



“I’m Jane Bush. I’m the Manager of Grazing Fields Cooperative, and owner of AppleSchram Orchard.

Farming started as a childhood thing, really. We’d come up here to my uncle’s farm in Charlotte as a family and, you know, there were just so many good memories. That’s where the ‘Schram’ in AppleSchram comes from - the family name. I bought this farm from my aunt and uncle in 1987, which is just so hard to believe... I had been working for a printing company, a financial printer – we printed checks and bank notes and stuff like that. So, the day after my profit-sharing matured, I quit the job and I used that money as a down-payment on the farm. It was an operating apple orchard farm, and at the age of 27, I had no idea what the heck I was doing.

So, my first year’s harvest I sold to Cascadian Farms. It was headquartered in Washington, but they would process apples over here in Paw Paw. I was picking these apples – it was wild – picking them in single bushels. Man, I don’t know how I did it. Every morning when I would wake up, my arms were numb. We had to fill a bulk, semi-trailer with apples, and we did it one bushel at a time. It took us all day, but we actually did it! I was so naïve, and I just thought, there has to be a better way to do this. The following year I started the organic production methods. Then I discovered I could do apple cider, applesauce, and apple butter.

Grazing Fields Cooperative started in ’97. We just really got pulled into the market – which is where you want to be, you know? You don’t want to always be pushing. So, the People’s Food Co-op in Ann Arbor started to say, ‘Hey, do you know anyone up there that’s raising eggs? We could really use some nice, brown, farm-fresh eggs.’ I had some Amish farmers working with me to make the apple butter, so we jumped at the idea of eggs. Boy was it a mess in the beginning; we really needed some stability. But then we got a \$20,000 start-up grant from the Kellogg Foundation to create that structure and stability. Things just really started to take off after that.

Grazing Fields Cooperative basically operates the same way now as it did then – just a bigger truck. It can be really difficult to bring everyone together to make a decision, but we have a democratic process and a delivery contract that says how you're going to raise the eggs and how much you're going to produce. Right now, we have seven farmers supplying eggs to the co-op, and we move about 400 cases of eggs a week. At 15 dozen per case, we're moving 6,000 dozen, or 72,000 eggs each week. Each individual farm is now Certified Humane, which led to people becoming better managers of their farm, and therefore, making the co-op more profitable. Pork is also a part of Grazing Fields Cooperative, all of which comes from Larry Curtiss. We have about 70 retail stores we deliver to, directly; all in Michigan.

I first got involved in Allen Neighborhood Center back in 2004 when the Allen Farmers Market first started. I was one of the first farmers – that year there were four of us; all women. I'll never forget that first market – we just got ran over by customers. Holly, the market manager, really battled with bureaucracy to get the Allen Farmers Market to be the first to accept EBT. That was way cool. I've also done programming at Allen Neighborhood Center – got a couple of speakers in there like Temple Grandin. And we donate eggs to the BreadBasket Food Pantry.

We also supply eggs and pork to Veggie Box, ANC's multi-farm CSA. Veggie Box is really nice, especially when it's ramped up in the summer and fall with 300 members – it's matured so much. I've had a lot of people come up to me during the market and tell me they got introduced to our product through that program. Now that's good cross-marketing.

ANC is a great incubator for small businesses and just does so much programming – it offers so much neighborhood support and has done so much around health; Veggie Box keeps growing; it's so innovative and has been this whole time. I mean, after all these years, I still don't think I'll ever wrap my mind around all that they do. It's just so stable; it's a sure thing.

As for Grazing Fields Cooperative, I think it's really a model – a model for how to organize small-scale farm production across a region. It's a way to introduce small farmers to new markets, and increase farm income.

Grazing Fields Cooperative and Allen Neighborhood Center have been dancing this complicated dance around the intersection of for-profit farmers and non-profit programming for the last 18 years. And I've got to say, it's a dance that's been danced pretty darn well.”