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Well-nourished



Kevin Logan of Abundant Harvest Farm hopes to help those who are hungry for healthy foods

By Shawndra Miller

»With the earth buried under snow on a late February day, it's a little tough to picture, but in just a few short months, Abundant Harvest Farm's Kevin Logan will enjoy his favorite part of farming. The 7-acre parcel of land where Logan and his partners raise produce and grass-fed beef pulls him like a magnet, though he lives and practices medicine in a completely different county.

"I'd say probably the best memory I have is arriving early in the morning when there's still a little bit of dew," he says of the McCordsville farm, which lies just below the highest point in Hancock County. "There's almost like a fog, because early in morning there's a lot of humidity, and the sun's rising and the humidity's evaporating, and it's just very quiet and peaceful."

An integrative physician with a busy practice in Fishers, his introduction to public health came by way of farming practices. While serving in the Peace Corps in the Dominican Republic years ago, he worked to improve locals' health, teaching them how to raise nourishing food while giving back to the soil.

He has been on a mission to share the same thing here at home ever since. Every patient who darkens his door learns about the importance of nutrient-dense food. And in true teach-a-man-to-fish style, he periodically holds workshops to showcase home gardening techniques.

"There's been this resurgence of interest, from a health perspective, a sustainability perspective, a local perspective," he says. "We're just seeing that people are literally hungry to learn how to do this. Every gardening class I've ever held is full."

When the chance came to move from backyard gardening to small-scale farming, he snatched it. And "Abundant Harvest" turned out to be an apt moniker for the fertile land acquired by Logan and his wife, Jacqueline, in partnership with his old friend, Tom Wiles. The farm, now in its fifth year, formerly was part of Apple Family Farm. Mark and Debbie Apple took excellent care of the acreage, resulting in rich soil and terrific yields.

"It's fantastic land," Jacqueline says. "You can grow anything." And they do, raising black Angus steers as well as several kinds of strawberries, fruit trees and annual crops. The Logans' children, Oscar, 16, Sophia, 13, Emilia, 11, and Ethan, 9, pitch in as well ("some with more interest than others," according to Kevin). During work parties, volunteers participate in the growing process, and Peruvian-born Manuel Torres regularly works alongside Kevin at the farm.

Two years into farming there, the trio opened INgredients Field to Fork Market in Indianapolis. The natural food market was

meant to provide an outlet not just for their goods but for other area farmers and producers.

Though the financial side of the storefront business didn't come together as they'd hoped, and INgredients closed at the end of last year, they have no intention of letting the farm go. "For me," says Kevin, "the farm is just something I want to continue for the rest of my life."

He says the partners will continue to explore ways to increase its profitability, such as putting in higher-cash crops like garlic, lavender, bamboo or even ginseng.

Meanwhile they'll likely acquire more steers this spring, while also growing the annual vegetables that have produced so readily. Their fruit trees, raspberry canes and asparagus beds offer strong yields with minimal input.

Beyond that, the only criterion for crop selection is based on desire: "We grow what we want to eat," he says.

Wiles says they may step back and approach the farm "less like a business entity and more of a hobby thing for us," though they plan to have a presence at a few farmers markets.

While not certified organic, the farm practices go beyond the standard of certification, according to Kevin. Reducing tilling and planting cover crops help build the "soil microbiome," enabling microorganisms and plants to do the essential work of returning nutrients to the soil.

He favors sowing cover crops like oats, buckwheat, clover and daikon radishes between rows after the crop plants get established. Then, after the final harvest, the cover keeps weed seeds from taking hold throughout the winter and early spring.

In the case of the radishes, not only do they aerate the soil and draw up nutrients, they also serve as a tasty food crop in their own

right. “It’s being smart about the timing of things,” Kevin says, “and also utilizing the land in the most efficient and productive way.”

That extends to stretching out the harvest, too. He recalls an early yield of giant broccoli heads. “These things were like 18 inches in diameter,” he says. “They were the biggest broccoli I’ve ever seen. We cut the main stalk and left the plants in the ground. We came back ... and we harvested bushels of the little sprouts that came up off the side, these super-compact little sprouts.” Terrifically sweet, the side sprouts continued to grow over the coming weeks and ended up amounting to nearly as much, pound for pound, as the harvest of the main broccoli heads.

“I’m all about efficiency, especially as busy as I am,” he says. “And if you think about the life cycle of a plant, the plant expends so much energy to establish roots and establish leaves to make this one fruit that we harvest, and in commercial farming they would just till (the remaining plant) under.”

But in intensive farming, as at Abundant Harvest, the goal is to capitalize on the plants’ ability to continue to produce long after its initial energy expenditure.

Last fall, such practices led to a bumper crop of not only broccoli, but other cruciferous vegetables. “There wasn’t the market to sell all those,” he says. “I didn’t think of it till later, but what I’d like to do (with) any excess (is) donate to Second Helpings or Gleaners or something like that. Just to help supply ... some of those folks that need that that don’t get it.

“I love to grow food for everybody who’ll eat it, because I know it’s good for them.”

Kevin likens human cells to batteries that need to be recharged. “All cellular communication happens via electrical signals,” he explains. Recharging our batteries requires charged ions of food.

Eating food that's alive, newly harvested from soil brimming with nutrients, offers a much greater energetic charge than processed food. That's why the body works more efficiently on a diet rich in fresh-picked, chemical-free fruits and vegetables.

"People don't really think about that," he notes. "These are living organisms that are sustaining our life."

Torres, who says he continues to learn from Logan about natural agricultural practices, echoes this view. "The reason that we eat is to keep us alive and give us the nutrients," he says, "but it's not only material, it's the energy that we get from all these plants and fruits."

Not only is the consumption of wholesome food a healing practice, working the land itself offers health benefits, such as grounding the human body. "I find such therapeutic value in being in the earth and having my feet on the ground and hands in the soil," Kevin says. "And yeah, it's hard work, but it's better than going to the gym."

As he, Torres and Wiles can all attest, something intangible happens in tending to the land, something bordering on the metaphysical.

For Wiles, who lived in northern California for 16 years before moving back to Indianapolis, it was a surprise to find how deep that feeling ran. "I always got my good nature hits out in the dramatic places, the mountains and beaches," he says. "And I realized, when I was going out to the farm so much in 2012 ... how much I loved it. I would get there early, and that became my nature hit. It was just so beautiful out there at 5 in the morning, before it got oppressively hot."

Solitude is part of the draw for Kevin. "A lot of times when I go to the farm, I'll just throw my work clothes in the back of my car," he says, "and I'll drive from (Fishers) to the farm where

I'll be taking care of the steers and taking care of the vegetables. And it's just bliss, being out there by myself."

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