

Kari Anderson Mud City Farm & Pistil Production

By Josiah Taylor
UVM Agricultural Risk Management
and Crop Insurance Education



“Be kind to yourself in the decisions you make... it takes time.”

- Kari Anderson

For farmer Kari Anderson, nurturing her community’s emotional wellbeing is just as important as nourishing their bodies. Kari creates joy by brightening customers’ lives with vibrant floral arrangements, while also feeding them with vital produce and meat from Mud City Farm and Pistil Production. She has many years of experience in farming and maple sugaring. Three years ago she formally started her own farm venture, Mud City Farm, integrating her Pistil Production business to add cut flowers and floral design services to the enterprise.

Kari and her assistant farmer Kalie Schneider work the hills in Morrisville, situated on 100 acres at about 1,000 feet in elevation, tucked in at the feet of Whiteface Mountain and the Sterling Range. Mud City Farm feels like a quintessential Vermont hill farm, off a dirt road,



accessed by a long gravel lane that crosses over a sparkling mountain stream.

Eventually, after passing through a band of mixed forest, the farm comes into view, with a large hoophouse established and ribs for another cold frame that’s under construction. This is



amidst colorful fields of flowers for cut arrangements within a diverse polycrop of asparagus, brassicas, squash, garlic, berries, and other plants. Just a little further up the farm road is the farmhouse, barns, the wash shed, pigs, and chickens, all framed



by the sugarbush that rises above the rest of the farm. Mud City Farm integrates a diversified CSA program, produce wholesaling, raspberries and blueberries, and sales of whole pigs, along with Pistil Production’s floriculture. Mud



City Farm is also renovating their sugarbush to improve the woods as well as infrastructure to restart an historic sugaring operation, targeted for spring sugaring in 2023. Mud City Farm markets through a CSA, individual buyers, wholesale to other local CSA’s and distributors, and floral sales to individual and commercial customers and for events.

While farming typically involves managing many risks, Kari shares that Mud City Farm has some unique challenges relating to the land itself. Because of the high elevation, and being cradled in the mountains in Northern Vermont, Mud City Farm has a particularly short growing season, with multiple microclimates and less predictable weather. Kari views the weather and climate of Mud City Farm as the single biggest challenge – the snow recedes late in the spring, and the frosts can come early in the fall. Mud City Farm works to reduce these challenges by building out infrastructure for season extension, and is adding a second hoophouse to the farm in the fall of 2021. In addition, Kari uses a heated greenhouse for protecting early starts and curing harvests into the cold, short days of autumn. The farm also protects itself from the volatile and changing climate by growing a great diversity of crops – with many different species and varieties. If a single crop fails, there are still many others that are successful to market and support the farm. However, cultivating such diversity is also a challenge because it means managing great complexity, taking more time, attention, and knowledge. Kari says that she “can’t do enough research” on the farm’s living systems, and between reading, observing, and talking with a community of farmer-mentors, she learns and applies all that she can to work with the farm’s mountainous landscape and climate.

Taking over an historic farm also has its own host of challenges. Kari works at these with a combination of patience and vision. While the farm has historic infrastructure, including two old barns, it has been as much a liability as an asset. While one barn has been useful for some storage and cooler space, the other needs significant repairs and upgrades before being useful, but the renovations must also adhere to specific standards because the building is on the National Historic Register. The farm has also been incrementally building new water systems to enhance irrigation capacity. Because of the large time and cost commitments to this infrastructure development, Mud City Farm is intentionally growing gradually, doing the most with what they’ve got, and working with a UVM Farm Management Team and others to get consultations on the most efficient and effective ways to move forward.



The Covid-19 pandemic also ushered in new challenges, and exacerbated others. While Pistil Production was looking forward to a big year of floriculture for events and restaurants in 2020, Covid forced a closure of restaurants and also cancelled most events, completely devastating the market for cut flowers and restaurant produce sales that Kari worked so hard to grow. Mud City Farm quickly pivoted, placing less focus on flowers and



putting more emphasis on developing its CSA and produce sales to individuals, while continuing to develop long term growth strategies. The Covid pandemic also put added stress on an already tight farm labor market. Dependable and skilled labor has been among Kari’s greatest challenges, as she grows beyond what she can manage farming by herself. Kari feels fortunate to have brought Kalie Schneider on as the primary hired labor for the farm, and

appreciates Kalie’s rugged persistence working hard through adverse weather conditions for the past two seasons. Kari works ardently to show Kalie how much she appreciates her work and hopes to retain her as an employee by offering a fair wage, respect, stable long-term employment, engagement in farm planning, and showing care through including her in the farm family, integrating Kalie’s intelligence and enthusiasm to the farm’s assets. As Mud City Farm and Pistil Production grow, Kari looks forward to attracting and retaining other workers with a combination of good compensation and being a caring employer.

Another big risk that Kari contends with as she manages Mud City Farm and Pistil Production is not unique to this farm. In addition to the long workdays and complex challenges of operating this enterprise, Kari finds that while self-care is essential, it is difficult to fit in. Physical and mental burnout are too common among small farm operators and are things that she tries to work on to keep the farm sustainable on a personal level. The short growing season along with the days of extended sunlight in mid-summer require extremely long days of work when the daylight and weather are favorable. Often during the non-stop growing season, it can be hard to make time for practicing self-care. However, with her own motivation combined with encouragement from her partner Chris, Kari makes sure to get out for bicycling and running in the nearby Morrisville Town Forest. Even simply getting out to watch sunset at the end of a long day can help her relax and feel grounded. However, operating the farm dictates that it’s going to be a long growing season, and deep rest and care may not be possible until wintertime – when Kari gets out for backcountry skiing in the nearby mountainous wilderness, and recharges herself to prepare for another big year. Maintaining her physical and psychological well-being is critical to keeping herself and the farm going strong.



In the fall, with the arrival and quick passage of peak foliage and frost nipping at the most tender plants, abundant flowers still hold their blooms just a little longer. Kari and Kalie at Mud City Farm and Pistil Production look forward to wrapping up another dynamic and successful season and getting some well-deserved slower times of winter to rest, reflect, and plan another season of growth, learning, and development.



They’re excited to continue sharing their passion for growing delicious produce and brightening customers’ lives with brilliant floral arrangements. It may be challenging work, but for Kari Anderson this is the work she loves, and chooses to do.



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