Featured Workshop  March 28, 2015, 9:30-12:30
The Profitable Homestead
How to creatively generate income without leaving your farm
Come for ideas and strategic inspiration for generating income on your farm by creating multiple farm-based small enterprises that can thrive in a rural area. From bed & breakfasts to freelance writing and teaching, creating multiple farm-based enterprises that can thrive in a rural area.

Contact us at 262-642-3303  mwww.michaelfields.org

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Highlights >> Reflections on the growing season

We asked our garden interns to share their experiences at Michael Fields, here’s what they said:

“I didn’t know much about organic farming before arriving at Michael Fields, except a short farming experience of four months in India. I got to the farm in early March and I’ll be staying here until early November. So far I’ve learned how to grow vegetables from seed, to the customer’s plate. I’ve learned the different seeding and transplanting techniques, the irrigation system, how to take care of our planted vegetables, harvest them and store them in our walk-in cooler. Later this season, I’ll practice my tractor driving skills with the tilling and the use of cover crops to prepare the fields for the winter. This internship was my first major experience with farming and I hope to use what I’ve learned so far in my future job.”
~ Julie Bataille, Brussels, Belgium

“This summer I started my journey as an Organic Farmer, having no prior farmer experience before what so ever. Finding this internship online one day, I decided that it was something I needed to do.

Going for nutritional science I’m always trying to get closer to how food is made. What’s closer than growing your own food as nature completely intended. So around May 18th I departed for a journey that has shaped my mind on food forever. I came later in the season, so most crops were seeded and growing in the green house. Which lead to maintenance of the field and the general caring for the area before we planted said crop. Filling to needed specifications depending on what cover crop was planted previously, and determining where the sun shine for most of the day based on what crop will go where. Things I would have never considered before. Then harvesting drastically encroached on us, and then summer flew by.

After an accident at my other job, I had to sit out of the field for a week. In which I spent most of my time contacting local buyers, restaurants, and health food stores about our produce: After the week I remained in charge of locating and maintaining our customers, and was greatly promoted to wholesaler manager. Around this time two of our interns departed from the farm leaving two interns and our fearless leader. We greatly tackled the obstacles that presented themselves on a day to day basis. Learning to prioritize based on crop value, and over all time needed was a skill I’m happy to have obtained. Overall I have learned many valuable life lessons from the farm, if to list all of them I would have a novel. If given an opportunity to return to Michael Fields I wouldn’t hesitate, for this farm has slowly become my home. The people my family, and the garden my life.”

~ Nathan Rousseau, Green Bay, WI

“Michael Fields is a special place. Today, while filling the cooler, a local talked to me about CSA boxes Michael Fields gave out in the early 90’s. He just moved back from Europe. Without hesitating, he said our produce is the best in the world. Complements from him, and many other locals, melts my heart.

I am currently obtaining my Bachelor in Environmental Science at UW Green Bay. I have read countless books about the ecologically sustainable benefits of organic, biodynamic, polyculture farmers; but no books can show the smell of a row of basil, the backing of a rotary tiller or the taste of an heirloom bean you planted from seed. I was able to harvest lunch and dinner right from the vine. I’ve never been healthier in my life. Seeing the wide variety of produce grown, and learning from an extremely knowledgeable Garden Manager, I’m learning something new every day. I plan to harvest this hands-on experience and use my new knowledge to hopefully start an urban farm someday.”

~ Tyler Delsart, Green Bay, WI

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This summer, the Institute initiated an examination of sunn hemp (Crotalaria juncea L.) as a potential cover crop for Wisconsin. A tropical, rapidly-growing legume, it has demonstrated its ability to produce large biomass and nitrogen yields in the Southern U.S. and as far North as Illinois. It also has potential to suppress weeds, because of its rapid growth and has been shown to reduce root-knot nematode populations. Because it requires warm conditions, we envision using it during the summer months for several applications including organic transition, re-vegetation of certified organic land and on prevented-plant acres.

We currently don’t have a good warm-season legume option, so if successful, sunn hemp would fill this niche well. Currently under investigation are the effects of planting date and seeding rate on productivity and companion planting with nightshade-resistant, warm-season grass using various seeding rate combinations. The goal of these studies is to find the optimum combinations to maximize productivity at the lowest possible seed cost. As with all our cover crop screening work, we also keep a close eye on the plots, watching for potential problems including attractability of insect pests. Stay tuned for further developments.

As Michael Fields Agricultural Institute commemorates its 30th Anniversary, I feel moved to contemplate the motives behind the original three Founders, Christopher and Martina Mann and Ruth Zinniker. Those who have become involved with the Institute might call the three of them dreamers. Others might refer to the three as idealists or purists, but regardless of how they are viewed, all three were passionate about reclaiming the health of the soil. All three founders knew if the soil is healthy, full of organic matter, minerals and nutrients in the natural form, the food we all eat will be better for us.

Christopher, Martina and Ruth have always played an active role in the life of the Institute. The three of them served as Board Members for many, many years. Martina and Christopher lived and resided in a big farm house at the Institute. Christopher managed the land and the livestock while Martina started a bakery. Ruth Zinniker who lived just down the road on the oldest biodynamic farm in America was also very involved in the Institute. She lived the life of a true biodynamic farmer and worked side by side in the fields and the barn with her husband, Richard.

Contemporary “industrial” agriculture concentrates power, land and wealth in the hands of a few large corporations or, more commonly called, corporate family farms. Contemporary farming is wiping out diversity (just the opposite of biodynamic farming) in the name of short term profit. It will, I believe, ultimately undermine human health’s ability to sustain this population. Despite the argument that we need contemporary technology to feed the world, Christopher, Martina, and Ruth instinctively knew large amounts of inorganic fertilizer would pollute the groundwater and the effects of pesticides on the environment would also affect insect, animal and human health.

As Executive Director for Michael Fields Agricultural Institute, I work and believe in organic and biodynamic agricultural methods because I know it to be a way to keep more farmers on the land, more kids in local schools, and more businesses in the local community. Organic and biodynamic agriculture blend the older ways of farming with modern research (one of Michael Field’s three program areas) to showcase the best in agriculture and the best in human nature. Christopher, Martina and Ruth understood this philosophy and demonstrated it in the way they lived their lives. Throughout the last 30 plus years, Martina, Christopher, and Ruth have helped shape not only the Eastern Troy community, but the rural landscape of Southeast Wisconsin. At all times, they have had the best interests of their local community in mind and have invested tirelessly to help build the reputation of Michael Fields Agricultural Institute and its impact on all types of agriculture in the United States.

Two of the three founders recently crossed the threshold from this life to the next. Christopher now carries the torch singlehandedly and leads the charge for a better kind of agriculture. Michael Fields Agricultural Institute is a special place because of the dreams of these three individuals. Instead of eliminating farmers, farm workers and rural communities, organic and biodynamic agriculture bring together socially and politically different viewpoints in a common cause to produce nutrient dense food and strong, vibrant communities. Thank you, Christopher, Martina and Ruth Zinniker for reminding all of us that an individual’s most valuable contributions and should manifest themselves in organizations that promote what is good for the whole and not just the individual.

David Andrews, Executive Director