



Farmers Jen Clark and Nikki Parks

FARMER SPOTLIGHT: JEN CLARK & NIKKI PARKS, ROOTS FARM

You may know Jen Clark through the many roles she plays in our community - perhaps most notably as the owner of Roots Farm in Poulsbo, where she farms alongside her friend and longtime farming partner, Nikki Parks.

Together, Jen and Nikki have built not just a farm, but a thriving example of collaboration, resilience, and dedication to local agriculture. We recently had the opportunity to ask Jen about how she and Nikki got their start farming together, the lessons they've learned along the way, what they're working toward in the future, and the advice they would offer to both aspiring and fellow farmers.

Jen - how did you and Nikki first meet, and what led you to start farming together? We met about 15 years ago as homeschool moms, both wanting to give our families healthier food we could trust. Our small homestead quickly became a much bigger project as we realized how disconnected people were from their food and how important this was for health and community. After 13 growing seasons, farming together has become our shared mission: reconnecting people to real food.

How do your roles differ on the farm, and how have they evolved over time? As the owner, I focus on the bigger picture - building the vision, writing grants, creating partnerships, and developing infrastructure. Nikki keeps the day-to-day production flowing - computer/tech, crop planning, harvest, and organization. Over time we've really leaned into our strengths, which makes the farm run more smoothly, especially during the busy seasons.

What makes your partnership strong, especially during the busy seasons? Trust and shared purpose. We both care deeply about what we're doing, so even when things get stressful, we're working toward the same goal. After all these years, we just understand each other - and we laugh a lot, which honestly carries us through. We have also lived life together and weathered life challenges most friendships never do, connecting us in a very deep way. We've learned how to communicate, work through hard moments, and keep showing up for each other.

Can you tell us a little about your farm - what you grow, raise, and produce? My mission is to promote equitable food access and resilient local food systems - built through sharing food and knowledge. We cultivate a wide range of vegetables, fruits, and seeds adapted to our region. Whenever possible, we use livestock instead of gas-powered equipment for field preparation, fertilization, and pest and weed control. A core focus is building soil health and creating on-site fertility. Our goal is to secure research and education grants to enable us to donate 100% of our harvest to local food banks. Our grant projects focus on drought mitigation strategies for small farmers and developing fertility systems using local feedstocks. We are also creating several composting systems and related educational programs. We plan to offer free classes and educational materials on all these topics.

If someone visited your farm for the first time, what would surprise them most? That it's more than just a farm - it's a system. There are compost systems, animals, research trials, and education all happening together. Most people ask: "How do you do it all?" My answer is: I don't. I have a small team of long-term, dedicated people with a shared vision and mission.

Right - A view of the seasonal bounty that Roots Farm offers through their annual CSA program. Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a system that connects farmers and consumers directly, allowing people to buy a "share" of a farm's harvest in advance.



(Jen, cont.)

What inspired you to diversify into things like bokashi, biochar, vermicomposting, and beekeeping? With supply chain issues, a changing climate, and inflation, local communities need to find a more sustainable way to live on our planet. We need to create our own fertility and grow food locally.

It all comes back to closing the loop. We're taking what would be waste - food scraps, wood waste, organic materials - and turning it into fertility. It makes the farm more resilient and less dependent on outside inputs. We keep bees for pollination as well as for honey production. We have also been partnering with [CRUB](#) in Olympia through a program called *Healing Through Hives* to offer free beekeeping starter packages and education to veterans on beekeeping.

What's something you're especially proud of accomplishing over the past year? Even with massive funding cuts this year, we managed to pivot and not only stay afloat but thrive. I have found my niche in scientific research. We are also putting the finishing touches on a small "commercial" vermicompost project that is funded through the Department of Ecology. We process food and paper waste from our local food bank and turn it into farm fertility. We are also offering free community classes on the topic. KCAA is our fiscal sponsor and partner on this project.



What are some of the biggest challenges you've faced as you've grown and diversified the farm? Financial sustainability is a big one. A lot of what we do is community-focused, which doesn't always generate immediate income. We are about 50% of the way towards that goal to be funded through research and education, we are funding farm operations so we can offer more free community services by way of food distribution and education. We want to teach people to grow their own food to build stronger local food systems.

How do you handle stress or burnout during peak season? I am an eternal optimist as well as having a sense of humor. Anyone that works on the farm will tell you I tell way too many dad jokes. I love to laugh and makes others laugh.

What does a typical day look like for each of you (if there is such a thing)? There isn't a typical day. It can be harvesting, teaching, fixing something, or problem-solving. It changes constantly.

Jen and her Livestock Guardian Dog, Hugo

How do you define success for your farm? Success, to me, is measured by impact rather than profit. It's the food we grow and get into the hands of people who need it, the waste we divert and turn into fertility, and the number of people we reach through education and community programs. Success looks like a veteran who starts keeping bees, a family that learns to grow their own food, or a research trial that proves a more sustainable farming method works. When the farm is resilient, the community is more connected to their food, and we're closing the loop on waste - that's when I know we're succeeding.

What do you wish more people understood about farming?

How hard it is, you have to love what you do. People value you movie stars and athletes. Farmers should be valued, and paid, more. We feed the community.

If you could share one message with your community or customers, what would that be? Your support truly matters. When you support a local farm - through a farm share, classes, or buying local - you're helping keep real food in the community.



Potatoes on the Farm