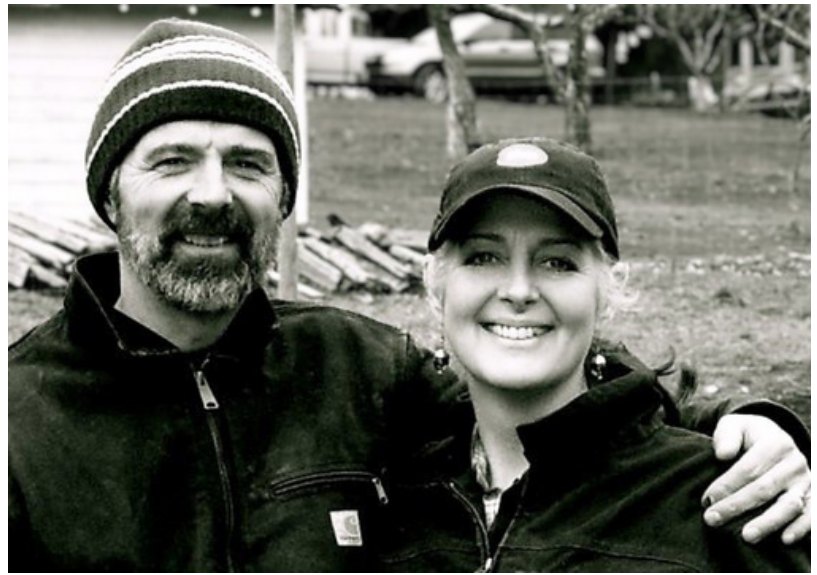


FARMER SPOTLIGHT: CYNTHIA MORA - THE FARM ON RODSTOL LANE

There are people who spend a lifetime becoming experts. And then there are people like Cynthia Mora, who are always learning something new.

Cynthia, also known as “*Farmer Rosie*,” and her husband Tony Mora own, **The Farm on Rodstol Lane** in Port Orchard.

KCAA’s Erika Anderson recently sat down with Cynthia to talk about how she got started in farming, the lessons she’s learned along the way, and how those early beginnings have shaped the farm she has today.



Cynthia & Tony Mora

Erika: When I asked Cynthia how she became a farmer, she didn't begin by talking about crops, livestock, or the property itself. She began with a confession.

"I didn't know anything about farming."

Years ago, when she and her husband, Tony, decided to purchase the family farm, Cynthia knew one thing: If they were going to make it successful, they had a lot to learn.

Cynthia: *"We knew we were going to buy the farm, and I thought, 'Well, if we're going to do this, I better go learn.'"*

That decision led her to a WSU Extension ‘Sustainable Farming’ Workshop. She expected practical knowledge - how to grow food, improve soil, care for livestock, and build a working farm. Instead, she found something much bigger.

"It was fantastic. It taught me so much," she recalled. *"And it connected me to people that really became my mentors."*

As Cynthia reflected on those early years, every story began with another person's name. Before she talked about what she had accomplished, she talked about the people who had encouraged her.

Marilyn Holt.

Diane Fish.

Sharon Howard.

And, before long, Nikki Johanson.

Cynthia laughed as she remembered her instructors insisting there was someone she needed to meet. *"They kept saying, 'You really need to meet Nikki.'" (Pheasant Fields Farm in Silverdale)*

When they finally met, Cynthia understood what everyone had been talking about. *"We just connected, like she does with everybody. You just become her friend. She wants you to succeed. She'll help you do whatever she can. She'll be a voice for you."*

It's a simple story, but I think it says a lot about the agricultural community in Kitsap County. People shared what they knew. They introduced each other. They helped each other get started. There was always someone willing to answer a question or point you in the right direction.

The WSU Extension course ended, but Cynthia's learning didn't stop there. Whenever she had the chance, she sought out farmers with more experience. She worked alongside Sharon Howard to learn how to process poultry. She asked questions, listened, and watched.

Then Cynthia used a word that stuck with me. *"I just really made a point of staying in touch with people... to glean from them."*

Glean.

Farmers use the word "glean" to describe gathering what remains after a harvest, making sure nothing useful goes to waste.

Cynthia used it to describe how she learned. She listened to experienced farmers, asked questions, and took away whatever she could from each person she met. One lesson at a time, she built her knowledge.

An Invitation

One of the more surprising parts of our conversation came when I asked Cynthia about community-supported agriculture. I expected her to describe a traditional CSA - weekly boxes of produce and members sharing in the seasonal harvest. Instead, she smiled and shook her head.

"No CSA," she said with a laugh. "I'm really intimidated by that. I don't have those skills... or really, the desire. What I really wanted to create here was a place for community."

Cynthia isn't inviting people to the farm just because she has vegetables to sell. She wants them to come, spend time there, and experience what a farm can be.

A place where people can come together.
A place where children can learn about agriculture.
A place where curiosity can take over.

One of my favorite stories from our conversation was when Cynthia talked about mushrooms. After hosting a workshop with Jen Clark (*Roots Farm in Poulsbo*), she inoculated a pile of straw with wine cap mushroom spawn. Months passed before anything happened. Then one day, while she was mowing the orchard, she spotted mushrooms coming up through the mulch. She immediately grabbed her phone.

"I called Jen and said, 'Jen! It works! I grew mushrooms that I can eat!'"

Then she laughed at herself. *"I'm kind of an easy lead."*

That little story says a lot about Cynthia. Even after twenty years of farming, she still gets excited when she learns something new.

When our conversation turned to **Farm Camp**, she didn't start with lesson plans or schedules. She talked about the kids.

"They'd dig up potatoes," she said. "They'd find one... then another... then another. They thought it was treasure!"

Some had never gathered eggs. Some had never met a chicken. Some had never stood in a field and realized that carrots, onions, strawberries, and potatoes grow in the dirt.



*"I didn't need the farm to be full of food. I wanted it to be full of people who cared about food."
- Cynthia Mora*



*"I wanted people to experience agriculture - not just read about it. There's something special about meeting the animals and seeing the farm come alive."
- Cynthia Mora*

As we talked about the workshops, Farm Camp, and all the different ways people have gathered at the farm over the years, I started thinking about how much the farm has changed - and how much the way farms connect with their communities has changed, too.

Like many small farms across Washington, The Farm on Rodstol Lane grew during a time when farming was becoming harder to sustain. Selling produce alone often wasn't enough to keep a small farm going, so farmers began looking for other ways to make it work. For some, that meant opening their farms to the community through agritourism, educational programs, workshops, festivals, and other events.

For Cynthia, those experiences had always been part of what she wanted the farm to be, but making that happen turned out to be more complicated than she expected. As regulations around agritourism and on-farm events changed, so did the challenges of running a farm that welcomed the public.

"It was hard," Cynthia admitted. She talked about how disappointing it was. Not because the plans had changed, but because it became harder to bring people together.

Throughout our conversation, Cynthia returned again and again to the same idea. **She wanted people to experience agriculture.**

Not read about it.

Not hear someone else explain it.

Experience it.

When some of those opportunities became harder to offer, Cynthia had to figure out what came next. She could let go of the vision, or she could find another way to make it happen.

Instead of dwelling on what was no longer possible, she started thinking about what she could still do. Some events changed or became smaller. New partnerships came together, and different educational opportunities took shape. The farm kept finding ways to welcome people whenever and however it could.

Years earlier, when Cynthia was learning how to farm, she had asked for help. She found people willing to teach her and farmers willing to share what they knew. When she wanted to build community, she opened the gates. And now, faced with a new challenge, she did what she had done from the beginning: **she found another way.**

She wants people to have a reason to come to the farm to gather, learn, ask questions, and get curious.

That curiosity has been part of Cynthia's story from the beginning. It's what led her to take that first farming class. It's what pushed her to seek out experienced farmers and "glean" from what they knew. And it's still what brings people through the gates today.

Still Growing

When I asked what gives her hope for the future of farming in Kitsap County, she talked about people. Young farmers willing to try something new. Families who want to know where their food comes from. Neighbors who choose to shop locally. People who are curious enough to ask questions.

And those questions make her hopeful. Because she remembers asking them herself.

"If somebody wants to learn," she told me, *"I'm happy to share what I know."* Then she added, *"I'm still learning, too."*

The Harvest

For some farmers, legacy is measured in acres. For others, it's the crops they've grown or the businesses they've built.

When I asked Cynthia what she hoped people would remember about The Farm on Rodstol Lane, she didn't talk about any of those things. She talked about people.

She hopes people remember the farm as a place where they felt welcome. A place where they could ask questions without feeling like they should already know the answers. A place where kids could discover where their food comes from, families could spend time together, and people could simply reconnect with the land around them.

And maybe that's the real harvest.

As the conversation wrapped up, I asked Cynthia what she was most proud of and she didn't hesitate.

"Community."

It made sense. So much of her story came back to the people she had met along the way. She learned from them, built friendships with them, and eventually became someone others could learn from, too.

Cynthia once told me she didn't know anything about farming. What she did know was how to ask questions, listen, and learn from the people around her.

That's still a big part of what happens at The Farm on Rodstol Lane today. People come to learn, ask questions, spend time together, and sometimes just see what's growing.

As KCAA works to strengthen the connection between our community and the farmers who grow our food, Cynthia's story is a good reminder that farming is about more than what comes from the soil. It's also about the people who are willing to share what they know and help someone else get started.

Sometimes it's as simple as answering a question or teaching a child how to dig up a potato.

Sometimes it's just opening the gate.

Cynthia has been doing that for years.



Community Event on the Farm

***"What I really wanted to create here was a place for community."
- Cynthia Mora***

