

# Food



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JOSEPH RESSLER PHOTOS | FOR LNP/LANCASTERONLINE

Top, the greenhouses and the pick-your-own field at Homefields Farm in Millersville. Bottom row from left, farmhand Christina Waple, farm supervisor Elizabeth Swope, lead farm hand Kelly Morris and farm manager Katie Landis.

## AGRICULTURE

# GROWING POSSIBILITIES

*Homefields provides working opportunities for those with intellectual and developmental disabilities while providing a self-sustaining, not-for-profit CSA*

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It's a steamy afternoon in early June, and the Juneberry tree at Homefields Farm in Millersville is heavy with fruit. Farmhand Christina Waple reminds me to wash my hands. Four of us each grab a small container and gather around the towering tree, plucking the dark purple fruit (also known as a serviceberry and saskatoon) that looks and tastes like a tart blueberry.

Waple, who is 35, has worked at Homefields for nine years. She is among three part-time farmhands living with intellectual and developmental disabilities that have long been thought of as barriers to traditional employment. A family member drives her to work from their home in Bainbridge. But with farming, Waple has discovered a way into the world.

"Farming is in my blood," said Waple, smiling wide. "All of my ancestors farmed — my great-aunt, my grandma, my mom and now, me."

Waple points to the hanging whiteboard documenting that day's handiwork. By midday, along with farm manager Katie Landis and lead farmhand Kelly Morris, they had harvested 40 bunches of radishes, 36 bunches of tatsoi, 22 pounds of spinach and 37 pounds of lettuce, in preparation for the third week of the farm's 24-week summer Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program.

Waple's story is woven into the fabric of Homefields, which was born out of a quest for a safe living space for people with disabilities. In 1994, when Waple was just a girl, Linda and Tom Strauss, along with four other local families, bought an 8-acre horse farm with the intent of creating two residences for their adult children who all needed assisted, long-term care. (Currently, six residents live among the two



### FARM SERIES

This is the third installment of an ongoing series with a focus on small independent farms and creative use of farmland. We hope it serves as a reminder that the food grown and raised in Lancaster County is both diverse and extraordinary and that the people tending the land have stories worth telling. Join us in saluting our neighbors.

homes on the property.)

In 2000, the founders realized their vision for a working vegetable farm and launched a subscriber-based CSA, which is a self-sustaining, not-for-profit enterprise. Ten years later, they bought an additional 10 acres. With seven acres in active production, the farm grows more than 50 crops that include more than 300 plant varieties, said Landis, with efforts underway for organic certification. On my June visit, I met Landis and Morris in the middle of a field of garlic (about 6,000 bulbs strong, according to Landis), where they were busy snipping scapes, the plant's edible shoot. As this story went to press, the crew, along with a massive army of volunteers, was elbow deep in harvesting all that garlic.

Every Thursday through Saturday, 185 farm shareholders visit the property to pick up their weekly haul, available farm-market style (versus packed in boxes) and have access to the quarter-acre pick-your-own field. On a recent visit, blueberries and peas were among the pick-your-own offerings. You might see kids tagging along with their parents, or



Farm manager Katie Landis works on seeding a crop of ornamental corn at Homefields Farm in Millersville.

board member/volunteer Matt Dillely tinkering on a new project. (Dillely and a band of volunteers recently installed a native plant rain garden with the help of a Sierra Club grant.) There might be a yoga class or native plant workshop underway.

Talk to any independent farmer, and chances are they aren't in it for fame or fortune. They're doing it for stewardship, for the love of the land. At Home-

fields, the mission seems even more transcendent, a love that ricochets from the head cabbage to the zinnias, from Christina Waple's hands to your kitchen and to one big communal table at which everyone can eat.

"What began as homes for our children is now home for community," Linda Strauss said in an email. "The farm is pregnant with possibilities and the ideas flourish."

### CSA SIGN-UP

• The summer CSA is sold out, but there are spaces remaining for the 10-week winter CSA. For more info: 150 Letort Road, Millersville; 717-872-2012; homefields.org. Farmer Kelly Morris is bringing Homefields produce to Manor Market, a monthly maker and food market on the grounds of Immerse International, 321 Manor Ave., Millersville. For details: facebook.com/manormarketinmillersville.