

Meet Our Farmers

The Veggie Barn

What began as a small garden for Adryon Clay a few years ago, turned into a 1500 square foot organic experiment a year ago. Now, thanks to Tom Mekus and Tim Wilson, the Veggie Barn has grown to 48,000 square feet, is awaiting its certified organic designation, and sells its produce at a custom built stand on the farm as well as at the Raleigh Downtown Farmers Market.



Ms. Clay, who owns and finances the farm, had been using her land to raise horses, but five years ago she got swept up in the local food movement. That new passion led to a discussion with her landscaper, Tom, about the idea of planting a garden. Since the land Ms. Clay wanted to use had previously been untouched, they decided to try their hand at organic gardening. The first few years bore mixed and at times frustrating results. Mekus, who had never planted an organic garden before, learned through trial and error quickly realizing that many factors were out of his control. However, he proved to be a quick study because last summer it happened. The garden produced and the processes became much more satisfying and fun for Mekus. It was then that the commitment was made to go head long into farming. So, for the 2010 season, the garden was expanded to more than 30 times its original size, allowing The Veggie Barn to grow blackberries, tomatoes, eggplant, basil, peppers, corn, okra, field peas, carrots, turnips, rutabaga, cabbage, onions, zucchini, squash, garlic, beets, and lettuce.

While last year's triumph was for their own use, Clay, Mekus, and Wilson are selling the fruits of their labor to the public this summer. They are at the Raleigh Downtown Farmers Market from 10 am until 2 pm on Wednesdays

and also offer their produce at their own farm stand. Located on the corner of Tryon Road and Dover Farm Road (just a ten minute ride from Downtown Raleigh), The Veggie Barn's stand is open from Wednesday to Friday, 3:30 until 6:30 pm, and Saturday from 9 am until 5 pm.

On the farm, Mekus and Wilson plant, weed, water, and harvest by hand. As part of the process of becoming certified organic, they do not plant treated seeds and only use organic fertilizers and pesticides. In fact, Mekus even makes use of bacterial pesticides and waters the plants via a pond on the property.

Even though The Veggie Barn may a newcomer to the area's farming scene, its future is bright. Work has already begun to expand the growing area to two acres and, as we speak, Mekus is investigating non plastic drip irrigation systems. The plan is to plant more squash, zucchini, tomatoes, and okra while adding blueberries, cantaloupe, and more herbs to the farm's repertoire. That's plenty to look forward to!



"Meet Our Farmers" and tasting tips by Brian Adornetto. Brian is a professional chef, culinary instructor, freelance food writer, and food editor for the Raleigh Downtown. For more information on Brian, please visit his [website](#).