



Growing venture
Friends join forces to create FarmIndy

By Ashley Petry
Photography by Josh Marshall

Farm Indy — a new organic farm

on the southside —is more than it might seem. At just five acres, it is tiny compared to other farms in the area, and its first growing season was marred by drought and excessive heat. But this is no amateur endeavor. FarmIndy represents a merger of two prominent central Indiana farms, and that depth of experience is evident in everything from the superior salad greens to the sweet golden beets.

FarmIndy's owners are Todd and Kathleen Jameson, who previously ran Balanced Harvest Farm in Carmel, and John Ferree, who owns Danville's Seldom Seen Farm. All three are prominent members

of Slow Food Indy and fixtures at area farmers markets.

Their joint mission is to raise high-quality, organic produce for southside consumers and to educate the community about sustainable agriculture.

The Late Bloomers

Both Todd and Kathleen grew up in New Jersey, but their backgrounds couldn't be more different. Kathleen was a city girl from the Jersey shore, but Todd was a farm boy from Farmingdale.

"I always wanted to be a farmer," he said, "and then one day I met a beautiful young girl who didn't want to be married to a farmer."

Instead, Todd managed an agricultural marketing cooperative, and he and Kathleen married in 1986. A few years later, he became executive director of the New Jersey Flower and Garden Show. When it was purchased by an Indianapolis event-management company in 1998, the Jamesons followed the job to the Midwest.

To teach their two children, Heather and Austin, about the foundations of the food chain, the couple started a backyard garden, which eventually yielded more produce than the family could use. So, they opened a booth at the Carmel Farmers Market.

"The kids lasted going to the market all of two or three weeks, but I was addicted," Todd said.

Before long, he located an uncultivated field in Carmel that was available for rent, and the couple founded Balanced Harvest Farm—meaning that Kathleen was finally married to a farmer after all.

They started the farm at the right time, just as a flood of consumers began to seek local, organic produce. The Jamesons credit books like Michael Pollan's "The Omni-



FarmIndy's CSA boxes are customizable, and include salad mixes for which John Ferree became famous during his time at Seldom Seen Farm.



Todd and Kathleen Jameson



*The Jamesons and John Ferree
farm five acres as FarmIndy.*

vore's Dilemma" and Barbara Kingsolver's "Animal, Vegetable, Miracle" for raising consumer awareness of sustainable farming.

In just a few years, they rose to local foodie stardom. Todd served for two years as president of Slow Food Indy, and Kathleen translated her passion for food into a thriving personal-chef business. In 2010, the couple were Slow Food Indy delegates to Terre Madre, an international slow-food gathering held every two years. (They are going again this fall.)

"It's an amazing opportunity to talk to people who do the same work we do," Todd said. "You're talking to small-scale sustainable farmers from around the world who

"Medical science has the ability to fix a good number of things, but anoxic brain damage is not one of them," Ferree wrote last year on the website for his wife's recovery fund (www.kellyfunkrecoveryfund.com). He declined to be interviewed for this article.

Funk, who is permanently disabled, is now in a long-term care facility.

"Through all of this Kelly is loved. She is remembered as a loving mother, spouse and daughter, full of life and empathy," Ferree wrote. "We continue to hope for the best in Kelly's recovery. That hope is cautioned by the sobering reality of her injury."

The Joint Venture

The FarmIndy partnership started with a chance meeting at the Traders Point Creamery farmers market in 2007.

"We were there in the middle of the winter, just doing some shopping ourselves, and we met John," Todd said. "We were taken with what a highly experienced and successful young farmer he was. There's a certain connection that happens when a farmer meets another real farmer. You speak the same language, and things begin to click."

Meanwhile, the Jamesons were looking for farmland of their own, after years of renting their Carmel acreage from dairy goat farmers Mindy and Tim Levandoski, owners of What the Farm.

To grow good vegetables, they needed light, loamy soil with good drainage, and they needed access to clean water for irrigation. It was a tough combination to find.

"Soil type to a vegetable farmer is everything," Todd said. "We are absolutely depending on the quality of the soil, and the same soil that grows superior soybeans or corn does not necessarily grow quality vegetables."

One night at a foodie book club, Todd met a soil mapper from the Natural Resources Conservation Service's Soil Science Division, and he asked the man where he might find what he needed. The man told him to narrow the search: south of Anderson and

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—Todd Jameson

have the very same mission we do, and that's putting forward the mission of ecological agriculture and chemical-free farming."

The Tech-Savvy Foodie

After a stint in Milwaukee, Ferree moved back to his family's Danville farm in 2001. At first he commuted to Indianapolis for work, but after a few years, he decided to switch gears and try his hand at farming. He founded Seldom Seen Farm in 2004.

Alongside him was his wife, Kelly Funk, who soon became a favorite at local farmers markets. In 2008, the couple represented Slow Food Indy at Terre Madre. Their daughter, Laila, was born in 2009.

On July 8, 2010, everything changed for the young family. While harvesting onions after a storm, Funk was struck by lightning and went into both cardiac and respiratory arrest. A farm employee was nearby and called for help, but by the time the ambulance arrived, she had already suffered brain damage from lack of oxygen.





FarmIndy Recipes

north of Seymour, between Sugar Creek to the west and the Big Blue River to the east.

Not long after that, the Jamesons got a call from a longtime friend, Pam Parker, the owner of JP Parker Flowers and a lifelong southside farmer.

“One afternoon Pam called all excited and said, ‘I found your farm. I need you to come down here right away.’ She said, ‘I’m not even going to tell you where it is,’” Todd said. “We got over there and literally walked next door, and there it was.”

Parker—who raises organic sunflowers and peonies—is the third generation to farm her Shelby County property, and she knew the owner of the farm next door: a Michigan nurse who had inherited the property from her parents. She knew that the soil was ideal, and she suspected that the out-of-state owner might be willing to sell. She was right.

“I called Todd the brother I never had, so having him in the neighborhood is just wonderful,” Parker said. “We get together and talk about vegetables, which not everyone wants to do. He is a true lover of what he’s doing and has a passion and a vision for healthy food.”

When the Jamesons began planning the Needham farm in earnest, it seemed like a natural fit to join forces with their friend Ferree. They had more land to farm than ever before. And in his new life as a single parent, Ferree needed the flexibility and security that came with having business partners.

Although many central Indiana farms offer organic produce, FarmIndy has something they don’t: a flexible and tech-friendly CSA. The acronym stands for community-supported agriculture; in typical CSA programs, members pay an upfront fee in the spring to receive a share of a farm’s produce throughout the growing season. Every week, each member gets the same box, whose contents are determined by the farm’s harvest.

FarmIndy is giving that concept a face-lift.

“It became apparent that there was a need for a new way of farming in Indianapolis, that the model of the CSA ... had kind of run its course,” Todd said. “Shoppers today need more flexibility and more freedom to control what would be in their farm distribution each week.”

Ferree, who is the tech-savvy member of the team, developed a way for CSA members to customize their weekly boxes online. The software is similar to that used by organic grocery delivery services, such as Indy-based Green BEAN Delivery, but FarmIndy’s system cuts out the middleman.

“When you’re supporting FarmIndy, you’re supporting an actual, functioning, working farm,” Todd said. “It’s coming straight from the farm to your door.”

FarmIndy had 250 CSA members this year, and Todd said he expects that number to expand in 2013. The farm has about 15 weekly pickup locations, including one each in Greenwood and Franklin, and it will open registration this fall for the 2013 growing season.

Those CSA boxes are sure to include memorable salad mixes, for which Ferree became famous during his time at Seldom Seen Farm. FarmIndy also cultivates rare varieties of produce that long ago vanished from grocery stores—often because they had a short shelf life or couldn’t withstand long-distance shipping.

In the future, Todd said FarmIndy plans to offer tours and other educational opportunities, and to put Kathleen’s cooking skills to use in farm-to-table meals. In the meantime, the Jamesons are remodeling a house near the farm, and they look forward to meeting their neighbors—and maybe raising a few chickens in the backyard.

“We are rapidly being embraced by the southside community,” Todd said. “We’re overwhelmed by the number of people who are stopping by the farm, excited about having an organic farm on the southside.”

Roasted Butternut Squash

1 large butternut squash, peeled, seeded and cut into 1 inch pieces

3 tablespoons olive oil

1 tablespoon chopped fresh thyme

Celtic sea salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

Heat oven to 400 degrees. In a large bowl, toss all ingredients. Spread out on baking sheet. Roast until tender, 30 to 40 minutes, tossing once during cooking to brown evenly. Makes four servings

Kale with Garlic and Dried Cherries

1 bunch kale, stems removed and leaves coarsely chopped

1 clove garlic, minced

1 tablespoon olive oil

2 tablespoons dried cherries

Salt and pepper

Cook kale in a large pot of boiling salted water until almost tender, about 5 minutes. Drain in a colander and immediately transfer to an ice bath to stop the cooking. When kale is cool, drain but do not squeeze.

Cook garlic in oil in same pot over medium heat, stirring, until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Add kale, dried cherries, and salt and pepper to taste. Cook, tossing frequently with tongs, for about 5 minutes or until kale is heated through.