



Guidestone Farm Ventures

At new location, Guidestone Farm in Colorado continues to lead by example teaching children and families, bringing fresh produce to the community and supporting sustainable agriculture.

By LaDaryn Backstrum

About the Author

LaDaryn Backstrum writes from her home in Colorado.

The idea of Guidestone Farm sprang from Eden Valley near the Colorado Rocky Mountains and spread throughout the base of the Collegiate Peaks range.

Since 1992, Guidestone had based its operations in that tranquil valley near Loveland; in January 2007, its operations moved to Buena Vista, Co.

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Guidestone's camp program, "Farmhands, educates young people about plant and animal life cycles, agriculture and organic farming. The Loveland church that owns the 150 acres—and that farmer and owner David Lynch had leased since 1972—had other plans for the land. After providing more than 400 Larimer County families with organic meats, vegetables and dairy products for 15 years, Guidestone Farms closed its doors.

What seemed to be a sad ending was actually the bright beginning of a new farming venture in Buena Vista—embracing even bigger and broader horizons. The new venture incorporates farming with several new business ventures ranging from sustainable agriculture to education to housing.

The new farm, a nonprofit organization called simply Guidestone, encompasses 90 acres in the idyllic Upper Arkansas River Valley.

The property is picture perfect with Cottonwood Creek meandering through its expansive meadows and stout trees.

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Guidestone, encompasses 90 acres in the idyllic Upper Arkansas River Valley. A seven-member board of directors currently oversees Guidestone. Among the board members is Erin Schieren, who began farming as an intern at Guidestone Farms in Loveland.

With the knowledge she gained there, she opened several booming businesses near Buena Vista.

Erin's Organics is her geothermal greenhouse that grows organic herbs, salad greens and tomatoes. She also owns Antero Hot Springs and Chalk Cliff Hot Springs, rental cabins available all year in Nathrop, Co.

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David Lynch, Guidestone's founder, has been asked to be a consultant on another low-impact farm and garden community development in Vail. David Lynch inspires people like Schieren with his own entrepreneurial spirit; at the new Guideline, Lynch has started Colorado Grown, a business that helps distribute vegetables grown by local farmers, like Erin's Organics, throughout central Colorado.

He also distributes specialty, pre-ordered foods such as raw milk, farm fresh eggs, chicken, garden greens, fruit shares, raw honey, lamb, grass fed beef, buffalo and pork.



Lynch's leadership qualities have not been overlooked; the Colorado Trust Foundation selected him as one of twelve students with exemplary leadership skills to receive full financial support in meeting their educational goals. In January 2007, Lynch graduated from Regis University with a master's degree in nonprofit management.

Buena Vista, Co.

Guidestone's new facility is located at the base of the majestic Rocky Mountain Collegiate Peaks on the east slope of Continental Divide. Hikers come from around the world to climb fourteen-thousand foot mountains dubbed: "Fourteeners." Mounts Yale, Harvard and Princeton serve as the backdrop for the town of Buena Vista, which literally means "beautiful view."

Community Supported Agriculture A Bridge to Sustainable Agriculture

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) gets whole communities involved in agriculture by inviting them, along with other farmers, to buy shares in a farm or the CSA; and by doing so, they can share in the bounty of farm crops throughout the growing season.

Lynch bolsters the sense of pride in the community-CSA relationship by selling member created goods: farm-fresh vegetables, raw organic honey and other locally grown foods.

An on-site distribution center at Buena Vista offers space for lease to individuals or groups who wish to display and sell hand made, organic or other healthful products.

"It's the kind of consumer/farmer relationship that a lot of people want: to know the place where their food comes from," says Lynch. "It's an up-and-coming agricultural system, which we refer to as sustainable agriculture; it's growing across the country."

"That's what community supported agriculture can do," he says. "Help people understand their bioregion, limitations of water, and kinds of plant and animal communities we're part of. It's a very fragile system."

Sustainable agriculture is the idea of farming productively while still having a low impact on the environment by careful soil management.

In the river valley near Buena Vista, says Lynch, "We have to think about conserving water, so we have to be more conscience of the kinds of soil care. The soils dry out too much. The microorganisms in the top layer die off because it gets too dry. You can't just leave your soil bare. It's not healthy."

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Another form of permaculture involves a portable chicken house designed by a Guidestone team member. They call it a chicken track because they look like big tractors. After the farm's lettuce is harvested, the chicken track is placed over the 4-foot wide lettuce beds. The chickens inside the house scratch up the topsoil, cultivating it and fertilizing the empty beds with their manure. "The idea is to get your organic matters high because that's what's feeding the life and then in turn the micro-life are what unlocks the nutrients in the soil and plants," he says.

"Those are the cycles we're trying to honor. Those are the cycles that have been skipped in our conventional process because farmers have lost their art and farming is an art."

Permaculture

Guidestone takes sustainable farming one step further: it uses farm animals in conjunction with overall farm goals.

Lynch says, "Different animals have different skills you learn to utilize. That's permaculture, creating a sustainable setting. If a garden's overrun by weeds, send a flock of goats in for two weeks and they'll clean up. Then plant the crop."

"We had a nursery of trees completely over run by Canadian Thistle. The more you cut it, the more it grows," Lynch complains. "We had tried everything from weed whipping to putting carpet and cardboard down."

"Meanwhile, the pigs were driving us nuts rooting along the fence line until they'd lift the fence and escape. The greatest



thing about pigs is their rooting skills. I turned 15 pigs loose in the nursery. In one year, they had uprooted every thistle plant with their powerful noses and loved it!" Often called "The Banana Belt" due to its moderate year-round temperatures, the locals claim an average of 360 days of sunshine per year. Because of the exceptional weather, this valley is prime farming land.

The general atmosphere is small town; the residents of Buena Vista are health-conscious, friendly and helpful, and promote a warm, community spirit.

This attitude of assisting other members of the community and farmers with their goals mirrors one of the basic premises of Guidestone's long-standing operations. It's a time-honored but almost lost community tradition that is still alive and well in many farming communities.

Because of the open nature of the residents and Lynch's leadership and business skills, many other businesses are interested in working in conjunction with him.

Children's Summertime Camps

One of Guidestone's goals is to educate the community, which its team members believe benefit the entire state of Colorado. So, like the first farm, Guidestone offers educational camps for children in kindergarten through 12th grade. Known as "Farmhands," the camp program educates young people about plant and animal life cycles, agriculture and organic farming.

Director of Children's Education Rafe Quinton and his partner, Lindsey Drennan, run the summertime camp programs in June, July and August. In the fall, students from public and private schools and churches stay in cabins and complete farming-style chores.

The Montessori School in Salida, Co., has collaborated with Guidestone's Heritage Breed farm program. Guidestone's plan is to allow the schoolchildren to adopt and to sponsor rare breeds of sheep, goats, horses, cows and pigs. The program's goal: educate the children and help preserve the diversification of the genetic library of animals.

Weatherwane CSA Farm

Guidestone also leases plots of land to businesses and individuals interested in CSA and organic farming. Former Guidestone Farm managers, Caitlyn and Seth Roberts, were the first independent farmers to lease from them. With their baby, Juniper May, in tow, the Roberts started a separate business on Guidestone property called Weatherwane CSA farm, (719) 395-8356. In 2007, Weatherwane CSA's gardens have radishes, beets, winter squash, flowers, potatoes and pea; in 2008, the CSA plans to offer 30 to 40 vegetable shares.

Seth and Caitlyn first met when they were both interns at the original Guidestone Farms. This year, Seth is in charge of the internship programs at Guidestone.

Internship Programs

Guidestone's long-standing internship program continues to offer opportunities for college students and others interested in learning about organic and CSA gardening, animal husbandry, milking and sustainable agriculture.

David Lynch says the internship program is "primarily for graduate students studying agriculture or those enrolled in similar types of programs. It's a way for people in academia in those fields to receive grounded experience; but it's not restricted to university students. Volunteers from the private sector come here to explore and get some hands on experience."

"We offer a lot of adult education, too. We want to help people become more conscious of their lifestyle and choices, because it's our choices that impact the environment," says Lynch.

"Another goal is to help people understand what will nurture the earth, what will nurture them and their families and how can they connect more deeply where they live and develop a sense of place. Ultimately, what I'd like to promote is called "earth literacy:" Being literate about the ecological cycles that govern the earth and our lives. Our society's gotten so disconnected from our human relationship with the earth. Those are issues that affect all of us in the long term."

One thing that's different about the internship program at Buena Vista: better housing. Dave admits, "The conditions in the mountain area tend to be windy; that was a problem we had with the solar-powered yurts (used at the previous location)."

Farm Family Camps

Another different component at the new facility is the addition of farm camps for the whole family. Three or four families at



a time stay in cabins near the scenic mountains beside Cottonwood Creek for a week or two during the summers. They learn how to plant, maintain and grow organic herbs and vegetables; they also learn what it takes to maintain and care for livestock.

The Dairy at Cottonwood Creek

Guidestone leases land to a raw milk dairy called The Dairy at Cottonwood Creek.

The dairy uses stringent levels of sanitation and kind animal care, as have been practiced by Guidestone over the years. The cattle, like most of the animals at Guidestone, are allowed to graze out to pasture and are grain fed.

Once up and running, The Dairy at Cottonwood Creek will sell shares in their herd of cattle. Like most CSA systems, the dairy members receive milk in exchange for their CSA share payment that helps pay for boarding and care of the herd.

Lynch takes a special interest in farm dairies; since in 1992, he has lobbied to increase the opportunities for dairy farmers interested in selling raw organic milk, which is illegal in most of the United States; farmers could be prosecuted by jail terms just for selling fresh milk from their cows. That worry is now gone after Lynch and other Colorado farm families rallied for change; working with Colorado legislators and the Colorado Department of Health, they helped to organize a legal method of distribution that didn't threaten food safety laws or regulations.

Cottonwood Meadows

Cottonwood Meadows is a community development that uses Guidestone Farms previous location on the Front Range as inspiration. The 277-acre development project in Buena Vista is prime agricultural land being preserved for farming indefinitely; 50 percent of the land is designated as open space. The villages will be built with the orientation toward foot traffic, with the garages built in the back of the homes; a CSA farm will be at the center of Cottonwood Meadows.

It's a complete community with a senior housing center, an assisted-care facility, individual cottages, apartments, single-family homes, a spa, an amphitheater and a field-to-table restaurant, which serves organic foods grown on the community's CSA farm.

Lynch has been asked to be a consultant on another low-impact farm and garden community development in Vail where the residents are directly connected to their food source. Guidestone is serving as the inspiration for this new model of farm-centered diversification, with a sustaining food source and low impact on the environment.

For a guided tour of Guidestone, or to schedule an internship program, summer or family camps, contact David Lynch at farmerlynch@msn.com. You can also call their office at (719) 395-5814.