

## **Meet Colleen Owen: The Urban Farmer from Pringle Creek Community**

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Pringle Creek Community is much more than a housing development. It is a community based on agriculture and calls itself an agrihood, where green homes are built. Thanks to Colleen Owen, an Urban Farmer, the community is able to produce organic fruits, vegetables, herbs, honey and make the harvest available for direct sales to the public.

Colleen started gardening about 11 years ago. Prior to working at Pringle Creek, she took an urban farmer class offered at the community center at Pringle Creek and was such an active gardener that she was invited to come and teach a class the next year. Colleen was hired at Pringle Creek in December of 2013.

“I would consider myself a farmer-gardener...my actual title is Urban Farmer because I’m growing farm products within city limits. We are very old-school and low-tech. There is not a lot of machinery as everything is done by hand. Planting is completed on our hands and knees. We have gone through and put irrigation in beds to alleviate the amount of time we spend tending our plants and it also helps conserve water overall,” said Colleen.

Colleen works in the two historic Lord and Burnham greenhouses that were refurbished by Pringle Creek Community, and these greenhouses are now a resident amenity. In addition to the greenhouses, there are orchards, a blueberry patch, beehives and a chicken coop. An outdoor community garden composed of repurposed onion crates for beds exists, where community members can grow their own crops. Colleen also expanded to a lot across the street that will become a lavender field.

Colleen and her father made a farmstand that is stocked every morning with fresh vegetables. Dry produce like onions, garlic, homemade honey, soaps, salt blends and other things that can withstand the heat are also available on the stand. Since there is no refrigeration, produce like carrots and tomatoes are available upon request, and Colleen will go pick the vegetables fresh off the vine.

There are five bee-hives behind the greenhouses that produce honey. It is collected and jarred about 100 ft. away from the greenhouse. The chickens lay eggs that are usually sold to members within the community. Colleen also uses those eggs for planting and fertilization to improve the quality of the soil.

The greenhouses provide benefits to production of produce. On average, the houses stay about 20 degrees hotter than the outside temperature. Colleen grows produce in the houses year-round. This enables her to grow cauliflower, broccoli, kale, lettuces and other vegetables in the brassica family all winter long. Warm weather crops like eggplants and peppers love the heat and will grow larger and in greater quantity in a greenhouse, as long as there is adequate water. Produce that wilts easily is located in the second greenhouse which is shaded more than the other.

For everything that she grows, Colleen can tell you the source her materials, and what company she used.

“Everything is grown with organic practices. The way I deal with bugs is all organic. There's never any issues about how something is grown. Because I order all the seeds, I know what I put into the soil, I can track everything from beginning to end and I know what's in where,” said Colleen.

A lot of the time, the harvest is too big and gleaners are called in. They then donate everything out to different food security organizations like Marion-Polk Food Share.

The Sustainable Living Center is a non-profit that operates out of the community, and Colleen teaches urban farming classes that educate residents on practical growing information such as how to keep bugs off of your plants and how to grow tomatoes. The operation is also a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm, and provides a bucket of fresh produce almost every week to its members.

“I run a 25 share CSA that's available for people who live in the community and those outside of it,” said Colleen.

The community is not your typical farm, nor is it located in a farming region, and that can sometimes confuse people. Colleen would like people to know that they are here.

“Sometimes people's first question is, ‘what is this place?’ One of the things we get all the time [is] ‘I didn't know this was here and I've lived in Salem forever!’ A lot of people don't realize that we are here. We are a sustainable development, and we are open for people to come and enjoy the greenhouses as long as we are here and people are respectful,” said Colleen.

Pringle Creek Community is involved with the Salem community and children. Being located right behind Leslie Middle School, kids come down and have day camps. They engage with the chickens, pull weeds, tour through the greenhouses and have seeding events.

“We do community outreach things as well, to keep people engaged. Community is a big part of our mission,” said Colleen.

Colleen finds meeting people and seeing her plants grow the most rewarding part of farming. “I feel accomplished when I plant some plants when they're small and they start to grow, and I’m overwhelmed-in the best way possible-with all of the produce,” said Colleen. “I also like to engage with a lot of the people that come through here--take them on a tour to show them around and tell them who we are.”

The Pringle Creek Community agrihood is one of 25 stops on the Marion Farm Loop, which is part of Oregon Farm Loop. Connect to this farm stop through website [MarionFarmLoop.com](http://MarionFarmLoop.com), Facebook, or Instagram, or email: [farmloop@gmail.com](mailto:farmloop@gmail.com) and sign up for monthly e-newsletters by texting “ORFARMLOOP” to 22828. Oregon Farm Loop connects local family farms and value-added businesses with the local and traveling public and is a program of Oregon Agritourism Partnership (OAP), an Oregon nonprofit. OAP programs are made possible with the help of various partners, including local farms, OSU Extension Service and Travel Salem.

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