

One in a VerMillion

Meet Grace Freeman

By David Lias

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Grace Freeman serves as the secretary on the board of directors of the Vermillion Area Farmers Market.

I was born and raised in Cincinnati, OH. She and her husband, Harry, a professor from USD, moved to Vermillion 15 years ago. They currently live on 10 acres near Westerville, where Grace devotes her efforts to gardening.

“I have what I would call a large market garden, which anybody in town in probably capable of, although I am probably expanding,” she said. She has an acre field that she likely will devote to the growing of medicinal herbs.

“I focus on spring and fall crops. Those are my specialty. The fun thing about Farmer’s Markets is finding your niche, and I like to do early spring and late fall produce,” Grace said. “The biggest thing that people would be aware of is baby lettuce. We call it a lettuce mix, and those are the most seeds that I plant.”

While not tending her garden, she’s kept busy producing honey. “I’m a beekeeper, and we have plans to transfer my bees this year to Jerry Wilson’s

farm, probably in May. He’s got a small orchard,” she said.

She admits that it’s difficult to trace exactly how she became interested in gardening. Grace grew up in “Suburbia,” she said. “By the time I was 16, I was the only one in my family who gardened, and I dug up my parents back yard and grew cucumbers and tomatoes.”

She holds the possibility that she may have inherited her green thumb. Her great-great grandparents came to the United States from France and farmed in Virginia.

While growing up in the 1970s, she began reading magazines about organic gardening. “My mom was into health food, and maybe that’s why ... I am one of six girls, and I’m the only one that’s this crazy. But two others now have large gardens.”

During her college years, she lived in Maine and worked on a farm during the summer as an apprentice with the Maine Organic Farmers Gardeners Association. She eventually ended up in Madison, WI, where her husband was attending graduate school.

“At that time, I just did farming full time, working on organic farms.” While she was there, she became involved with the Dane County Farmers Market,

which is known as the nation’s largest.

“It’s just been building since I was 16 and I dug up my back yard. It’s just been a theme,” Grace said. “So when we moved here, that’s when I started getting involved in the Vermillion Area Farmers Market.”

The local farmers market history includes a variety of locations – from an empty lot near the Cherry Street Grille to a vacant alley in Vermillion’s downtown.

It’s more recent home, where it seems to have finally hit its stride, is a grassy lot on the Clay County Fairgrounds.

“We finally found that home with the Clay County Fairgrounds, and it’s been a really nice fit for us,” she said. “We can fit in with them, and there’s just tons of potential there to help hook in young people through the 4-H program, to learn about basic gardening, and to actual go into the business of market gardening and sustainability.”

Grace learned of the great potential farmers markets hold while working at the Dane County market.

“There’s a real joy in selling what you grow, and what you make,” she said. “The thing about the farmers market that I love so much is that personal interaction. You get repeat customers, and you start building a relationship, and



GRACE FREEMAN

start new friendships. There’s a snowball effect, where there’s a lot of give and take between the customer and you, and also between you and the other

vendors.

“I don’t know why it’s so stimulating to me, but I love that environment,” Grace said. “I think it’s like a wellspring – it’s a place of

networking and community building ... it’s a really neat way to interact with a wide variety of people.”

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Re-Discovering Old Barns in Clay County

Public is Invited

Informational Presentation
Vermillion Public Library
February 15 • 7pm

This is about our Survey Project to record barns in Clay County.

The object is to preserve information at the South Dakota Archives in Pierre.

There will be pictures of barns already surveyed, their construction methods and the history of these barns.

Any information about the location of other barns in Clay County will be greatly appreciated.

Contact Jim Stone at 605-624-8507