



Seedlings push through in their pots

David Perry

In the end, it's about the farming >

Executive Summary:

Polly Hieser doesn't like the business aspect of her career, but the daily work in the fields—and providing healthy food for her customers—has its own rewards.

By David Perry

They say the people of Floyd County march to the beat of a different drummer.

In Polly Hieser's case, it's a West African drummer. The Check farmer loves to dance to the sounds of West Africa, and just last year married a Ghanaian musician whom she met while he was performing in Floyd.

For the past 19 years, Hieser has run the Seven Springs Farm Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program, providing locals with fresh, organic vegetables seven or eight months of the year.

Hieser lives what many in the suburban comforts of southwest Roanoke County might consider a rustic lifestyle. Her home is a modest wood-sided dwelling with solar panels out front and a composting pit toilet out back. She rises early and works on the farm most every day, tending the wide variety of vegetables she includes in her customers' weekly produce delivery.



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—Polly Hieser

Polly Hieser: "I really don't like being a boss. I'm indecisive and it's hard for me to make decisions"

"I work seven days, but not 10 hours every day," Hieser says. "I'm not a workaholic, even though I like to work hard, and I don't like to get up early, even though I do."

Hieser was a pioneer in the CSA world, considering that the very first CSA in America was started in 1985. "I wish I had a teacher," says Hieser. "I'm just inventing the wheel. I don't know anybody else doing it other than people in my generation who are in the same boat as me ... I didn't know what kind of tractor to buy. I just saw one the other week that's what I should have bought. How did I know?"

Being the Decider is tough for Hieser sometimes, too: "My biggest struggle is being a boss. I'm indecisive and ... it's hard for me to ... tell people what to do and correct them when they're doing it wrong."

Fortunately, the farming comes a little easier than being a CEO, although she's had a few failures along the way. She doesn't grow corn

In Brief

Name: Polly Hieser
Age: 55
Company: Seven Springs Farm CSA
Location: Check
Type of business: Community-Supported Agriculture
Title: Owner
History: The Newport News native moved to Floyd County by way of Philadelphia and tried something crazy—charging customers up front for a season's worth of vegetables grown the old-fashioned way, without chemicals. She's still going strong 19 years later, feeding more than 100 families in the New River and Roanoke Valleys every year from May to December. Today, Polly enjoys West African drumming and dance in addition to her true love—growing stuff.



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On the farm, it's all pretty simple, including directions

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any more—"People would either say it's awful or the best corn they ever had"—and she has given up on peas, too.

"At first, I would try until the very last thing would die," Hieser says. "Now, I'm giving up sooner. At some point you have to cut your losses and plow it in, and that feels really good once you've done it, because then I'm not agonizing over it all the time."

As any farmer knows, making a living off the land is a gamble. "It's hard to know what's a mistake and what's the luck of the draw," Hieser says. "We had a hailstorm one year that just flattened everything. That was the easiest thing to get over, because there was no way I could blame it on myself."

Ultimately, it comes down to this: "I just want to be a better farmer." 

Other area farms

Seven Springs Farm's CSA fills quickly each spring. The following local farms offer CSA programs to the region (there are others, as well):

Blue Ridge Growers Cooperative

Mike Burton
540-651-2427
mikeburton7@hotmail.com

Waterbear Organic Farm

Richard Ursomarso
waterbearorganicfarm@yahoo.com
www.waterbearfarm.com

Good Food Good People

Tenley or Cole
540-745-4347
gfgfruitshare@swva.net

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