

Windrose Farm



East of Paso Robles, near the tiny town of Creston, Bill and Barbara Spencer protect an ideal that we could all stand to learn from. It's one that a lot of people tout, but that few truly adhere to: Eat seasonal and eat local. These are two people you will never find in the grocery store buying a melon from Chile in January.

On approximately 50 acres, the Spencers grow only organic crops—roughly 12 acres in vegetable rotation, six in apples and other stone fruits, and five in sheep pasture. Perhaps best known for their extraordinary heirloom tomatoes, they also grow potatoes, onions, garlic, green and dry beans, peppers, eggplant, winter squash, carrots, turnips, beets, cucumbers, melons, and many varieties of greens. Barbara Spencer calls this “roots, fruits, and greens.”

Windrose Farm has been registered as an organic farm with the State of California since 1993 and certified with C.C.O.F. since August 1999. Asked what their favorite thing about farming is, their response is related to their completely organic program. “By luck and design, we are in a very ideal micro-climate, and so the slow natural balancing of all things we do and observe is our ultimate reward,” says Bill Spencer.

The Spencers came to farming in a bit of a circuitous route. Though young Bill sold eggs as an eight-year-old to buy his first 10-speed bicycle, his adult career was in real estate. Barbara's grandparents

were Pennsylvania farmers, but she was a studio musician in Los Angeles. Today, they are farmers through and through, finding the ultimate satisfaction in the fulfilling act of growing delicious and healthy food. “I love hilling potatoes, being in the moment, in the fields,” says Bill Spencer.

Available at retail through Nature's Touch in Templeton, the Santa Barbara Farmer's Market on Saturdays, and, in the near future, through their farmstand, you have probably most often enjoyed their produce when dining at Central Coast restaurants, including Big Sky and The Park in San Luis Obispo, Villa Creek and Artisan in Paso Robles, and Bouchon and Hungry Cat in Santa Barbara.

When asked to recommend a few heirloom tomatoes to try over the summer, they said, “Though it depends on what you're going to do with them, here goes: Black Plum, Pineapple, Cherokee Purple, Persimmon, Japanese Black, Pruden's Purple, Aunt Ruby's German Green, Black Pineapple, to name a few.”

From their need to grow their own heirloom tomato plants for the field, the Spencers began a nursery program that now offers an extensive line of tomatoes, as well as peppers and other vegetables, to the public. This is good news since, as they point out, a “true vine-ripened tomato eaten right off the vine is one of the great joys in farming and in life.” www.windrosefarm.org