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Meet Your Neighbors Doug and Andrew Joyer

Lino Lakes farm boys tend 30 acres of vegetables

by **Nicholas Backus**
Staff Writer

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LINO LAKES — As usual, brothers Andrew and Doug Joyer are out in the field, tending to their crops.

It's a warm summer day, and cucumbers, green beans and peppers are soon to be ready for picking at Waldoch Farm and Garden Center.

A storied tradition of vegetable raising and selling that goes back to 1919 lives on. But how has this Lino Lakes gardening destination staved off urban sprawl and downward trending food prices to continue its crop output?

Primarily because the fourth-generation Joyer brothers, whose mother is the granddaughter of founder William Waldoch, have come back home.

"Maintaining the lifestyle is justification enough," Doug Joyer said about his farmer's tan. "I would be doing landscaping for more money, but making produce for your family and the community is more rewarding."

After achieving degrees in horticulture at the University of Minnesota, Andrew, 26, and Doug, 24, are part of a fresh generation of educated urban farmers. The duo collaborates to keep both the garden center and surrounding 30 acres of fields in a manner that would make their great-grandfather proud.

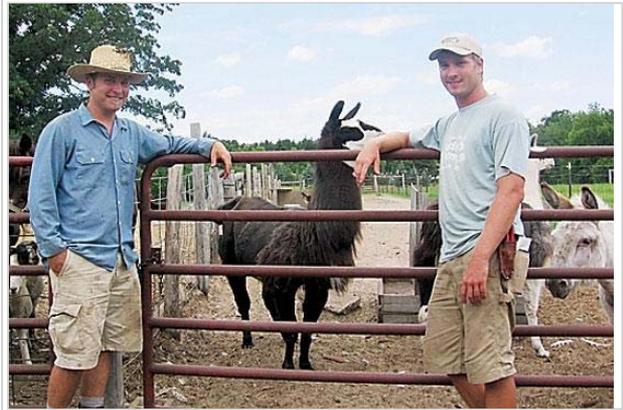
"We're hopefully going to earn enough to make a living but the jury is still out," Andrew Joyer said.

According to the latest American Farm Bureau Federation Marketbasket Survey, food prices have decreased for the third consecutive quarter, yet Waldoch continues to grow amidst poor economic conditions. 2008 marked its seventh consecutive year of increasing sales, according to Mary Joyer, Waldoch's owner.

"All the growth has been from demand," she said. "The produce end used to be more of a lifestyle but now advertising and word of mouth is helping us sell more."

Waldoch features a roadside stand to sell picked produce. The stand has been used for four generations and moved to three different locations. Peppers, in particular, are popular. The farm has been doubling, if not tripling, its pepper sales over the last three years. On the greenhouse side, vegetable plant sales increased by 20 percent in 2008.

Although Waldoch doesn't provide Community Supported Agriculture, (CSA) the program (in which subscribers receive a box of fresh veggies every week through the summer for an annual fee) has gained steam in recent years. Farms listed in the Twin Cities Region CSA Directory have grown from 33 in 2007 to a record 43 in 2009, according to the Land Stewardship Project, a Minneapolis-based nonprofit.



Doug and Andrew Joyer tend some of their animals. They are the fourth-generation of the family at Waldoch Farm and Garden center. - Photo by Nicholas Backus

Doug Joyer believes some of Waldoch's success is because locally grown vegetables are coming into higher demand.

"People are going out to eat less and cooking their own food at home more," he said. "They want to grow their own veggies or buy local veggies and they know they can buy them here. You can't get more local than coming out and picking them yourself."

To make sure it is coming straight from the field, the farm began offering a pick-your-own program in the '80s that continues today.

Late July will bring a horde of Twin Cities residents who are on "the list" to get cucumbers. Mary Joyer has more than 100 people queued in a notebook, some of whom called as early as May.

As of now, the field is empty of customers, with only a couple of bare-backed family farmhands erecting tomato posts. Mary Joyer doesn't expect the pick-your-own program to open until late this month.

Thanks to Waldoch's addition of a greenhouse for a garden center in 1990, Waldoch is able to support vegetable production, which Mary said turns in less revenue.

As the fourth generation of Waldoch farmers grows older, it appears the security of its future grows stronger. Mary said she would not be able to continue producing vegetables if not for Doug, Andrew and her nephew Eric Rivard, who, according to Mary, can "fix anything."

"They are continuing the produce because it's what they want to do," she said about the fourth generation.

Though plenty of landscaping jobs have beckoned for the Joyer brothers, home beckoned longer and more convincingly.

"We're here to stay," Doug said. "We want to sustain it as long as we're able."

Added Andrew, "If people stop wanting to eat veggies and buy flowers than we might be out of business, otherwise we'll be here."

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Nicholas Backus can be reached at quadnews@presspubs.com or 651-407-1235.