewardship Award

Good Stewardship Practices

Conventional wheat and commodity crop growers until 1994, the Huesby's have transformed their operation into a successful livestock farm using only natural production methods to raise grass-fed beef, free range chickens, turkey, lamb, pork, and meat goats. The farm consists of 399 irrigated acres, 225 are owned and 174 are leased from the PCC Farmland Fund. All livestock at Thundering Hooves are pasture ranged (no feedlots), leading to more contented animals and healthier meats. The Huesby's use no hormones, avoid antibiotics, and pasture their animals on certified organic land that has been chemical-free since 1995. Livestock are kept on growing pastures their entire lives, receiving no grain, spending no time in feedlots or confinement facilities. The Huesby farm uses a well-managed, high intensity rotational grazing system and establishes perennial grasses and alfalfa to outcompete the weeds.

Thundering Hooves is also breeding and incubating the only known strain of Wishard's Unimproved Standard Bronze turkeys, a unique old breed of turkey that had been genetically isolated by Wishard Poultry for 50 years and still carries many of the natural characteristics of its wild cousins, the kind of turkey consumed by the pilgrims and Native Americans at the "first thanksgiving". The Huesby's saved the Wishard strain from extinction three years ago now, but believe that propagating these turkeys remains a vital task as a form of animal stewardship that should not be overlooked or taken for granted. A bird with brains and feathers, as Joel likes to point out, the Standard Bronze is in demand for its robust turkey flavor resulting from a bird that prefers to forage more than lounge at the feed trough. The Huesbys also raise a larger, more conventional turkey, the Broad Breasted Bronze.

Savvy Marketing

The Huesby's have implemented a creative and multi-faceted marketing program, employing the motto: You know your dentist, you know your doctor, but do you know your farmer? They have created and manage a state of the art website through which they not only sell their meat but also tell their story and educate visitors about sustainable farming.

Thundering Hooves sells most of their meat at Seattle and Walla farmers markets, at their butcher shop retail counter in Walla Walla, and by filling custom orders online (www.thunderinghooves.net) and via telephone (1-866-350-9400) and delivering direct to customers at drop-off points in Seattle and Bellevue. Several of the finest restaurants in increasingly popular wine-touring destination of Walla Walla serve their meats, including the Whitehouse-Crawford, Creektown Café, Grapefields, and the Marc.

Thundering Hooves now owns a historic butcher shop/processing operation with a storefront in Walla Walla, providing more vertical integration of their operation as well as more opportunities to interact with the public.

Leadership and Educating the Public

The Huesby's are actively engaged with communities across the state and beyond, speaking at countless civic and church meetings, conferences and other venues about their stewardship values and practices. Joel Huesby sits on numerous boards including Tilth Producers, the Walla Walla Farmers Market, the Safe Food Safe Work organization in Walla Walla. Joel is also the agricultural advisor for the Solid Waste Advisory Committee in Walla Walla and serves on the Center for Sustaining Agriculture and Natural Resources Organic Action Team and the WSDA Small Farms and Direct Marketing Board this fall. They have also opened their farm to visitors and have taught classes from grade school to college on site.

Vision

The Huesby's have developed a unique vision and operating philosophy that draws on but is not limited to basic good stewardship. For instance, they see themselves as "sunlight harvesters," managing

grass and livestock to capture the sun's energy in a way that benefits people. They believe that the distance from 'farm to fork' should be dramatically less than the 1,500 miles average food products travel from where they are produced to where they are consumed. And they are committed to 'human-scale' business, rather than a factory-type model. The muscle is the most efficient engine ever created in terms of energy coming in compared to work going out. "So," they say, "we use ours."

Farm Contact: Thundering Hooves, 2021 Isaacs Ave., Walla Walla, WA 99362, www.thunderinghooves.net, Home: 509-529-2218; office: 509-526-0944, email: ichuesby@bmi.net

Runner Up and Finalists

Nash's Organic Produce – 2005 Runner Up for the Vim Wright Stewardship Award

Nash Huber has farmed the Dungeness Delta for over 25 years, using organic growing methods. Today, Nash and his crew farm nearly 400 acres, and provide the region with nearly 100 different varieties of healthful and nutritious fruit and vegetables. Nash's passion goes beyond providing healthful and nutritious produce. His leadership and care have been instrumental in saving hundreds of acres of farmland from development. Since 1999, more than 200 acres of prime farmland have been protected. "I'm getting up there in years, states Nash. We have to work hard to make sure this land is preserved, and there is an opportunity for the next generation of farmers."

Farm contact info: Nash's Organic Produce, 1865 E. Anderson Rd., Sequim, WA 98382, (360) 681-7458, www.nashsproduce.com

BelleWood Acres – Finalist – 2005 Vim Wright Stewardship Award

In 1996, John and Dorie Belisle came to Whatcom County with the goal of growing the county's "best apples in the best way possible." Today they have 24,000 of Jonagold and Honeycrisp apple trees in a vibrant orchard that is Food Alliance and Salmon Safe certified. John and Dorie's passion goes beyond providing the best tasting apples in Whatcom County. They are committed to treating their staff, trees, land, watercourses, and wildlife with the greatest of care and respect. In 2001 they were selected as the Whatcom County Conservation District's Cooperators of the Year. They are also committed to the community. John serves on the Whatcom County Planning Commission, the Whatcom Agriculture Preservation Committee, and Whatcom Farm Friends. Dorie is Project Manager for the Ten Mile Creek Watershed Project.

Farm contact info: Bellewood Acres, 231 Ten Mile Road, Lynden, WA 98264, 360-398-9187 EMAIL: jdbelisle@hotmail.com or doriebelisle@yahoo.com, www.bellewoodapples.com

Mother Flight Farm – 2005 Finalist, Vim Wright Stewardship Award

Bordered by the South Fork of the Skagit River and Kikialus Slough, Mother Flight Farm grows certified organic crops in the luscious soil of the Skagit River Delta. Glen and Charlotte Johnson have provided positive stewardship of this land for nearly 20 years, nurturing a diverse crop of over 50 varieties of fruits and vegetables, from burdock to bamboo, and raspberries to rhubarb. Mother Flight Farm grows over 50 varieties of vegetables and fruits including a full line of salad greens, braising and steaming greens, beets, burdock root, garlic, green beans, radishes, summer squash, winter squash, potatoes, apples, berries, pears, and much, much more. Mother Flight Farm is certified organic by the Washington State Department of Agriculture, and certified Salmon Safe by the Stewardship Partners.

Farm contact info: Mother Flight Farm, Glen and Charlotte Johnson, 20482 Skagit City Road, Mt Vernon, WA 98273, (360) 445-3501, EMAIL: johnson@ncia.com

For more info on the award: Jeff Voltz 206-622-1340, Farming & the Environment, or Jen Lamson, 206-985-7481 or Kristin Hyde, 206-491-0773, Good Food Strategies.