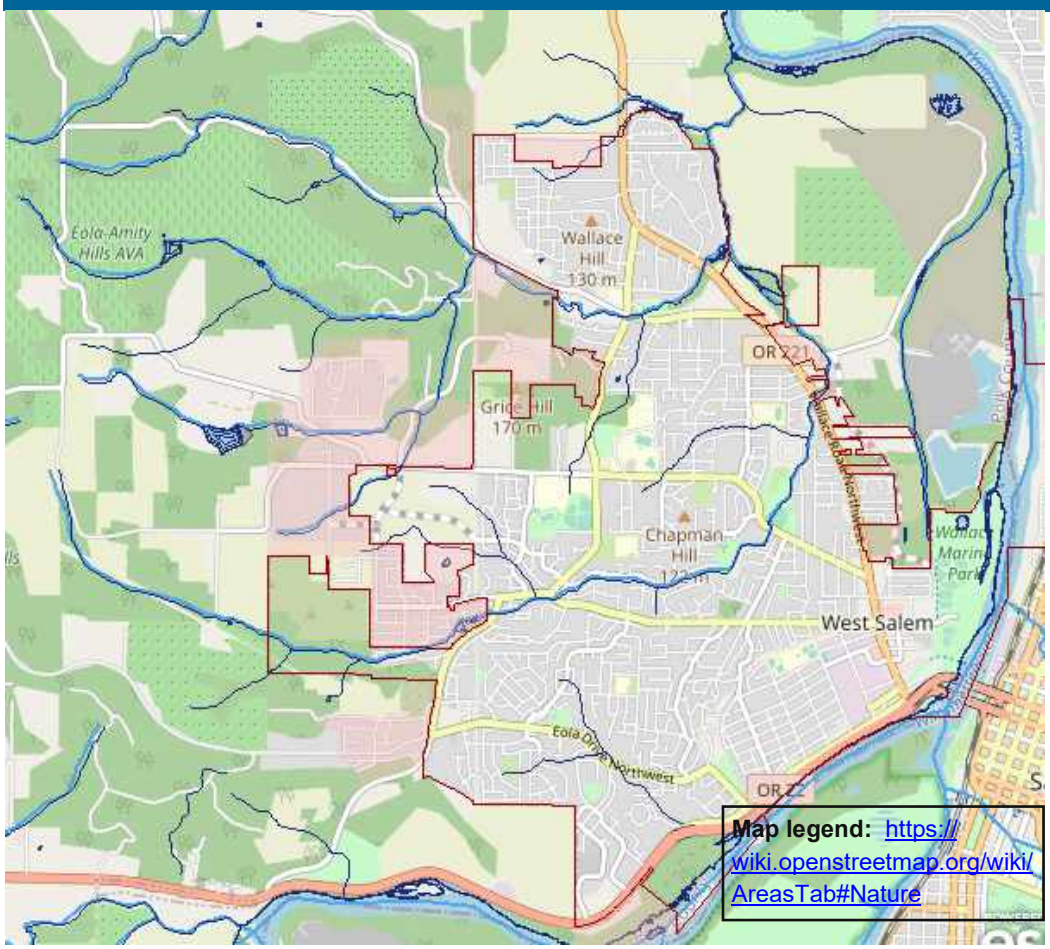
Watershed Events

Glenn and Gibson Creeks Watershed Council Newsletter Spring 2021



Growth in the Watershed

Crops, that is. The upper and lower areas of our watershed are primarily zoned EFU, Exclusive Farm or Forest Use. GGWS is unusual because development is sandwiched between farming zones. Farming practices in our watershed have changed over time but a wide variety of crops and agricultural land uses remain important. In this issue, we meet three farmers, each at a different elevation of the watershed, to learn more about the challenges and opportunities of farming in our watershed.

Agriculture in the Watershed Agriculture in the Glenn and Gibson Creeks Watershed (GGWS) has varied over time. At one time, cherry and prune orchards covered the hills. West Salem hosted an event called the Cherry Blossom Drive. One of the main roads in West Salem is named Orchard Heights Road. The industrial area of West Salem was home to a thriving canning and fruit drying industry. Changes in market scale and development pressures have seen the fruit industry diminish in an area that once led to Salem being known as “Cherry City”.

The land use map illustrates the variety of agriculture in the watershed. The higher elevations include vineyards in the *Eola - Amity Hills Viticulture* area, cherry and prune orchards, wood lots, nurseries and Christmas tree farms. Where topography permits, grain is grown. Smallholders raise livestock or grow specialty crops such as flowers and vegetables. Water is a limiting factor in the hills. The entire watershed is included in the Oregon Water Resources *Eola Hills Ground Water Limited Area*. When a hemp farm was recently proposed in the West Salem hills, neighbors were concerned that the irrigation required would cause their wells to run dry.

The most intensive agriculture occurs in the lower part of the watershed on the Willamette River floodplain due to the flat topography and fertile soil. Crops include fruit and nut orchards, nursery crops, cane berries and vineyards. All the farmers we interviewed expressed concern about the future of farming in our watershed due to two factors: pressure of urban and suburban development and market forces driving production toward large scale operations.

Upper hills of the watershed

David Simmons has owned and operated **Organic Enterprises of Oregon** (OEO) since 1992. Currently, he raises grain and legume seeds.

He serves on the Board of Directors of the Polk Soil and Water Conservation District (Polk SWCD), representing Zone 2 which includes the Glenn and Gibson Creeks Watershed. He serves as a Director on the Glenn and Gibson Creeks Watershed Council, representing the Polk SWCD. David also serves as Water Operator for the Orchard Heights Water Association.

David Simmons is a 4th generation farmer in the Glenn and Gibson Creeks Watershed. David's great grandfather emigrated to Oregon in 1911. He traveled to Oregon from Kansas in a horse drawn wagon on the Oregon Trail, attracted by a realtor friend of the family who extolled the opportunities of the fertile and abundant land available. David's father, Wayne Simmons , continued in the family farm business using the modern equipment and chemicals that transformed agriculture post World War II. David is continuing the tradition in a different way, farming organically. By the time David began farming, West Salem had grown and neighbors were close by. Those neighbors had concerns about pesticide drift and were very unhappy when inadvertent pesticide spray drifted onto their gardens.

Rachel Carson's landmark book Silent Spring was published in 1962 and public concern about pesticide use began to grow. It seemed like a good time to go organic. Public concern has only grown. According to agricultural sources Rodale and Agrivi.com, domestic consumer demand far outstrips supply and organic products are imported to meet the demand. It is a given that farming is not for the faint of heart, and organic farming is definitely not for the faint of heart. According to the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA), land certified organic must meet rigorous standards on both state and federal levels for at least three years. During the three years, no produce coming off the land can be labeled organic. The certification process includes a chain of product identification so food can be traced back to the source.

Benefits associated with organic farming include minimizing the environmental impacts of farming. It avoids synthetic pesticides and herbicides and renews soil by crop rotation, use of animal manure and compost. Farm workers and organic produce consumers experience health benefits from less exposure to pesticides. Soil erosion is minimized due to no till or low till plowing.

Challenges include keeping up with changes to agricultural practices. Organic farming has become increasingly dominated by large operators. They are able to farm on the scale necessary to succeed with market conditions that include high operating costs and small profit margins. Government programs designed to aid organic farmers are often targeted toward these large, high tech operations. There is a niche for small operators but often that involves creative approaches such as adding value to crops and directly marketing to consumers. Organic farming is more labor intensive, requiring hands on work to maximize production. There is increased risk of crop loss due to disease or pests that cannot be dealt with by organic methods. Organic farmers may still use "organic" pesticides including copper and sulphur that can damage both environment and health. Organic products are expensive at market, but often, the increased price does not go back to the producer, but rather to the marketing and certification chain.

The OEO operation high in our watershed captures and filters precipitation, benefitting both ground and surface water quality and quantity. Carbon capture, habitat and open space are additional benefits.

"America's agricultural landscape is now 48 times more toxic to honeybees, and likely other insects, than it was 25 years ago, almost entirely due to widespread use of so-called neonicotinoid pesticides"

(6 Aug, 2019, Nat. Geographic)

Mid level hills

Claudia Huntsinger owns and operates **Claudias Country Pantry**. Drive west on Orchard Heights Road and you see the colorful pink sign directing you to turn into this agricultural operation that grows, processes and markets all in one place. This seems to be the trend for successful small scale agricultural operations. Consumers pay more attention to where their food comes from, how it is grown and how it gets to market. Those are Claudia's concerns as well. One of the reasons she gives for her life long interest in gardening is her concern about where her food comes from and how it is grown.

Claudia markets her produce to three Roth's grocery stores, Amadeus Restaurant, Alibi Bar and Grill and, in season, directly to you at her vegetable stand on Orchard Heights Road. "Buying Local" doesn't get much more local than this.

She also grows, cuts and arranges flowers and sells this service to local businesses. She does admit to getting some help from her family but this is primarily a one woman operation. Her business has been affected by COVID 19. She has had contracts cancelled and returned from a buying trip in Mexico just before the border was closed.

Claudia's garden is all organic and thanks to a drip irrigation system, conserves water. She does her irrigation system with Steve Cravino Landscaping and Lighting, also a local business. Due to the many pollinator plants in her garden, she has considered bees but thinks the care and feeding of bees might be beyond her time limitations. She does talk to a local beekeeper about locating some hives in the garden.

CLAUDIA'S ORGANIC
Veggies & Cut Flowers
Jams, Relishes & Pickles

Wed and Fri, 12–5
Call ahead for availability

July – October
3187 Orchard Hts. Rd. NW
Salem, Oregon 97304

503-949-0045

Claudia's is a poster child for keeping agriculture in the watershed. It provides fresh, sustainably grown food that does not have to travel far to the consumer. Like the other farmers interviewed, Claudia Huntsinger worries about pressure from development.

Claudia's Country Pantry has experienced being in the path of a proposed housing development. That proposal was deferred for the time being but the risk remains.

Exclusive Farm Use is a land use zone that was designed to protect agriculture but as urban growth boundaries expand, development pressure increases. This is a trend in our urbanizing watershed. As the planning process **Our Salem** moves ahead, one for citizens and planners alike to consider.

Pauline and Lowell Ford

Willamette River Floodplain

Pauline Ford grew up playing in old growth riparian forest on the property where the Ford family now grows wine grapes. In between forest and vineyard, Pauline's father pastured dairy cows, then beef cattle. Later, the family grew row crops, walnut and cherries. The Columbus Day storm took out the walnut orchard in 1962. In the early 1980's, the Fords were informed by the Cherry Growers Association that they could no longer sell their cherries to the association because their operation was too small. In 1983, Lowell and Pauline decided to grow grapes, and started **Illahe Vinyards.**

At the Wallace Road location of **Illahe Vineyards**, the Fords grow Pinot Gris, Viognier and Chardonnay grapes. Chardonnay makes up the sparkling wine which is the newest wine offering. Brad Ford is the winemaker, and operates the winery at the vineyard in Dallas. Brad grew up on the property at Wallace Road and makes the third generation working this land.

The vineyard adheres to the rigorous sustainability standards necessary to receive the LIVE and Salmon Safe certifications. The LIVE web page explains:

" LIVE offers third-party sustainability certifications for both the vineyard and the winery, thereby ensuring minimal environmental impact throughout the entire chain of wine production.

LIVE takes a whole-farm and whole-winery approach to sustainability. The entire property, including non-grape crops, landscaping, building operations, labor practices, even packaging must be managed to LIVE standards.

LIVE's certification is internationally accredited and third-party verified. LIVE is endorsed by the International Organization for the Biological and Integrated Control of Noxious Animals and Plants (IOBC), an organization recognized for 60 years for its cutting-edge work in applied sustainability research. The IOBC accredits LIVE annually and has since 2000."

Illahe Vineyards has received the Salmon Safe grower award. This means integrated pest management , water conservation and promotion of biodiversity.

Being a LIVE member not only serves my values but it also is very worthwhile. Illahe Vineyards is in a better position financially because we keep the LIVE standard.

— Lowell Ford, Illahe Vineyard

Glenn Creek stewards

Glenn Creek flows through the Ford property and the family has worked hard to maintain the water quality and biodiversity of the creek. Recently, they have spotted river otters cavorting in the creek, one with a fish in its mouth. A Bald Eagle sits in the big Cottonwood tree beside the creek.

Lowell Ford remembers Glenn Creek prior to their wetland restoration as a small thread running through mats of reed canarygrass. Lowell excavated the invasive species, creating a pond and wetland, allowing sediment to filter out of the water.

The Fords planted over 100 shade trees along the riparian area, only to watch the resident beaver chew through many. The Fords took the loss in stride, understanding that beavers are another aspect of the natural life that goes along with living along a creek.

They are excited to learn that the Salemtowne Dam, a barrier to fish passage between their property and the Willamette River for many years, is to be retrofitted to allow for fish passage. They look forward to a greater variety of life in the creek.