

Hi Jasmine,

Bryan & Shari from Dancing Roots Farm here. Even though the process of passing our farm on to the next caretaker started over a year ago, it seems things are moving quickly now and we realize we'd like to volunteer some input and a little history to you and the other folks on the board that are making what is, to us, a monumental decision.

First, we want to thank you, Jasmine, for reaching out to us when you first moved to our neighborhood. All those years ago you stopped by and introduced yourself with treats and we've always remembered that friendly gesture! We'd also like to apologize for not returning it! I can offer an excuse, though. The process of rehabbing this property and home and creating a successful organic farming operation was a 48 hr/day, 14 day a week undertaking that occupied 99% of our energy for a couple of decades. The lack of time and energy to engage more with friends and neighbors was a constant frustration of those years. Given a second opportunity we'd like to think we'd do it differently, but we're not sure how.

Since we didn't, unfortunately, share meals and stories with each other all these years. I would like to take this opportunity to tell you and other interested parties a little about Shari & Bryan's histories, and the history of Dancing Roots Farm.

Shari & Bryan's Farming History

We moved to Portland from Fairbanks, Alaska in 1992. As a trained, professional musician (sax, woodwinds, music education), I soon made inroads into the vibrant Portland music scene. Shari also found success in her field of environmental activism and non-profit work and was hired as the first employee of what was then called the Northwest Earth Institute. She was instrumental in helping that organization spread environmental awareness to thousands of Oregonians.

Even though our respective fields kept us low-income, with perseverance, creative financing and lots of sweat-equity, we managed to purchase a fixer-upper house in NE Portland that we renovated over the course for the next 8 years ('94 - '02). During those years Shari gradually realized that she felt a calling to change from a path of fighting *against* threats to a path of being *for* a better way. That "better way" was growing healthy food for the community and caring for the land.

In 1995 she began her journey by volunteering, apprenticing, partnering, and then by 1998 she started her own farming operation on rented land in Hillsboro. After several years of the 45-minute commute to the farm we would never own, we realized that to be able to farm most successfully would require somehow finding our own piece of property.

In May of 2002, after years of searching, we finally found the Woodard Rd property. We'd come out to Corbett to look at a different property on Woodard that turned out to be less than ideal. As we left that property though, we passed by a dilapidated old farm house on the road with a rickety little handmade "For Sale" sign stuck in the front yard. We wrote down the phone number and after a long summer of negotiating, on Oct. 10, 2002 we closed on the property and began the immense project of rehabilitating the old Woodard house back to livability. I can't tell you how many elderly neighbors stopped by to thank us for saving what at one time had been the original house on Woodard Road!

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Once we had the home's structure and systems renovated enough to live in, the *real* work began: The work of turning the land back into a productive, organic farm. We had to start from scratch with very little financial resources, but over the course of a couple of decades using our bodies, minds, repurposing, trading, recycling, wonderful apprentices and employees, and the innate fertility of this land, we managed to create a farm that we hope continues to sustain the health and hopes of our community for generations to come.

Some Details About the Farm

When we got it in 2002, the land was overgrown with volunteer trees and grass. With the help of neighbor Jim Tarpley (now deceased) and his tractor, we plowed our first field. Gradually, we acquired enough equipment to open up new fields and by 2010 we had a crew of 5 employees, a CSA membership of 200 families, and provided premium produce to over 25 of Portland's finest restaurants. During those years we built the business, planted the orchard, provided education to apprentices, employment to young farmers, continued to renovate the home reinforced the soil fertility and health through organic practices, constructed important infrastructure and held fund-raising dinners that supported causes ranging from Helping Hands (at the Corbett Grange) to our own CSA Scholarship Fund that made CSA membership affordable to low-income folks.

Fast forward more than a decade. By spring 2023 it became obvious that we would not be living out our original plan of staying here until the end of our days. The last 3-5 years had dealt us severe setbacks with COVID being merely the icing on the cake. We had started thinking seriously about selling, but that thought always made us sad. Sad not only to leave our life's project, but also because of the threat of the property being taken over by those with no vision. We never thought of this place as an "investment," we thought of it more as a family member and resource to be nurtured and cared for. A friend of ours once saw an old house with a stone-block foundation. Chiseled into one of the stone blocks were the words (in German)- "This house is mine, yet it is not mine. Someday it will be someone else's and it won't be theirs either." That's how we've always felt about this house *and* land, and that's why we feel so blessed to have this opportunity to pass it on to new caretakers.

And that's where you and the board come in. The original people lived off this land for untold centuries, then the Woodard family farmed it for 70-80+ years. Shari and I bought it from the Woodard's and have put a combined 45 years of our life's energy into making it a fully functioning, turn-key and bountiful source of nutritious, chemical free food for our community. We have now handed it over to you and trust that you will use your wisest heart and deepest soul to discern who are the most worthy recipients of this little piece of vibrant Mother Earth.

We also want you to know that we will be extremely happy to do whatever we can do to help the new farmers be successful in their transition. There are many things to know about this land and its infrastructure and we can help them a lot, especially if they will be growing food. And what beautiful and incredibly tasty food this land grows!

Sincerely,

Handwritten signatures of Bayan Dideoosere and Shari Suikin.