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# Island Living

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## Sustainable, organic farming's many benefits

By AMANDA LEIDIG  
Staff Reporter

The San Juan County organization "Navigating Our Future" presented a forum on locally grown sustainable and organic farming. It took place on Lopez Island Saturday, Feb. 28.

The day's activities began with a tour of Henning Sehmsdorf and Elizabeth Simpson's 50-acre S and S Homestead Farm. Led by Sehmsdorf, it began in the couple's garden, where he pointed out the different plants he grows, his watering process and the cold frames he built from wood that was also harvested on the farm. The operation keeps a wide variety of vegetables in production year-round.

Sehmsdorf mentioned to the nearly 25 people who gathered on the farm several reasons why food produced by organic and sustainable farming is essential to good health.

He explained that a cow on a commercial dairy farm is fed 60 pounds of grain a day to keep its milk sacks full and producing. Because the cow is kept in this unhealthy state, it must be given antibiotics on a regular basis.

Sustainable and organic farmers take a very different approach milking their cows, Sehmsdorf said. Love Joy, the sole milk producer on the couple's farm, is hand-milked every day. She, like all of their animals, is fed a diet of hay, fresh fruits and vegetables, all grown on the farm. "I try to avoid anything I have to bring in," Sehmsdorf explained.

S and S Homestead does not use pesticides on its fruits and vegetables and, whenever possible, it sows the seeds of plants grown on the farm.

Sehmsdorf attributes his clean bill of health to the antibiotic-free, pesticide-free, organic food he eats, all from the farm. "My only health care costs are check-ups," said Sehmsdorf. "I haven't had a cold in 30 years."

After touring the gardens, Sehmsdorf guided the visitors to his worm castings, compost, rain catchment system and field rotation system. He also introduced everyone to Love Joy, who was an instant favorite.

Yet after the nearly two-hour tour, Sehmsdorf had barely begun to touch on the many intricacies of the farm.

### SPEAKERS MAKE THE CASE FOR LOCALLY PRODUCED FOOD

Once the tour was completed, a forum was held in the Lopez School Multipurpose

room. It began with an exercise in which participants tracked food's route from the farm to the dinner table. The more than 45 people at the forum, who were split into several groups, mapped out the resources it took to grow the food, harvest it and ship it. Everything from water, labor, roads and trucks, as well as what it takes to build them, was on the list.

The exercise spread awareness of where food comes from and what goes into producing it. It enabled comparisons to be made to local efforts such as those used by S and S Homestead.

"The more we globalize, the further we remove the consumer from the farmer," said John Goekler, who was one of six forum speakers for "Navigating Our Future." Goekler added that the typical bite of food travels more than 1,500 miles before it reaches the consumer's table. He then expressed what he felt were the benefits of supporting local farmers, from boosting the local economy to a healthier population.

Washington State University County Extension Director Tom Schultz presented current San Juan County numbers regard-

ing agriculture. They came from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), for the year 1997, and showed that 15 percent of the land in the county is used for farming. Schultz feels that local farmers need to create local and regional marketing plans

for their products and speak with a unified voice. He also feels it important to educate the younger generation. "I believe we need to keep our youth involved in agriculture," said Schultz.

Simpson told the audience she spends less than \$200 dollars a month on groceries, and 60 percent of that is spent on paper products such as toilet paper. The other 40 percent is spent on products the farm doesn't produce, such as coffee, tea or peppercorns. "We take a great deal of pleasure from raising fruit from seed to plant," said Simpson.

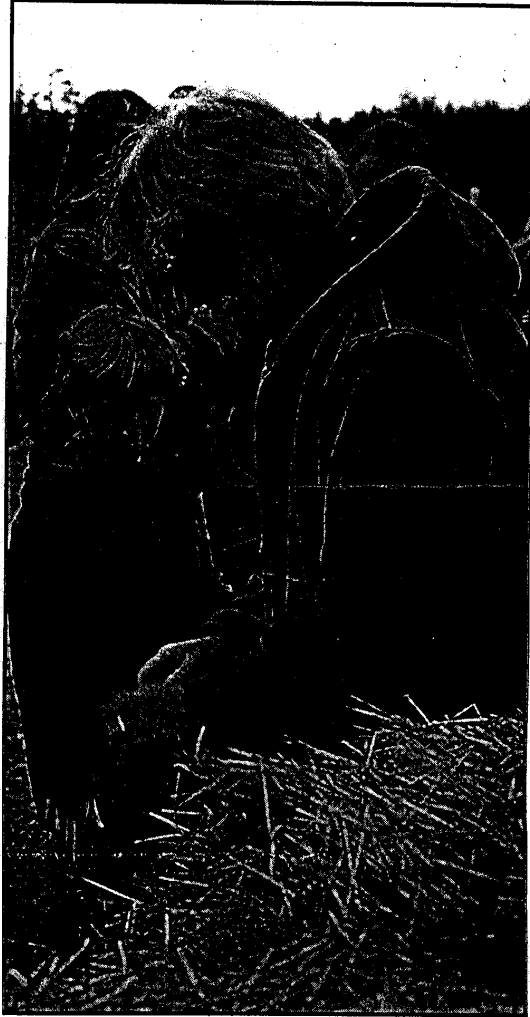
She also told the audience anyone can grow organic foods, either in their back yards, or in containers on their deck.

On S and S homestead, Simpson and Sehmsdorf provide themselves with food, then sell the excess, at affordable prices, to their friends and neighbors on a subscription basis. "We believe organically grown foods should be available to everyone," said Simpson.

Dr. Bob Wilson, author Anna Anderson, Larry Greene, director of "Navigating Our Future," and Sehmsdorf also spoke during the forum.

**"I haven't had a cold in 30 years."**

LOPEZ FARMER HENNING SEHMSDORF



Amanda Leidig / Staff photo

Lopez farmer Henning Sehmsdorf, right, explains composting to one of the youngsters who attended Saturday's tour and discussion of sustainable and organic farming.

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Amanda Leidig / Staff ph

*Emma Freedman of Orcas Island was among the children who enjoyed meeting Love Joy, the dairy cow at S and S Homestead. Holding Emma is her*

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