

Root Down Farm

Adaptive planned multi-species grazing and native hedgerow/
tree planting to improve soil health and productivity, increase
profits, and secure favorable conservation leases.

*“I want to show people that meat comes
from living creatures and has a direct
impact on the health of our planet and
how we treat those animals and the land
really matters.”* —DEDE BOIES



In 2014, Dede Boies started Root Down Farm in one of the most expensive counties in the United States. While finding affordable land and housing and starting a new business was a substantial challenge, her unwavering commitment to growing the best food she could for her customers in a way that also improves the health of the land helped Root Down Farm not just survive but grow. From an ambitious lease with a local conservation trust that recognizes and rewards the ecosystem services of her adaptively grazed livestock and conservation practices to premium prices from customers who support nutrient-dense and lovingly raised products, Dede's work at Root Down Farm is a powerful example of a young and innovative farmer using regenerative practices to create meaningful opportunities for her business as well as ecosystem services and nutritious food for her community.

THE RANCH

Root Down Farm is a pasture-based poultry and pig farm located in the coastal town of Pescadero, California near San Francisco and Silicon Valley. Started and managed by Dede Boies, Root Down Farm leases 62 acres of land from the Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST), using 15 acres for its own production and subleasing the rest to regenerative farmers and ranchers in the area.

Dede developed her passion for agriculture while working on farms in Hawaii and New Zealand through the World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF) program. In 2008, she moved to Pescadero to apprentice on local organic farms and livestock operations and gather knowledge and experience on how to steward and work with the area's unique ecosystem. In 2014, she began Root Down Farm with the mission to "humanely raise the healthiest animals possible, while working within [the] ecosystem to responsibly steward the land and improve soil health."

REGENERATIVE PRACTICES

Root Down Farm uses a number of regenerative practices to help care for its land and animals while growing a sustainable business. All 62 acres of the farm are certified organic by California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF) and Dede works closely with the local office of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to identify and implement beneficial conservation practices including cross fencing, infrastructure to store water during the wet season and enable planned grazing, and native oaks and hedgerows to support wildlife and promote soil health.

The farm's primary land management tool is adaptive planned grazing. In 2018, Root Down Farm raised approximately 1,600 ducks and chickens, 150 turkeys, and 65 pigs on its pastures. The animals are moved around the land in mini-migrations that give them animals fresh diverse feed and fertilize the fields and cycle nutrients. To achieve these goals, pigs are moved to fresh grass once a week and the poultry and their mobile coops are moved



HIGHLIGHTS

27

EVENTS

In 2018, Root Down Farm hosted 27 educational gatherings on the ranch. These free events included guided tours, food/farming workshops, and social gatherings intended to help connect and teach customers and neighbors about the farm and their local food system.

2x

PRODUCTION

From 2017 to 2018, rapidly growing demand and improved land health on the farm allowed Root Down Farm to nearly double production and hire its first full-time employee.

\$47,000

IN PROJECT
GRANTS

Since beginning the farm in 2014, Root Down Farm has worked closely with the NRCS and has been awarded around \$47,000 in project grants to improve the farm's impact on the surrounding ecosystem and watershed. These projects, including off-season water storage, improved water infrastructure efficiency, cross fencing, and native tree planting have also increased the productivity and resilience of the farm.

“Running the farm has taught me a lot about the food system and farming and I want to share that with people. Everyday food choices have a big impact on communities and the world. People have a lot more power than they think to shape the future.” —DEDE BOIES



every other day. This frequent movement distributes manure, improves animal health, prevents overgrazing, and provides long recovery periods that help establish deep-rooted perennial plant communities.

Another tool Root Down Farm employs to improve land health is its carefully chosen sub-leases. As Root Down Farm is relatively new and still growing, Dede uses just 15 of the 62 acres she leases. Instead of growing at an uncomfortable pace or facing financial or ecological costs of leaving areas unmanaged, she has built good working relationships with local regenerative operations who can help steward the whole of her land. These partners include organic herb and vegetable growers as well as a local grass-fed beef ranch that seasonally grazes parts of her rangelands based on a collaborative grazing plan.

SEEING THE BENEFITS

Root Down Farm has seen a wide range of benefits from its regenerative management. As Dede's fields have become more diverse and the soil healthier, forage growth has improved and her growing season has lengthened. Additionally, overall animal health and performance has improved by continuously

moving animals away from manure and onto fresh grass. The meat quality that has resulted has earned Root Down Farm a valuable reputation for humane, nutrient-dense, and delicious food that is rewarded with premium prices from enthusiastic and loyal customers.

The farm's regenerative practices have also been essential to securing an affordable lease in the expensive San Francisco Bay Area. Dede worked closely with POST, a land trust that protects open space and farms in and around Silicon Valley, to develop a lease to reward the ecosystem services (e.g. beautiful open space, wildlife habitat, soil health, etc.) her regenerative management provides with a reduced lease rate.

As Root Down Farm continues to grow, Dede has begun working with Kitchen Table Advisors (KTA), a local non-profit that provides farm advisory services, to strengthen her business fundamentals and clarify her vision for the future. She hopes to continue her work to care for the land and raise healthy food but she is also beginning looking for opportunities through tours, on-farm workshops, and speaking engagements to be a source of inspiration and education for her community and the next generation of farmers and ranchers. ■



The Profiles in Land and Management Series features the work of innovative ranchers and land managers who are achieving economic and ecological benefits on working lands.

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