

The Whole Villager

Whole Village is a Sustainable Farm Community

We are a group of people from a variety of backgrounds, singles and families, who have come together to build an ecovillage, creating an ecologically and environmentally sensitive farming community based on biodynamic principles and practices.

The Whole Villager is our quarterly newsletter, designed to keep our associates and friends up to date about our project and to help them develop stronger ties with our farm community. We plan to share information regarding community living, sustainable agriculture and land stewardship to promote our mission, vision and guiding principles.

An Anthropologist In Our Midst

By Ted Baker

Whole Village has its first anthropologist. It was perhaps inevitable. What this small group of people in Southern Ontario is attempting is quite remarkable and deserving of attention. The people of Whole Village are engaged in a kind of collective/shared living that is rare in these parts. Established intentional communities (communities of people who, to varying degrees, share their lives together) in Ontario could probably be counted on one hand. Compared to some densities in the U.S., Ontario has quite a low percentage of intentional communities. So why focus on a phenomenon that, at first glance, would seem to be relatively insignificant?

Two reasons. The first is the most obvious. The creation of sustainable modes of living speak directly to current hot-button topics such as our over-dependence on fossil fuels (and the related notion of “peak oil”), growing global food scarcities and inequities, and last but not least, the global reality of rapid climate change and the environmental crises it engenders. All these troubling processes are threatening land and peoples the world over and learning how to live in a more sustainable manner is one way to begin addressing these global problems.

The second and less obvious reason why intentional communities such as Whole Village deserve more attention than they currently receive is their deliberate expansion of possibilities. While constrained by local zoning regulations and legal frameworks, they are nonetheless pushing the boundaries of the possible, exploring new ways of living, learning, and growing *together*. This reason perhaps explains the inevitability of Whole Village attracting the attention of an anthropologist, a particular type of academic traditionally concerned with “other” cultures—ways of living and being different from our own. It has been said that one of anthropology’s main goals is to “make the strange familiar and the familiar strange,” a process through which the natural and taken-for-granted is questioned (as historical and culturally constructed) and the strange or exotic is seriously engaged as an expansion of the possible.

Now life at Whole Village is both familiar and exotic. We share much of the same cultural and socio-economic background (even if there is

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considerable diversity here), but there is also much to Whole Village that is quite different from life “on the outside.” What is immediately apparent are the dynamics that emerge from shared and collective living. For example, prior to moving to Whole Village I rarely knew my neighbours, occasionally exchanging brief words on chance encounters but little else. Living here, however, means not only constant interaction but also sharing dinners (the cooking and cleaning as well as the eating) Monday to Friday with many neighbours. This may seem overwhelming to those looking in, but there are many benefits to such an arrangement. Not only does this provide an element of social bonding that nourishes our basic need for social interaction (given the gregarious nature of human beings), but it also provides very practical benefits. In the “normal” setting of the nuclear family, dinner is a daily chore. In this setting, however, you only have to worry about cooking dinner or doing the dishes for 3 to 8 days of the month (depending on whether you prefer to cook or do the dishes). The rest of the month you just have to show up at the dinner table.

Cumulatively this sharing of responsibilities frees up an enormous amount of time.

This is only one of the more obvious examples of how life in Whole Village differs from mainstream living situations in North America. For many people, sharing their lives with a large group of individuals may seem daunting and perhaps overwhelming—and at times it can feel that way. Life at Whole Village is by no means perfect or utopian. Anxiety can thicken the air when crisis looms and diverse individuals always have diverse viewpoints that are not always reconcilable. Yet there are also moments when the atmosphere can be intoxicating, where the spirit of good-will and mutual aid can feel near-magical.

In a society hungry for alternatives, intentional communities such as Whole Village can offer viable examples of living differently, expanding the possible through a demonstration of deepened social engagement. They help to show that other worlds *are* possible, that other ways of relating to each other *are* achievable, however minute or numerically challenged they may be.



The new family at Whole Village: Sarah, Ted, and their son Smith.

A Growing CSA in 2007!

By Amanda Kirby

The past year was a whirlwind of activity for Whole Village’s Community Shared Agriculture (CSA) program. Whole Village CSA Members buy a share in our harvest, paying a set fee at the beginning of the growing season that entitles them to come out to the farm each week from June to October and pick up a basket of fresh, organic produce. 2007 was Whole Village’s sixth year of growing organic vegetables for sale.

Due to the hard work of new CSA Manager Aerron Kirby and a whole host of volunteers, Interns and “Willing Workers on Organic Farms,” (WWOOFers) the 2007 season, though very challenging, was in the end a great success. Our first Intern Jenny, originally from Wales, arrived at Whole Village in April and she and Aerron got down to work in the greenhouses seeding plants for a much enlarged garden. We kicked off the season at the Erin sidewalk sale, alongside other members of our local producers’ cooperative, called “Homegrown Harvest.” After several Orientation sessions were held in early June to introduce potential Members to the CSA system, CSA pick-ups began in late June. We also started

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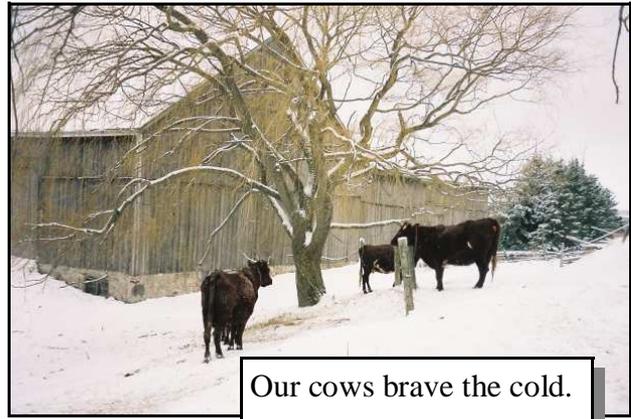
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weekly trips to the Orangeville Farmer's Market, where we had a great time meeting and chatting with customers and other farmers interested in organic food.

It was a difficult year in many respects. Aerron was new to the farm and community living and had a lot to learn on the fly. One of the biggest challenges we faced was the worst drought in Ontario since recording began 50 years ago. Climate change was very much on our minds throughout the season as we hoped for rain that never came! Flea beetle and Swede midge infestations caused some damage to crops, and the newly plowed sections of the garden were filled with grass roots that had to be exhaustingly hand-dug and removed. Our Intern Jenny was injured in late August and decided to leave a few months early. All of this led to a stressed garden team at times! Despite these obstacles, we also had many successes.

The CSA received a lot of press coverage this year, including articles and/or photos in The Orangeville Banner and the Caledon Citizen as well as Hills of the Headwaters and Caledon Living magazines. We increased the size of the CSA from 35 to 45 shares, including 10 shares purchased by local Chef Roberto Fracchioni from the Millcroft Inn Restaurant. The Farmer's Market was a great success, and we developed a loyal customer base and great contacts with potential new CSA Members. We put together a "Whole Village CSA Cookbook" to help our Members identify and learn how to use their vegetables. We hosted several events, including a cooking workshop by Erin Chef and CSA Farmer Cathy Hansen, a summer "Star Party" and fundraiser, and a Harvest Festival at the end of the season. We attended the annual Feast of Fields event held this year at Everdale and had a table at the Caledon Fall Fair. We hosted young volunteers and WWOOFers from all over the world, including the Czech Republic, England, Ireland, Japan, and the U.S.. We renovated our CSA pick-up shed and upgraded our CSA Newsletters.

Like living in community, running CSA's is full of both difficult challenges and inspiring moments. It has been a tremendous learning experience over the last season, and we're looking forward to using what we have learned to make the 2008 CSA season even better than the last.



Our cows brave the cold.

Another Step Toward Self Sufficiency

By Brenda Dolling

In the last six months Whole Village has developed by leaps and bounds. With construction of Greenhaven completed, it's been a time of community consolidation and development of the farm project.

The CSA garden expanded to 45 shareholders under the management of Aerron Kirby and Amanda Henderson. Although food production was a challenge in a year of record drought, there was enough produce to maintain a presence at the Orangeville market throughout the season. With the help of members, interns and volunteers the garden provided food for the summer, for preserving and for the root cellar. The cupboards are full of jams, chutneys and tomato sauces.

During the summer months Aerron brought seven dairy shorthorns and one red poll from his former farm. Four of these rare breed cattle are providing milk for the community. A new calf born in December was the highlight for the Whole Village children. We even managed to raise 14 of our own chicks to maintain our egg laying flock. 2000 hay bales were taken from the pastures and stored in the upper barn for cattle food over the winter. Rumours are that two more calves and some sheep are coming soon.

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Barn repairs were overdue so contractors were brought in to repair the barn foundation, doors and windows. New eaves troughs were installed and plans for rainwater cisterns discussed. The barn interior has been set up for animals while members are learning to milk and care for cattle.

More native trees were planted for windbreaks and landscaping, then mulched and watered throughout the drought. To increase fruit production we planted strawberries, bramble and berry bushes as well as 38 more fruit trees west of the pond. At the end of the worst drought ever recorded our farm well went dry, necessitating a new drilled well. Our two greenhouses now have piped-in water.

During the fall months, two volunteers from Canada World Youth lived and worked here, becoming part of the WV “family”. In November the Ontario Environmental Network held its AGM here and participated in part of our scheduled work bee. Midsummer, harvest and solstice events helped us slow down for a while and celebrate the seasons and their bounty.

Swarm Stories

By Jamie LaTrobe

This was my sixth season as a beekeeper for Whole Village, and every year brings a few surprises.

This year at least three hives split or swarmed, which is the hive’s way of reproducing as an entity, usually when it feels crowded. Although the hive is filled with individual bees, it almost seems the “beehive” is actually the species, as honey bees do not function on their own, and live and die for the hive. When they swarm an old queen leaves with half the hive after a new queen is raised by the workers. Naturally I try to avoid this, but I am seldom there when it happens, and so one hive loses half its workers. Often I do not know my hives

well enough to know that one has swarmed.

On one occasion I noticed bees going into some old hive boxes I had sitting around and had thought were of no interest to the bees. I was angry at myself because I imagined that there must have been some honey in there and they were learning to be robbers, a bad habit. Sometime later I saw one bee carrying in pollen and realized that actually a swarm had set up home in the old equipment. Although I doubt if they have acquired sufficient stores to make it through the winter I have wrapped them warmly and we will see if this feisty swarm makes it to next spring.

This year I was there on one warm day in late September. I suddenly realized the air was full of a noisy cyclone of bees. Slowly the swarm cloud moved south and coalesced in a ball high in a tree. Too high to reach. I knew they would sit there until scouts found a new home. They were gone the next day, and I am sure they will not survive, as the honey flow was over for the year. Although the bees usually seem very intelligent, swarming this late seems like a dumb move on their part. Perhaps it is done to save the mother hive somehow.

A week after that I found another swarm on the grass in front of the hives. Seeing a huge ball of the lovely brown and furry (yes furry!) bees is a lovely sight. I scooped them up and put them in an empty hive. Next week I moved them on top of a mature hive, separated by a sheet of newspaper, hoping they would slowly eat their way down and unite peaceably with the other hive. This was their only hope this late in the year. But for some reason this did not succeed.

Perhaps the most interesting swarm story can be told by our fellow member Denis Bowman. He had a swarm set up home on the side of his house! A beautiful sight it was, wide slabs of perfect ivory-coloured honeycomb hanging down in perhaps eight even layers. As we expected, the bees failed to make it through the winter in such an exposed location, but the following year another swarm took over the same real estate.