

EAST STONE HOUSE CREEK FARM PROFILE

PAUL JOHNSON – APRIL 2008

My 40-acre farm lies in the gentle rolling hills of southern Jefferson County – 15 miles from Lawrence, 5 miles north of the Kansas River and 5 miles east of Lake Perry. I bought my farm in September 1980 and have sustainably, organically farmed this land ever since. My farm is in a creek valley thus the name East Stone House Creek Farm. I have 10 acres of creek bottom land that I garden, 15 acres of brome hay that I have baled for mulch and feed for my sheep, 8 acres of pasture and 7 acres of woods.

My farming philosophy is pretty simple – the healthiest soils produce the healthiest plants and thus the healthiest food. While I work with 10 creek bottom acres (for my urban friends an acre is just a little smaller than a football field), I garden on 3-4 acres each year while growing special cover crops on the remaining. I divide my gardening between 2 acres of annuals and 1-2 acres of perennials. Annuals include potatoes, broccoli, cabbage, snap peas, spinach, green onions, squash, cucumbers, peppers, tomatoes, melons and strawberries. The perennials include rhubarb, asparagus, blackberries and red raspberries. I rotate my annuals on a 2-year cycle while growing red clover, soybeans, buckwheat, rye, wheat and hairy vetch on the fallow ground that is then incorporated into the soil.

I had a large strawberry and raspberry operation from 1985 to 1993 and then moved over to Rolling Prairie when it started in 1994. From 1994 to 1997, I was a certified organic grower. Since that time I have sold all of my produce through Rolling Prairie or directly to customers so I felt I did not need the organic certification. I have not changed my gardening practices and in fact have improved my uses of cover crops, rotations and living green manures. My small flock of sheep provides the composted manure I need to top dress my rhubarb and raspberries. I use the fresh cuttings of red clover and hairy vetch as a nitrogen fix for my summer plants such as tomatoes and green peppers. I have used organic insecticides in the past but now I try more cropping rotation, use cover crops such as red clover as a habitat for beneficial insects and plant extra so if some is lost to insects I can still meet my production goals.