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## Organic farming takes root

**By Rachel Tuinstra**  
*Seattle Times Eastside bureau*

Nestled in the Snoqualmie Valley near Carnation, 20 minutes from Microsoft and 40 minutes from downtown Seattle, the Ames Creek Farm would seem a hot spot for new tract homes or condos. There's a view of the snow-capped Cascades to the east, Redmond Ridge to the west.

But Friday, Michaela Blakely, the knees of her jeans stained with grass, her salt-and-pepper hair pulled into a ponytail, gave a tour of the future of this land: The free-range chicken and beef will go here, she said. Right next to the organic Asian greens.

Blakely and her husband, Joe Adams, own Growing Things Farm, one of three organic farms that will take over parts of this 178 acres of land in agreements with PCC Farmland Trust, which recently purchased the property for \$1.2 million to ensure that it will never be paved and will be used to grow organic food.

The deal means the farmers will get land for a fraction of what it would cost on the open market. And their output will increase the amount of locally grown organic food in the region, said Goldie Caughlan, a board member for the land trust.

"Farmland is a heritage," Caughlan said. "Without farms there is no food, or certainly no local food."

Farmland has been quickly disappearing in the region as land is priced out of reach of most farmers' budgets. The farmland trust, a nonprofit affiliated with PCC Natural Markets, has been raising money to purchase land at a market rate to sell or lease to organic farmers for less.

It is one of the few, if not the only, trust funds in the country dedicated to creating and protecting organic farmland.

Blakely and her husband had been running Growing Things in another location in the Snoqualmie Valley for about 20 years, but they only had five acres.

"It was getting so confined," Blakely said. "It's hard to do and not put too much stress on the land." Now Growing Things will lease about 30 acres.

Another family farm, Shong Chaos, which in Hmong means Children's Garden, will lease about 20 acres.

The farmland trust has sold about 127 acres of the Ames Creek Farm property to Andrew and Wendy Stout, who run Full Circle Farm. Under terms of the sale, the land must be used as organic farmland in perpetuity.

"We're excited about it," Stout said. "We want to have a big harvest dinner in the fall. We want to make sure people have an invitation to look at organic farming more closely. We have an opportunity to teach things, how to view the land and land stewardship."

Before it was sold to the PCC trust, the farmland, near West Snoqualmie Valley Road between Redmond and Carnation, was long run by family farmers. The previous farmers used the land to grow grass for cattle, and they didn't use pesticides or other toxins. So the ground is ready for organic farming, Stout said.



GREG GILBERT / THE SEATTLE TIMES  
Joe Adams holds a 2-month-old pig at Ames Creek Farm. Adams' Growing Things Farm is one of three organic farms that will take over parts of the Ames Creek land.



GREG GILBERT / THE SEATTLE TIMES  
Andrew Stout displays some of his produce at Full Circle Farm. The PCC Farmland Trust sold about 127 acres of the Ames Creek Farm property to the Stouts for organic farming.

Stout said the other two farmers will work together, each with niche markets and methods, but all growing organically.

For Blakely and Adams, that means raising organically grown animals and produce so that the land is kept rich, fertile and able to yield good food. It means giving the chickens a whole 1 ½ acres to roam free, and the tomatoes room to grow in a large greenhouse before they get transferred to soil outside.

"We basically sell to farmers' markets," Adams said. "It will be a long time before we're big enough to sell to PCC."

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