

Elizabeth Obelenus, Serenity Garden, Meredith, NH
Elizabeth runs a one acre market garden on her partner's family farm, raising garlic, flowers, herbs and mixed vegetables. She is also the CSA's office and member coordinator, and check-in person on pick-up day.



“Before I began growing food for market in 2002, I had been a consumer of organic foods for about twenty years. About 95% of my food was organic, because I wanted to eat food that was free of pesticides and preservatives. Have you ever looked at the boxes conventional lemons are shipped in and see the list of materials sprayed on the lemons and the packaging to preserve and repel, and then people/restaurants then use that same lemon peel in recipes? Ugh! I made the choice to afford organic food instead of luxuriating in the many material offerings of our culture. The farming part was the big surprise for me. I have been an artist my whole life, a restless type who liked to travel westward looking for big horizons, and I worked a variety of jobs to get by. Through several books, including *The Artist's Way*, by Julia Cameron, and *One Straw Revolution*, by Masanobu Fukuoka, I connected various loves/dreams of my life: being outdoors in the fresh air as much as possible, all day preferably, the recognition that hard physical work is valuable, a desire to protect the environment and become an integral part of the environment, and an interest in self-employment.

I grow mixed vegetables, herbs and cut flowers. I do most of my own farm labor, which includes planting seeds, transplanting seedlings, weeding and fertilizing by hand and with hand tools. Eventually I will acquire better tools to make work go faster and with less physical effort. My partner helps with tractor work for plowing and moving compost. I like growing garlic because it rises straight from its mulched beds early in the very cold spring, and announces that the growing season has begun! People love garlic and there is a readymade market for it. I grow flowers because I think they will add to my sustainability, and they create habitat for beneficial insects which is my preferred form of pest control. I am surprised at how much I love looking at the flowers when I am working in the field.

Self-management is my biggest challenge. I love the process of gardening/farming so much that I lose track of my goals and time. Also, if a crop bolts (goes to seed), instead of pulling it and replanting, I often let the crop go to seed to observe what the process and seeds look like. Perhaps the art of nature is my goal, with food being the side benefit. As a certified organic grower, I need to keep many records – in addition to all the other work I do. Succession planting is another challenge, where the goal is to have a continuous supply of many different crops. Basically, it's the planning part that eludes me.

One reward is the incredible flavor of my products along with the ensuing compliments from the fans of my farm products. Another reward is that I am contributing to the revival of the small farm. Probably the best reward is when I lift my head from the ground where I am working hard at the moment, and see that incredible NH sky above me, either high blue or roiling with rainclouds of all shades of gray, or when I hear the wind in the trees surrounding the garden, delight in the hummingbird that buzz-drinks from the flowers I love, or work next to those bumblebees of which I used to be in terror. The smell of good earth is incredible too. I love being outdoors, even in bad weather, and hope to be able to continue this work.

When I check in our CSA families and am told about a CSA child here and there that wants, even plans, to be a farmer, I feel happy. When I was growing up, if you were smart in school, you were going to be a doctor or a lawyer, that was it. I did not know until I started farming that farmers need to be very smart to be successful. So many middle-aged organic farmers express major doubts that there is enough initiative to keep small farms operating in the US. I see the opposite - and I am grateful to be a part of the small farm revival.