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By G.K. Sharman

Spring in north Florida is green and quiet. On a farm outside the town of Madison, a butterfly alights on a tender bloom. A breeze tickles the new growth at the end of a tree branch. The delicate scent of an unseen blossom perfumes the air. _It's so quiet out here away from the commerce and traffic that you can hear insects buzzing softly and appreciate the leisurely flap of a bird's wing high overhead.

Amid this pastoral backdrop, Betty O'Toole, clad in boots and jeans and a sweatshirt, walks

to the end of a row of hopeful young potato plants and picks up a handful of soil. Dirt is good, and you have to get your hands in it, she tells the visitors following her around the herb farm that spring day.

Her roots are deep in the sandy loam of Madison County, population 18,000 and change. She and her husband Jim, owners of O'Toole's Herb Farm, grow plants much the way her ancestors must have, on land that has been in her family since the 1840s.

It's a safe bet that her forebears never grew shiitake mushrooms, though. And they probably had little use for basil or fennel or arugula. It's

also a safe bet that, though most of them farmed without chemical pesticides or fertilizers, they never called their operation organic.

But for the O'Tooles and their fellow Florida organic farmers, the old methods are the future of agriculture.

A certified organic herb nursery and garden, the O'Toole farm sells wholesale and retail herbal plants, fresh-cut herbs and greens and shiitake mushrooms.

It's one of nearly 130 certified organic operations in Florida, according to the Florida Organic Growers Association, said Juan C. Rodriguez, FOG's director of education and outreach. And those are just the ones that FOG knows about and that are certified by Quality



Certification Services in Gainesville, which is in turn certified by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.\

Organic refers to food that is grown, packed, processed and stored without the use of synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides or irradiation. Proponents maintain that the food tastes better and is healthier for both consumers and the earth in which it's grown.

Under Florida law, a product can be certified organic only if:

-- No harmful chemicals have been applied to the land for at least three years.



B offers a guest some edible arugula flowers in the garden.

Tools refurbished a pair of old cracker houses to use as a retail space. Items for sale inside include herbal teas, honey, organic gardening supplies, baskets, books and art processors are inspected annually by a certifying agency. -- Farmers and processors keep detailed records of their practices. -- Farmers maintain a written organic management plan.

The penalty for claiming to be organic if you're not isn't chicken feed: a \$10,000 fine.

FOG doesn't keep track of all of the organic producers out there.

Operations with less than \$5,000 in gross

sales of organic goods don't have to be certified, Rodriguez said, and other producers may be certified by other firms.

Florida's certified organic producers include farmers, livestock producers and food processors, and they stretch from Madison and other Panhandle communities south to Homestead.

For a list of QCS-certified farms, ranches and processors, click here: www.qcsinfo.org/entities/QCS_Ent07.xls.

In terms of volume, the largest organic crop in the state is citrus, followed by produce such as greens, lettuce, tomatoes and peppers. Other crops include everything from coffee to soy, grain to pecans and even tobacco. Cattle and chickens are raised by certified organic livestock producers and 16 processing plants turn out ready-for-market meat products and dog treats as well as such items as flour and barbecue sauce.

Nationally, the organic industry in the United States grew 17 percent in 2005, the latest year for which figures were available, reaching total consumer

sales of \$14.6 billion. The largest portion of the market is organic foods, which grew 16.2 percent and accounted for \$13.8 billion of the total. Other segments of the market include personal care products, nutritional supplements, fiber, household cleaners, flowers and pet foods, among other items.

Organic farming is practiced in approximately 120 countries throughout the world, though the U.S. lags in terms of acreage per person and other standards. And we



The farm grows more than 350 varieties of herbs - including the young fennel shown here - perennials and vegetables.

do things differently - and bigger - here.

Once dominated by small producers selling their wares at farmers' markets, organic farming in the U.S. has become big business and high profile. Green products are on grocery shelves all over the country, including at super-retailer Wal-Mart. Seventy-three percent of conventional supermarkets stock organic items, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Corporate giants such as Archer Daniels Midland, Coca-Cola and General Mills have gotten into the act by buying organic companies. And the University of Florida recently began offering an organic-farming major - one of the first universities in the nation to do so.

Organic purists believe the movement - and they do consider organic farming a movement, not just a way to make money - has gotten away from its roots. Letting

the big boys play in this green sandbox has served mainly to commercialize what should be a grassroots endeavor and weaken national standards for how organic farming and processing should be conducted.

The O'Toole farm, which is among 12,000 acres under organic cultivation in Florida, is big enough to make a profit and small enough to stay close to its ideals. And like many of its green brethren, it also welcomes visitors.

On this particular spring day, Betty - who prefers to go by B - leads a tour for a small group of guests. After the mushroom section - a covered area housing racks of deciduous hardwood impregnated with shiitake spores - it's on to the original garden.

The potatoes are here, as well as the greens and lettuces, the rows of mint and the arugula with its peppery, edible flowers.

Farming organically isn't harder than conventional farming, or more expensive, B said, but it is trickier. The technique relies more on lime and compost and know-how than on better living through chemistry.

She and Jim started farming 17 years ago, she said, catching the knife-edge of the nation's interest in organic foods.

"We didn't have any training in it," she said, "we just wanted to do it." The goal was to produce better-tasting herbs and also to replenish and maintain the soil's fertility and help keep nature in balance.


Back then they figured they'd produce fresh-cut herbs for restaurants nearby and in Tallahassee, about 20 miles away.

They were one of Florida's first organic farms and interest in their product spread throughout the neighboring counties and across the Georgia border to Valdosta.



The shiitakes on your dinner plate begin here, in deciduous hardwood logs impregnated with the mushroom spores.

HERBS FOR DINNER



Most people can figure out what to do with an organic orange or broccoli or tomato, or an organically grown chicken, for that matter.

Using herbs sometimes requires a little more creativity. Here's a tasty use for them that we ran across at Whole Foods:

Herb Garden Salad
Serves 4

6 cups mixed greens, torn into pieces
1/3 cup mixed fresh herbs, chopped
4 red radishes, thinly sliced
12 cherry tomatoes
16 walnut halves
1 TB organic balsamic vinegar
2 TB organic extra virgin olive oil
freshly ground black pepper

Ingredient options: use red leaf, Boston or romaine lettuce, radicchio, arugula, etc. For the fresh herbs, use parsley, thyme, basil, chives, cilantro, dill, tarragon, etc.

Toss the greens, herbs and radishes with the oil and toss again with the vinegar. Arrange the cherry tomatoes and walnuts. Dust lightly with pepper and serv

Things have changed. The fresh-cut business is over, replaced by what she called "a huge market for plants," especially for the wholesale market. The greenhouses cover as much area as the original garden and the client list stretches from Jacksonville to Destin and up to Valdosta and beyond.

The drive to rural Madison is neither quick nor direct, yet "people would come all that distance to get a load of plants," she said.

The quality is what draws them, she believes, as well as the variety. In all, the farm grows 450 kinds of herbs and plants, including 12 kinds of basil and 10 varieties of mint.

Individual plants are for sale too, and after learning how healthy they are for both humans and the environment, who could resist taking some home for their own garden. And don't forget the large bag of, um, all-natural, animal-product fertilizer - after all, you wouldn't use chemical fertilizers, would you?

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[Organic](#)

Everything to do with Organic items.
shopping.yahoo.com

[Organic Valley Brand](#)

Discover The Benefits Of Organic The Organic Valley Family of Farms
www.organicvalley.coop

[Prepare to be Shocked](#)

Millions have already taken this amazing test. What's your RealAge?
www.RealAge.com

[Organic Farming](#)

Learn About Key Health Issues with our Informative Articles & Features
WomansDay.com/Health

Miami

Glaser Organic Farm
19100 S.W. 137th Ave.
Miami FL 33177
305-238-7747

Assorted fruits and vegetables and herbs

Glaser Organic Farms
9100 S.W. 137th Ave.
Miami FL 33177
305-238-7747

Processing of vegetable and fruit products.

Green Garden Organics
Miami FL 33133
305-444-9830

Wheatgrass and greens

Fullei Fresh
400 N.E. 67th St.
Miami FL 33138
305-758-3880

Sprouts

Florida Bottling Company
1035 N.W. 21st Terrace
Miami FL 33127
305-324-5900
Fruit juices.

International Coffee Warehouse
3600 NW 59th St
Miami FL 33142
305-635-3109
Coffee

Café La Rica
3000 NW 125th St
Miami FL 33167
305-591-0040
Coffee

Redland

Bee Heaven Farm
19000 S.W. 264th St.
Redland FL 33031-1787
305-247-8650

Herbs, vegetables, fruits, other crops, and 100% organic products (on-farm processing). Livestock: Chickens/Layers

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[Organic Link Directory](#)

Search organic business, services, and organizations by category.
www.allorganiclinks.com

[Citrus Springs Florida](#)

Citrus Springs Florida Real Estate, Builders, Property and Communities
www.FloridaOnDisplay.com

[Organic Meats - Blackwing](#)

Selling Wholesale to the Public
 Checkout Our Specials!
www.blackwing.com

[Organic Almonds](#)

Baughner Ranch Organics is certified sustainable agriculture farming
www.bro-almonds.com

Homestead

Elfin Acres Organic Farm
 25650 S.W. 197th Ave.
 Homestead FL 33031
 305-248-5027,

Flowers, fruits, herbs, vegetables and micro greens.

Paradise Farms

19801 S.W. 320th St.
 Homestead FL 33030
 305-248-4181

Microgreens, vegetables, fruits and flowers.

Jennings Farms Inc.

Homestead and White Springs FL
 386-963-1055

Mixed vegetables and fruits

The Lettuce Farm

31700 S.W. 207th Ave.
 Homestead FL 33030
 305-242-1407

Vegetables, edible flowers, and herbs

Pompano Beach

R & Z Ventures Inc.
 1300 S.W. 1st Court
 Pompano Beach FL 33069
 1-800-949-0371

Juice processing.

Orlando

Orlando Brewing Partners, Inc
 1301 Atlanta Ave
 Orlando FL 32806
 407-872-1117

Organic Beer

Sarasota

DeSoto Lakes Organic
 4180 47th St.
 Sarasota FL 34235
 941-351-4121

Assorted vegetables.

The Plant Farm

12638 Fruitville Rd
 Sarasota FL 34240
 941-915-1366

Greenhouses

Blumenberry Farms

2151 Dog Kennel Road
 Sarasota FL 34240
 941-358-6555 ext 309

Assorted fruit and vegetables.

Global Organic Specialty Source, Inc

7345 16th St. E. Suite 116
 Sarasota FL 34243

(877) 952 1198 ext 318

"Handler and Distributor of 100 % Organic Products "

Boulevards
7203 21st
East Sarasota FL 34243
941-752-0042
Dark Hot Chocolate

Madison

O'Toole's Herb Farm Inc.
305 N.E. Artemesia Tr.
Madison FL 32341
850-973-3629

Herbs, shiitake mushrooms and plants.

Live Oak

Magnolia Farms
12886 87th Road
Live Oak, FL 32060
386-364-6450

Organic Produce & Herbs, Natural Goat Milk, Soaps & Lotion

Island Grove

Hammock Hollow Herb
S.E. 212th Lane
Island Grove FL 32654
352-481-2522

Vegetables and herbs

Monticello

Ladybird Organics
1211 Waukeenah Hwy. (CR 259)
Monticello FL
850-245-9726

Fruits, vegetables, herbs, trees shrubs and pasture

Wimauma

My Mother's Garden Inc.
3819 County Road 579 S.
Wimauma FL 33598
813-642-0191

Vegetables, herbs, spices and flowers; 2 greenhouses

Pacific Tomato Growers
18740 US Hwy 301
South Wimauma FL 33598
941-722-3291
Grape Tomatoes

Crescent City

Eagles Nest Grove
470 Old 17 N.
Crescent City FL 32112
Citrus.

Alegre Groves
152 Marvin Jones Road
Crescent City FL 32112
386-467-9207
Citrus.

Lake Crescent Citrus
Junction Road and Highway 17
Crescent City FL

386-698-4745

Citrus.

Gainesville

Rosies Organic
Gainesville FL 32607
352-331-1804

Assorted vegetables, and flowers.

Sweet Water Organic Coffee Co.

1331 S. Main St.
Gainesville FL 32601
352-372-8342
coffee

Ft. Pierce

Rosslow Organic Citrus
1000 S. Kings Highway
Ft. Pierce FL 34954
772-595-3335

Organic citrus packing.

M & M Groves

4945 Edwards Road
Ft. Pierce FL 34981
772-461-5470

Citrus.

Gibbons Farm Organics

3904 N. Kings Highway
Ft. Pierce FL 34950
772-461-4756

Vegetables, herbs and fruits

Vero Beach

Osceola Organic Farm
6980 33rd St.
Vero Beach FL 32966
772-231-9167

Vegetables, herbs and flowers.

White Rabbit Acres

7195 37th St.
Vero Beach FL 32966
772-778-1241

Vegetables

Spooner Citrus

1956 34th Ave
Vero Beach FL 32960
772-473-3367

pasture and agricultural land

Sailfish Sur

1956 34th Ave.
Vero Beach FL 32960
772-567-5286

Citrus Fruits

Oslo Citrus Growers Association

695 South U.S Hwy 1
Vero Beach FL 32962
772-562-2197

Organic Fresh Fruit Packing

Frostproof

Pressley-Davis Inc.

1131 S. Lake Reedy Blvd
 Frostproof FL 33843
 863-528-8455
Growing and packing of citrus

Zolfo Springs

Mancini Packing Company
 3500 Mancini Place
 Zolfo Springs FL 33890
 863-735-2000
Peppers.

Fellsmere

B & W Quality Growers Inc.
 17825 79th St.
 Fellsmere FL 32948
 772-571-0800, x105
Water Cress, Arugula

Arcadia

Roper Growers
 Arcadia and Holopaw FL
 407-656-3233
Citrus

Plant City

Marjon Specialty Foods Inc.
 3508 Sydney Road
 Plant City FL 33566
 813-752-3482
Producer of soy products.

Eustis

Florida Food Products Inc.
 2231 W. Highway 44
 Eustis FL 32726
 352-357-4141, ext. 307
Vegetable concentrates.

Zephyrhills

Zephyr Egg Co. Inc.
 4622 Gall Blvd.
 Zephyrhills FL 33541
 813-782-1521
Poultry (layers) and eggs.

Lakeland

Tom Oswalt
 6820 Nunn Road
 Lakeland FL 33813
 863-646-2210
Citrus

Clermont

Uncle Matt's Organic
 1000 E. Hwy. 50, 2nd Floor, Ste. B
 Clermont FL 34711
 352-394-8737
Citrus juice and fruit marketing.

Bonifay

Burt Worthing
 Highways 280 and 79

Bonifay FL 32425
850-547-2967
Persimmons and chestnuts

Trilby

Tampa Farm Service Inc.
21310 Highway 98 N.
Trilby FL 33593
813-659-0605 x200
Packing and handling of organic eggs.