

PrairieSun Organics - A Unique Way of Life

By Anne La Brake
For the Plain Talk

At first glance, all the farms around Vermillion look just about the same, don't they?

There's probably a barn, a truck, some chickens, maybe there's a garden.

Okay, so maybe it makes those visitors passing through feel a little nostalgic, but the truth is there is good reason to feel that way.

Family and farm just go hand in hand here, and once you get past the obvious "everything is divided into square avenues feeling," you do begin to see that no two farms are very much alike at all.

The history, story, legacy, and memories of each farmstead have been built up by the dedication, ambition, and hard work of countless individuals and families.

PrairieSun Organics is just one example of the unique identity each of these farms possesses.

"PrairieSun Organics is a

small certified organic farm about one mile northeast of Highway 50 and Crawford Road," instructs Angela Sasse-Jackson. "In the summer months, we offer slicing cucumbers, slicing tomatoes, radishes, and bell peppers. We also sell row crops such as corn and beans."

The name of PrairieSun Organics is very unique.

As with most personalized businesses, there is, of course, a history behind it.

"A good friend of mine in Iowa, though now deceased, who was an avid member of Practical Farmers of Iowa, an organization of farmers and farmer supportive individuals that support land and people friendly agriculture, helped me decide on it years ago," explains Jackson. "We wanted a name that reflected where the product was grown."

What got Jackson interested in this direction of life personally?

"I was inspired after completing a \$500 North

Central Region-Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (NCR-SARE) research grant project on the benefits of organic grass-fed beef that was reviewed by Dr. Jerry DeWitt at Iowa State University Leopold Center. The results of this research project were the key to convincing me that there was more to eating meat than just buying a rib eye steak from the meat case."

The Sasse-Jackson's family members, of course, are the sole operators of the PrairieSun Organics farm.

"Our farm is entirely managed by immediate family," Jackson explains. "My father passed away recently, so the management rests with the rest of us. Glenn, my husband, plants most of the crops and my son, Ryan, helps with marketing and sales. My daughter, Brittany, and I manage the pastured chicken operation. In spring and fall, it is about four to five family members working hard in the evenings and weekends."

Despite the hard work, the

Jackson family hopes to increase the business that they love and have made their life's work.

"We are expanding our farm to include an on-farm store of our products," Jackson shares enthusiastically. "We'll, also, be putting in a berry orchard and adding 1,000 more square feet of garden area. The on-farm store will have regular hours for customers to come in to buy their favorites."

What are the most popular items for consumers at PrairieSun Organics?

"Our pasture raised broiler chickens, organic grass-fed ground beef, and cucumbers are the biggest sellers."

When can customers purchase vegetables from PrairieSun Organics?

"We only offer vegetables right now in the summer months," Jackson expounds. "They are grown in one large, high tunnel that is 30 feet wide and 100 feet long, as well as a smaller greenhouse. We use a bank of standard refrigerators and freezer for our coolers."

What, then, would be the most fun and, also, the most difficult parts of PrairieSun Organics?

Obviously there are many joys as well as hardships in this type of business.

"There are so many favorite parts," Jackson confesses. "But it is definitely most exciting when the baby chicks arrive in the spring from the hatchery at one day old. They are so cute and fun to watch as they learn their new environment."

"Planting in the spring, however, is definitely the most difficult part," Jackson adds. "You have a short window of opportunity and very long days."

Filled with hard work, this way of life is visibly fulfilling for the Jackson Family.

How could someone, however, who knows very little about this organic way of farming start going in that direction if they wanted too?

For an extended version of this story visit www.plaintalk.net

HONOR

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