



"I'm Adam Montri from Ten Hens Farm. I am a vegetable farmer, a dad, a husband, a writer, and a friend.

I went to MSU and graduated with a BA in English, then came back to study Horticulture with the intention of pursuing public gardening. I was taking a required greenhouse production class, and John Biernbaum was the professor for the class at that time. He was building some hoophouses out on a research plot that later became MSU Student Organic Farm (SOF), and he offered that anyone in the class was able to come learn and help build if they were interested in them. That experience quickly shifted everything to vegetable production. It was a great experience to be involved with the early years of the SOF and the planning for the first year of their CSA. Honestly, if the SOF wasn't getting started at that time, I think I would have gone the track of public gardening and might be working at Frederik Meijer Gardens or somewhere similar to that.

My wife, Dru, and I met as undergrads in Horticulture at MSU, and then we went to Penn State together for grad school. After we graduated with our Masters in Horticulture, we WWOOFED, which is Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms. We worked on one farm in Wisconsin, then headed to Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, California, and Oregon. We stayed and worked on vineyards, in animal agriculture, mixed-crops, and the original wood-fired pizza farm. At each location, we asked ourselves, 'What are we going to try and learn here? What are they doing that we would like to, or not like to, do on our own farm someday?' During this time, Dru was accepted to a PhD program at MSU, and at the same time, the Michigan Farmers Market Association (MIFMA) had gotten some funding. So, while she got her degree, she also started MIFMA. After completing her PhD, Dru continued working for MIFMA, eventually transitioned into a position in the MSU College of Agriculture and Natural Resources and now works for Feeding America. Meanwhile, I worked at both Michigan Food and Farming Systems and MSU. My role with MSU was to work with farmers around the country, specifically in Michigan, on building hoophouses, looking at economics, soil management, crop planning, marketing, really just everything across the board. Now I'm farming full-time.

The first year we built a hoophouse right away – we knew we wanted to do that. It was a little more than 3,000 square feet. The following winter, the township connected with Dru about ideas they had for starting a farmers market, and wanted her helping thinking through the planning process. By working with a number of people in the township as well as holding open meetings that were attended by many township residents, we were able to be a part of starting the Bath Township Farmers Market. We now grow mixed vegetables on three acres, in 20,000 square feet of hoophouses, and in one heated greenhouse. Our main markets are: our CSA; Allen Neighborhood Center's Veggie Box; the Bath Farmers Market; an on-farm stand; Dusty's Cellar; and Burcham Hills Retirement Community. So that's where we're at this year, though in the past we've sold to a lot of restaurants, other cooperative CSAs, and a wholesale tomato processor. The farm is changing some this season so that our markets are a lot closer to home than they have been in the past.

We first got involved with Allen Neighborhood Center back in 2006. MIFMA was starting, so Dru worked very closely with Joan right from the get-go. MIFMA has always had access and food security at the heart of its work and ANC was one of only three markets in the state that were accepting SNAP benefits at that time. Understanding the lessons learned as more markets were interested in accepting food assistance benefits was really important. In 2015, we started selling to the Veggie Box program. It was only 16 shares that first season, but we believed that it would grow over time and become a profitable part of our business. Veggie Box is now up to 100 members in the Spring, and 300 in both the Summer and Fall. Plus, we are now able to do crop planning and bidding for it, which helps with the profitability and impact on our farm. As the Veggie Box grew, we were able to grow alongside with it knowing we had a guaranteed market.

What motivates us, what drives us to do the work we do? It's a good question – one we ask ourselves pretty regularly. Most importantly, it's a way for us to be part of our community. Part of it is that although we're small, we're able to preserve some green space. We do it because we enjoy growing food we like to eat. But also, it's a good place for our kids to grow up. I want them to be able to go out and eat things right off the plant, to see how things grow. When their friends come over and they're outside playing and we find them eating tomatoes or in the peas – without romanticizing it too much, it's a good way to grow up.

A lot of the money that comes into our local business goes right back out to other local businesses. It keeps money circulating in our local economy. But I think the bigger reason for supporting our farm is that there is a lot of joy and life in it. If our farm brings 50 people together who would otherwise not come together and they connect, that's substantial. I think small-scale diversified farming has some of those intangible, person-to-person, soft benefits. And that's worth supporting.

At the root of it all, Veggie Box is guaranteed economic income for our farm. If we go to market and it's a rainy day, we won't have as many sales. But Veggie Box is a nice, stable thing. We if we grow the crops we bid on, they are sold. I love interacting with our CSA members, but it's nice to not have to manage and coordinate a whole other CSA to see the benefits. ANC takes on the logistical role of managing a multi-farm CSA and all those member interactions, emails, payments from members and to suppliers, and working with all the farmers – it's a lot of work that our farm doesn't have to do, but can benefit from.

I think because of our long history with ANC, we are in a fortunate and privileged position to truly understand the bigger picture of what all they. We believe in the in the work that happens beyond what we're involved in. Allen Neighborhood Center – it's is an inspiration, a model to others. Their transparency and encouragement says: 'This is what we did, this is how we did it and what we learned, and this is how you might be able to do it too.'