



TABLE TOP FARM

Stewardship Profiles in California Agriculture
Environmental Leadership with Soil Health and Water Efficiency

In 2010 Arron Wilder founded Table Top Farm, a series of small, organically certified vegetable plots located on the Point Reyes Mesa and the historic Black Mountain Ranch in West Marin County. Arron leases a total of 11.5 acres on four separate parcels: three-quarters of an acre on Cypress Road, another three-quarters of an acre on McDonald Lane, three acres on Toby Road, and seven acres at Black Mountain Ranch. Initially Arron began farming row crops at the Cypress Road location with the idea of marketing to Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) customers, but as his business developed, his customer base expanded. He now also sells his produce to local restaurants, West Marin grocery stores, and two farm stands.

In addition to cole crops, tomatoes, alliums, root vegetables, snow peas, potatoes, beans and chicory, Table Top Farm also produces fresh cut flowers. Tom planted a mixed fruit tree orchard 2014. The family-run Black Mountain Ranch has been in agriculture since the 1850s and the current landlords are strong proponents of agricultural sustainability and environmental stewardship. At first Arron didn't think that organic certification was necessary until he realized that some of the beginning farmer programs he was applying for required the farm to be certified organic, and that going organic would give his operation a competitive advantage. In 2015 Table Top Farm achieved organic status through certification with California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF).

CHALLENGES

Managing soil fertility and moisture content across four different plots is an ongoing challenge for Arron. At the ranch, there is a creek that is subject to fluvial erosion, and surface erosion elsewhere has led to a loss of nutrient rich topsoil. Silt deposits contaminate the stream and pose a threat to endangered Coho Salmon and other aquatic species living in the creek. Starting plants from seed in the greenhouse has been labor intensive and it has been difficult for Arron to keep transplants alive and healthy. In the beginning, Arron's soil was rather acidic, with a pH of 5.0 - 5.2.

ACHIEVEMENTS

- Optimal soil cation exchange capacity
- Eliminated overhead irrigation
- Increased seeding quality and climate adaptation



“It is important to have peers and a network of a farmer relationships.”

-Arron Wilder

SOLUTION IMPLEMENTATION AND MANAGEMENT

Arron is working to improve his soil by practicing no-fallow farming and crop rotation. For the last six years, he planted winter cover crops on all of the land except for the acreage reserved for wintertime production, which takes place on three to six acres per year. Cereal rye is a cover crop that Arron has used to help stabilize the soil and protect against erosion while balancing microbial activity and soil pH. He has also used compost to help boost his soil's organic matter and water holding capacity. The compost is made on-site from collected food scraps and manure, which he inoculates with soil and compost.

To address the erosion around the stream, Arron planted a three-hundred foot vegetative buffer along Lagunitas Creek that provides habitat, prevents runoff, controls sediment and encourages water infiltration. He also built a drainage swale to filter pollutants, encourage rainwater infiltration, and replenish the groundwater table.

MEASURING SUCCESS

The combination of cover cropping and compost has resulted in optimal soil cation exchange capacity (a measure of the soil's ability to hold positively charged ions, which influences soil structure, pH, and nutrient availability), and plant nutrient uptake. Over time the rye cover crop and compost applications have improved the soil organic matter and brought the soil pH up to 6.4.

In an effort to decrease on-farm water use, Table Top Farm has eliminated overhead irrigation in its nursery; this has also minimized the need for thinning and weeding. Replacing the farm's existing greenhouse with two new high tunnels has been a win-win strategy that has allowed Arron to save on seeds, extend his growing season and reduce plant nutrient and water needs in the field due to an increase in seedling quality and climate adaptation.

For more information about the stewardship practices discussed in this profile, please contact the farmer directly. You can reach Arron Wilder by phone at (415) 209-4705 or by email to: aswilder@gmail.com

STEWARDSHIP PRACTICES



Soil Health



Water Efficiency



PROJECT PARTNERS

- Marin Resource Conservation District
- NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
- NRCS High Tunnel System Initiative program
- Salmon Protection and Watershed Network (SPAWN)
- U.S. Department of Fish and Wildlife

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