

New Farmer Profile: Chris Cubberly

[CRAFT and Stateline Farm Beginnings@ graduate Chris Cubberly](#)



Each year, more people come to Angelic Organics Learning Center in search of a career change. The Learning Center's farmer training programs have guided many of them on a new, promising path. No matter their previous occupation, these students have become rejuvenated and drawn satisfaction in farm work. Just ask former veteran chef Chris Cubberly.

While working in San Francisco, Chris had reached the point where he dreaded going to work every day. The late hours and constant bustle of the kitchen had become overwhelming after 15 years. But his eyes opened one day when a local farmer made a routine delivery of herbs to his restaurant. Chris didn't speak to the man, but admired his demeanor. "The farmer was very relaxed, and I was very tense," Chris said. "He looked pretty happy. Happier than I felt."

Chris put aside his chef's hat and examined farming possibilities in Northern California. However, land was too expensive, and soon he and his wife, Tania, moved back to Chicago, where he became a manager at Fox and Obel, a gourmet food market in the city.

During this time, Chris used his off days to immerse himself in farming by working as an intern at Green Earth Institute, a CRAFT-member farm. In 2006, Chris became an employee at Sandhill Organics, another CRAFT farm, to gain a better understanding of the production side of farming. He also participated in field days on other CRAFT farms around the region, gaining exposure to a wide variety of sustainable farming practices.

In 2006, Chris and Tania enrolled in the Learning Center's Stateline Farm Beginnings program, where they learned much of what it takes to keep a farm running. "One thing that we took away from Farm Beginnings was the experience of other farmers who spoke to us about their operations and business practices," Chris said. "We learned there's a million ways to do the same thing and that was really valuable to us. The farmers were passionate about it, and we could tell we were passionate about it. It kept us going."

Through Farm Beginnings, the Cubberlys discovered the farm incubator program at Prairie Crossing in Grayslake, Ill. The incubator allows aspiring farmers to hone their skills for three to five years on five acres of rented land before securing their own farmland elsewhere. Chris and Tania jumped on the opportunity and together started Red Tail Farm, where they raise chickens and grow herbs, fruits, vegetables, and flowers. They share a small tractor and two water carts with three other incubator farms at Prairie Crossing.

2007 is Chris and Tania's first full growing season. They're selling Red Tail Farm products at farmers' markets in Northfield, Ill., and Chicago's Logan Square neighborhood.

"A lot of people go to farmers markets to get really well-cared-for food from hard-working people," Chris said. "High-quality care and love go into this food."

Chris lauds the Learning Center's farmer training programs for helping him focus on his goals as a farmer and understanding the hard work required. He is also appreciative of the people he has met. "Farm Beginnings had all kinds of great people. I gained friends and phenomenal business connections. That's invaluable."

Although Chris and Tania are still getting their feet wet in operating their own farm (and raising their 1-year-old son, Eddie), they're already seeing the positive impact it's making on their lives. "It's incredibly satisfying to see something completely through from seed to harvest and sale, selling your own things that you've grown yourself. And it's brought my wife and me closer together. We both think about it all the time, and it's really wonderful and very fulfilling.

"This is my full-time work. I'm very happy about it."