COMPACT FARMS TODAY
JOSH VOLK
SLOW HAND FARM
Where My Biases Come From

working as a bike mechanic and racing bikes lead me into mechanical engineering
“5% theory, 95% practice” — Sri K. Pattabhi Jois
Eating a lot and wanting to know how to produce better food - and to do it in a way that was good, clean and fair led me into farming
“Small is beautiful.”  — LEOPOLD KOHE

PART 1
WHY FARM SMALL?
THE BACKSTORY
A double entendre: “ground’s well” to describe the soil from which it all springs forth, and “groundswell,” as in the gathering of force and opinion that drives social and political movements.

IN THE LATE 1990S. Zoë Bradbury and her sister, Abby, tried to start a potato farm on land owned by their mother, Betsey, on the south coast of Oregon, where they grew up. The garlic they planted rotted, so that idea was a bust, but Abby kept at it, starting a salad greens business instead while Zoë found work on farms in other parts of the country. In 2008, Zoë finally returned to Langdon to start a small farm on Betsey’s land. Zoë new farms alongside her sister’s very successful (and still very small) salad greens business and her mother’s complementary greenhouse vegetable production business.

Zoë returned home with visions of farming with horses, developing a CSA, and working with her sister to expand fruit production on the property. Although they have each maintained their own businesses and production systems, they work like a producer cooperative, marketing their produce under one common name, Valley Flora. The trio handle orders, sales, and deliveries collectively and share other resources, such as the tractor, as well.

The three of them try to avoid any overlap in product. Zoë grows the widest diversity of crops and largest production area, concentrating on a broad variety of main-season vegetables, roots, bunching greens, u-pick berries, and cut flowers. Abby continues with salad greens in the summer. Betsey grows tomatoes, peppers, and other high-value greenhouse crops in the summer, plus salad greens in tunnels in the winter.
THE BASICS
Groundswell Farm is a mixed power farm, using both tractors and horse power. It’s located on the south coast of Oregon, just outside the tiny town of Langlois, and sells in communities up and down the coast in an area with very few farms marketing produce directly to consumers. The farm delivers as far south as Gold Beach and into Core Bay to the north, each about 40 miles away.
Groundswell Farm cultivates about 4 acres of Betsy’s much larger property. Mauii, the farm’s Belgian draft horse, is pastured on an adjoining property. Zoë lives just a few miles away in the small town of Langlois with her husband and two young daughters. Betsy lives on the farm, growing her produce in hoop houses adjoining the fields she leases to Zoë and Abby.

CUSTOMERS AND MARKETS
All of Groundswell’s produce is sold under the Valley Flora name, along with Abby’s and Betsy’s produce. Groundswell Farm produces 120 CSA shares for families. Through partnerships with other businesses, Zoë also offers add-ons to the shares — salad from her sister’s operation, eggs from a neighboring farm, and fresh tomatoes from a local restaurant. Groundswell also sells produce to more than a dozen restaurants and stores in the same area.

LABOR
Zoë runs her operation with a full-time year-round foreman, Roberts, who has been with the farm for 10 years. Zoë is learning how to run the farm while also managing a restaurant. She’s studying business and management at Western Oregon University and hopes to bring additional marketing skills to her farm in the future.

GROUNDSWELL FARM HARVEST WINDOWS

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1. Tool storage and farmland
2. Berries
3. Annual row crops (220' beds)
4. Perennialized space
5. 85' bed
6. The Panhandle
7. Packing shed
8. Betsy's tunnels
9. Propagation house
10. Tunnel
11. Orchard (includes grapes and kiwis)
12. The New Nine
THE BACKSTORY
Danny was forced to come up with a name to get his tax ID number so he could open a bank account for his business. He was then raising meat birds and vegetables, so he thought the name fit with a well-rounded meal—that, and he was busy with a lot of everything at the time, and still is.

Danny started working on farms in 2000 while still in college. He worked for different CSA farms, mostly in the Northwest, before starting a small garlic farm with a friend on a half-acre, selling at farmers’ markets and to restaurants. After a couple of years growing garlic, he took a break and worked as a carpenter doing remodeling work, building his skills.

In 2007, he returned to farm work, eventually moving back to the Northwest where he really saw and began to understand the interesting crops and varieties he could grow there in the winter. A few years later, he and his wife, Michelle, bought a mobile home and put it on her parents’ land, where she grew up in Ridgefield, Washington, just north of Portland, Oregon. During his first two years on that land, Danny farmed only part-time—he was too busy working on their house and managing another farm for a Portland restaurant to sell anything during the summer from his own place. The land was also very soggy in the spring, which led him to offer a winter-only CSA.
THE BASICS
Full Plate Farm produces mixed vegetables for a winter CSA season that goes from November through March. April is a bit of an off month for the farm with no harvest, and planting doesn’t start until the beginning of May. Starting with 12 members, the CSA nearly doubled its membership every year for the first four years. It is now up to 90 members. The winter CSA schedule spreads out the work over the year more evenly and leaves Danny more time to spend with his family. In the summer, he plants, waters, and cultivates; in the winter, he harvests, washes, packs, and delivers.

Michelle’s parents live on the same property and own the land. The property is 10 acres, with about 5 acres of forest and 5 acres of open fields. Michelle and her parents are an important part of the farm, but aren’t directly involved in the day-to-day operations. Michelle is an artist and created the inspired “Farm Seeks Artist” project, which invites local artists to create art in conjunction with the farm. One of the projects was a beautiful illustrated journal that followed the 2013 season of the farm. Michelle’s father, Russ, owns and runs a transmission shop and is the farm’s resident mechanic, rebuilding motors and fabricating parts to repair implements.

CUSTOMERS AND MARKETS
The farm has 90 CSA members in the Portland, Vancouver area. There are two sites for a market-style CSA pickup, where all of the produce is field and people pack their own bags. There are five other pickup sites where pre-packed CSA shares in boxes will go to members to pick up.

Some years, when he foresees a surplus, Danny sells to stores or to restaurants in January or February.

LABOR
During the summer, Danny hires one part-time worker to work with him two to three days a week. For the harvest season, there are a handful of CSA members who work to trade for their shares. Coming to the farm on the breezy, hot days and adding about four extra pairs of hands.

Danny works roughly half to three-quarter-time on average, spending the rest of his time looking after his three young children. He works 8 a.m. to 4-30 for workshops, saving office work and irrigation moving for nighttime, but from 6:30 to 8 a.m., he makes sure he spends time with his family.

WATER
There’s a well on the property that serves both houses and the farm fields. There’s no permanent distribution for the irrigation system, as a 450-foot hose works to get water to the fields from the well. The well has a Cycle Stop valve on it to improve the life of the pump and its efficiency.
CULLY NEIGHBORHOOD FARM

THE BACKSTORY
After considering a bevy of more outrageous names, Matt very simply named the farm for the neighborhood in Portland, Oregon, where it sits.

CULLY NEIGHBORHOOD FARM was started in 2010 by two friends, Michael Tevin and Matt Gordon, who wanted to start a small farm but weren’t ready to leave Portland. The land is owned by a neighborhood church. Michael passed by at one point, noticed the open land, did the research, and found the owner was the adjoining Trinity Lutheran Church and School. After attending council meetings at the church and talking to church leaders, he wrote up a proposal for a lease arrangement.

The agreement lets the farm operate on the land in exchange for delivering some excess produce to the church’s food pantry and maintaining the site. In the first year, they farmed only ½ acre and sold at a small neighborhood farmers’ market. In their second year, they started a garden education program for the church’s K-8 school children called the Cully Young Farmers Project, funded by a grant from the Soil and Water Conservation District. After two seasons Michael moved to California but Matt has continued the farm, slowly growing into the space and experimenting with various markets.

Education wasn’t a part of the farmers’ initial vision of the farm, but it fit well with the site and their desire to give back to the community. The project dovetails nicely with their original intent to have a little urban farm close to where they live and demonstrate a productive use of vacant land in a neighborhood with a lot of large lots and yards.

The description Matt follows is a preseasonal of the 2014 season. Systems-the welcoming mat of the land-is all about tending the soil and keeping it fertile.

Matt Gordon

APRIL PRODUCTION
0.5 ac

LOCATION
Urban – Portland, Oregon

CROPS
Mixed vegetables

MARKETS
CSA, restaurants

YEAR STARTED
2010
THE BASICS

Cully Neighborhood Farm has taken an urban lot at the back of a church property and turned it into a productive vegetable farm that feeds the community and provides space for local K-8 schoolchildren to learn about nutrition, plants, gardening, farming, and where food comes from.

One corner of the property is the children's garden, which is run separately but supported by the farm. The mostly grant-funded Cully Young Farmers Project uses the children's garden for food programming but all the participants take a full farm tour at some point during the season. The kids that participate are from the neighboring Trinity Lutheran School. Each class visits the garden about once a week during the spring and fall. The hope is that the project will expand to serve more neighborhood children during the summer.

In 2014, Matt ran the production part of the farm solo as his full-time job, after several years of splitting his time between multiple farms and music gigs.

CUSTOMERS AND MARKETS

In 2014, Cully Neighborhood Farm grew produce for 40 CSA members and also sold to a handful of neighborhood restaurants and a local juice company.

LABOR

To make it all work, Matt puts in about 40 hours a week during most of the season and about half of that December through February. From June through August, he employs an apprentice.
“In anything at all, perfection is finally attained not when there is no longer anything to add, but when there is no longer anything to take away, when a body has been stripped down to its nakedness.”

— ANTOINE DE SAINT-EXUPÉRY
“The ultimate goal of farming is not the growing of crops, but the cultivation and perfection of human beings.”

—MASANOBUS FUKUOKA

SMALL PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

WHEN I MET WITH...