

In November 2017, I watched from two round tables over as some vague friends and even more vague acquaintances leaned in to hear each other's rushed and slightly hushed voices at the annual Central Rivers Farmshed Farmer Tribute Dinner. I was curious, but I guess not enough to interrupt; I carried on with my frivolous evening of good food and beer. It was my third year attending the dinner, and the following year (2018) I found myself around one of those very same round tables with those very same mysteriously whispering people...but this time we were laughing raucously together as good friends and colleagues.

Around the time of that dinner in 2017 the conversation had officially started (though it had informally taken place long before then). By December we'd had our first meeting, in January we looked at some land, by March the Farm Service Agency approved our loan, and in April of 2018 we closed on 35 acres in Custer, Wisconsin.

Enter: Rising Sand Organics Cooperative Farm

It wasn't random; we all had previous ties, some a little loose, but shared a friendship with one individual that (from my perspective) ultimately brought us all together. After the first meeting, I admit to some skepticism but quickly realized that this group of people was unlike any other. Now I feel lucky to call them my friends and co-owners. I am a better person for what I've learned alongside them so far and that will undoubtedly continue.

We broke ground in the tough, cold, Wisconsin spring but by August we had almost 2 acres of lush, nutrient dense, organic vegetables on our new property. In a sense much of it had already been sold, to our 55 CSA families, who paid months in advance to help us cover the very late 2017 and very early 2018 season costs. Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a farming model that has become more recognized recently, allowing small farmers the opportunity to work closely with those for whom they grow, and creating accessibility to necessary funds that just isn't otherwise there.

It was a season of new things for me. While I'd worked on a number of small CSA farms before I had never been part of an entire growing season: from the cold but increasingly warmer and brighter spring days, through the unpredictable summer, and then to the cold and increasingly colder (and darker) winter days. And here I am again, ready to jump at the flicker of a lingering sun that indicates the lengthening of days and the notion that life will once again rise from the soil, no matter how cold and frozen it was all winter. "

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COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE to ORGANICS COLLECTION

*one YPs journey from waste management to organic farming and
back again*



Rising Sand Organics Member-Owners. Back row: Danny Werachowski, Corrina Wilson, Fanni Bartnik, Polly Dalton, Kelly Adlington, Monica Endres. Front row: Daniel McDowell, Logan Brice, Lee Bartnik, Oren Jakobson

Furthermore, I'd never been an owner before. My newfound sense of responsibility has redefined what the very word even means, in addition to helping me uncover an overwhelming sense of purpose. I will be forever grateful to all my co-owners for allowing me (and everyone) the space to pursue our own passions. In my case that would appear to be curbside diversion of organic waste from the landfill.

We are currently picking up from 57 residences and 5 businesses, totaling roughly 50 5-gallon buckets every week depending on the rotation. The weekly haul typically ranges between 500 and 700 pounds but we have collected as much as 1,200 pounds. The most common type of subscription is the residential every-other-week option, for \$11.50/month (via Paypal).

We also supply a free drop site one day a week in town for folks who don't want to pay, but will arrange for them to help out once a month if they'd like to volunteer instead. Those who pay for the service (whether with cash or help) get a 5-gallon bucket fitted with a screw-top lid and on their pick up day we swap it out for an empty one. In the beginning I used my personal vehicle ('08 Dodge Grand Caravan), then switched to the farm van (1992 Ford E250), then recently purchased a 1990 Ford F350, converted manual. The flat bed is great for our current capacity of buckets but will just get better as we start picking up from larger food waste generators.

What I think is really unique about this is the collective effort that made it happen. As beginning farmers and brand new land owners, we didn't kid ourselves into thinking we could also become commercial composters in the same year. We're working with another local farm, Whitefeather Organics, who has composted on a larger scale for years. We also teamed up with Farmshed (the same nonprofit I mentioned in the beginning) to have an in-town site to rendezvous, wash buckets, and store a few things.

As it always has been, UWSP is also a partner in this effort. The Soil and Waste Department in the College of Natural Resources has provided us endless opportunities to work and learn with students; I'm lucky to have Susanna Baker, Rising Sand's Compost Intern and UWSP waste major, with me every week to run the route together. Additionally, in April we launched a Gofundme campaign with a goal of \$1,000. 36 people donated and they made up the bulk of our initial customer base (which totaled about 15 in July). Thanks to these contributors, especially the extremely generous ones—the City of Stevens Point and Rob Greenfield—we surpassed our goal by about \$100. Thus, we were not only supported by likeminded businesses and organizations, but also our community.

While it was a collaboration between people and resources that made this possible, the collaboration between fields of study is also fascinating.

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For me, waste and recycling was an interest far before local and organic food was. It was my desire to minimize waste that led me to the farmers market, where food is sold without packaging and nobody will fight you on it. The next few years brought new perspectives, learning that how we live our lives and subsequently *what we waste* is complexly related to the health of our environment. Simultaneously I began to truly grasp that agriculture is dramatically changing the quality, availability, and understanding of our natural resources in ways that often feel unstoppable and irreversible. To me these were, and remain today, the most glaring challenges that face our world.

I hung in limbo for a while in college, unsure of which direction my path was to take: waste and resource management or food and agriculture? Where could I have the most impact? In the end it seems that waste brought me to food which has brought me back to waste...and now I find myself hovering between the two as if they are the same effort.

I recently reminisced with a fellow waster about how the major at UWSP has changed in the last five years. In my program there were about 60 students, but I recall being one of only two women who regularly attended Waste Management Society meetings, often working and laughing in the shadows of large, plaid, boisterous men on the fast track to

wastewater treatment plants and landfills (let it be known that I fondly remember these fellas, their friendly-giant qualities, and the humor they brought with them everywhere). While it was mostly men, there still weren't that many of them. Now when I walk into a Waste Management Society meeting, the room is filled and the demographic has evolved.

The study has grown, just like the industry, and we must grow our conscience in tandem with them. If not, the world and its constant change will outrun us and we will be forever behind. The issues we see today are calling for alternatives: alternative waste and resource management; alternative forms of organizing; alternative attitudes about life, and the natural resources on which that life hinges. Growing organic vegetables and picking up food waste curbside may seem like entirely different things but they have settled into my life like unequivocally related friends.

My recent career journey has taught me to be creative and open to collaboration, accepting that the answers to problems we've never had before may just not yet exist. The only way we're going to arrive at those answers is by continuing to explore the ways by which we can collaborate and cooperate. After all none of us, nor our professions, are mutually exclusive...in fact, it happens to be quite the opposite.

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About the Author: Kelly Adlington graduated from UWSP with a BS in waste management in May of 2017. She is a member-owner of Rising Sand, growing vegetables cooperatively and managing the curbside compost service. She also serves as the Project Coordinator for Recycling Connections, pours beer in the taproom at Central Waters, and hosts a radio show on 90fm--Stevens Point's student-run station--called "The Tuning Fork." **Photos From:** Layne Cozzolino, Rising Sand Organics, and Kelly Adlington.

For more information about Rising Sand Organics contact Kelly at kelly@risingsand.com