

How much do we really care about local food production?

By Karen Platt

The newly formed Friends of Madrona Society (FoFM) has entered into an agreement with The Land Conservancy of BC¹ (*TLC*) to purchase Madrona Farm, located near Victoria. FoMF must raise \$2,157,000; of which more than \$600,000 will be donated by the landowner. *TLC*'s mission is to ensure that the agricultural productivity and ecological values of Madrona Farm are protected forever. This fundraising campaign for the purchase of the farm by the community it serves, and the placement of the farm in the hands of a land trust, will be the first of its kind in BC, and part of the solution for local food security.

Once *TLC* holds title, the property will be inalienable and can never be sold. The farm, its uses for local, sustainable food production and conservation of biodiversity, will be protected by the Constitution of *TLC*. This will ensure the purposes of the FoMF are met in perpetuity.

Community purchase of this farm is a test of our collective desire to protect farmland for farming.

Madrona Farm is an extraordinarily productive and biologically diverse 27-acre piece of urban farmland on Blenkinsop Road in the Capital Region, a rich agricultural area increasingly under pressure from residential development. For those who believe in supporting small farms and farmers, Madrona Farm tells why, it is a prime illustration of successful local, sustainable food production. In this world gone wrong, full of almost universally bad environmental news, it is a shining example of what's gone right.

David and Nathalie Chambers are true eco-farmers. Madrona Farm, already a *TLC* Conservation Partner, features Douglas fir and Garry Oak ecosystems, four natural ponds and a wooded corridor of diverse native tree species that Nathalie & Dave began planting in 2004. More than

¹ *TLC* is a registered charity and land trust protecting wilderness areas, cultural landmarks and agricultural lands in B.C. Since 1997, *TLC* has protected almost 120,000 acres of sensitive and threatened lands, involving more than 300 projects. *TLC* has grown to include over 7,000 members, and is now part of an international network of National Trusts with over 7 million members. For more information, visit www.conservancy.bc.ca.

130 fruit trees now stabilize the farm's southwest facing slope. Madrona is home to many species of birds, including great horned and screech owls, eagles, red-tailed hawks and herons. “There’s not a spreadsheet in the world that can measure the value of maintaining forest on the northern slopes of a farm,” said farmer Joel Salatin in *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*.

It seems that demand for local food is not a problem, but supply is at risk. The farm market at Madrona Farm sells out all the time - and fast! People are lining up at farmer’s markets everywhere long before the opening bell. The media is full of stories about the demand for locally grown, environmentally sustainable products. The question of whether we want local food is being answered with an increasingly loud “Yes!” But that demand creates the new question – where is this food going to come from if we don’t protect and maintain farmland and make it affordable for farmers to farm?

Last year, Dave and Nathalie produced over 128,000 pounds of food on this land, feeding hundreds of loyal customers at their roadside stand for virtually 11 months of the year - with virtually no waste, no artificial inputs, and using less than 700 litres of diesel. There is something phenomenally satisfying about making a salad from local greens – in January. Now, Dave is training new farmers - people actually interested in growing our food themselves someday. The question is whether they will have land to do that. Our farmlands are at risk of becoming as endangered as any red-listed species.

Madrona has been a fixture on Blenkinsop Road since David’s grandparents, Lawrence and Ruth Chambers bought it in 1952. Lawrence died in 1982 and the farm was leased for hay production. Needless to say, Lawrence’s three sons couldn’t escape fast enough; it’s fairly well-known that farming often skips a generation. And in 1999, it was grandson David who moved to the farm to take care of his grandmother Ruth and decided he would restore the depleted, overgrown family farmlands.

When Ruth died in 2002 ownership of the farm was passed on to her three sons – David’s father and two uncles. They, in turn leased the property to David and Nathalie to farm and it has flourished. But now, the brothers want to sell and although the property is listed in the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR), the designation does not require the land to be kept in food

production. Without further protection, Madrona could be purchased for use as a “hobby farm” or “Gentleman’s Estate,” and never again used for growing food for our community.

One of TLC’s mandates is to protect farmland for farming – a big step toward local food security and agricultural land preservation. The Friends of Madrona Farm Society needs support.

Together we can ensure that Madrona Farm will remain in local food production forever. We will send a clear message about the importance of locally grown, nutritious food to our health and the well-being of our community. Become a Friend of Madrona Farm and help us protect farm land – forever

Please make your donation now! Online at: www.conservancy.bc.ca/donatetomadrona)

For more information, go to www.madronafarm.com