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Allard Farm: A labor of love that is bearing fruit

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Marjorie McGinnis,
Co-owner, Allard Farm



John Allard and Marjorie McGinnis of Allard Farm

At the end of a dirt lane, John Allard and Marjorie McGinnis can be found working the soil and nurturing their plants. They are in the process of resurrecting the old Allard family farm and it is a labor of love that is bearing fruit.

In the 1960s John Allard’s parents built a nursery on their 20-acre property that included a pond and an old cranberry bog. At the time, “We were the only nursery around and people from across the Cape came to visit and purchase their plants,” recalls John. In the 1970s and ‘80s, the nursery was in its heyday, but in the 1990s business shifted as “everyone, including Stop & Shop, got into the plant

selling business,” says John, and the nursery ultimately shut down. John went into business on his own, starting a landscape company called Outdoorworks.

The youngest of five boys, John’s mother Virginia introduced him to the world of plants when he was six years old. “Growing plants is bred into my nature,” says John, who has an intuitive knowledge about plants that is the result of decades of growing and earning a living from them. Marjorie refers to him as “the soil master.” Notes John, “I have been mixing soil since I was a kid and I have 7,000 yards of compost out back.”

Marjorie and John met seven and a half years ago at the Brewster Chowder House where Marjorie was a part-time bartender. They hit it off and started making plans. Marjorie didn’t want to bartend

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forever, nor did John want to landscape indefinitely, so they discussed how they could eke out an existence by growing vegetable plants and doing some farming. Two years later, John and Marjorie began the process of re-opening the farm by opening a vegetable stand.

That was five years ago, and since that first year they have seen a 50% annual increase in their farm stand business. This has allowed them to focus on growing plants for the nursery. "Marjorie grows everything by seed or bare root," says John. "It was John who introduced me to growing plants," Marjorie says with a smile. "You feel like you're a part of something much bigger than you, and plants are very forgiving."

During April, May and June, John and Marjorie work 14-hour days, planting vegetables, growing plants in the greenhouse and managing the farm stand. John's landscaping business is also in high gear, but as the farm business increases, John's son is taking over running Outdoorworks. Despite the heavy rains and cold temperatures this spring, when John and Marjorie opened the first week of March, they had potted 2,300 1-gallon plants and 500 dahlias ready for market.

To help them get up and running this spring, John and Marjorie took out a micro-loan from the CDP to provide them with cash flow for the start of the season. "Having a cash flow was huge," says Marjorie, "and it made a significant difference in how we were able to run our business."

They have also spent a lot of time this year cultivating customers for the next year. At their open house in June, 120 people showed up.

John says that he had not anticipated how successful the farm stand, or the nursery would be. "It took me by surprise. There is a huge market for vegetable plants." Marjorie notes that "The best part is having customers come in and share their stories of the old family farm. One person came in and told us that John's mother Virginia "would be proud."



Looking to the future Marjorie envisions a garden center with the farm stand as part of a larger farm with more greenhouses. In fact, the CDP recently approved a loan for a greenhouse, which is critical to getting the plants established early in the growing season. "We want to create a place where people can stop here first with their list. Prices will be very reasonable, and the product will be beautiful," says John. The farm also abuts the bike trail which "presents another great opportunity," says Marjorie. "There's a possibility of establishing orchards with peaches, pears and apples." As John points out, "We are trying to appeal to a local market. We want everybody to eat our food and everyone to buy our plants."

We have no doubt that Allard Farm will succeed. We are proud to be able to support John and Marjorie and look forward to watching their business achieve continued success.