Homer Garden General Membership Meeting

 February 25, 2018

The meeting was called to order at 2:00 by V. P. Kathy Dube' in President Francie Roberts' absence. Kathy called upon visitors to introduce themselves. She also pointed out that refreshments would be available in the back of the room following the meeting.

Peggy Pittman, treasurer, provided her report; the treasury currently has a balance of $15,747.57.

Committee Reports followed: Jeannette Lawson, co-chair of Gardeners' Weekend, said that although we had lost one garden, Francie Roberts will allow us to include hers on the tour. Jeannette also reported that sign- up sheets would be passed around and available in the back after the meeting for the May cleanup of the Baycrest Garden. Peggy Craig said she had sign-up sheets for those interested in purchasing fish bone meal.

Kathy announced that Lori Jenkins of Synergy Family farm would be the speaker at our March meeting.

Additionally, Kathy announced that Kit Strange from the Royal Botanical Garden in the U. K. will be traveling to Alaska as part of a speaking trip around the U. S. where she is speaking to rock garden people. Having been able to comply with our requirements, we will be hosting her on April 8 and will thus be holding our April meeting early. It will consist of a regular business meeting and Kit's presentation. Ample notification of that meeting will be sent out. A venue needs to be found since the Bidarka is unavailable.

The "apron" project was updated and gardening aprons will be available at the end of the meeting in the back. Cost is $25 for HGC members, $30 for non-members.

Roni gave a brief update on where we stand with the updating of Kachemak Cultivating - From Seaside to Summit. All chapters with the exception of the one on high tunnels are finished and Roni has them for final editing. She complimented those who volunteered to work on the chapters, saying that each had been dedicated to doing the best job possible. It is hoped to have them finished and available at the May plant sale.

Barbara Kennedy, chair of the plant sale, announced that the sale will be on 5/19, not later, in order to avoid the Memorial Day weekend. Signup sheets were available.

Julie brought us up to date on the design phase of the production of rack cards. She, Jeannette and Roni worked on the design and the text. Now that they are in final form they just need to be approved by the board and ordered. The price for 500 will be under $100.00 plus shipping.

Kathy then introduced the day's speaker, Emily Garrity Owner, Boss, CFO, CEO, etc. of Twitter Creek Farm, a farm she created herself beginning with a quarter acre and growing it to several.

Emily began with a brief bio about how she came to discover farming as her life's work. Growing up in Fairbanks she began as a helper for an elderly widow who needed assistance in her own gardens. From there she worked for Basically Basil in Fairbanks, a 5 acre farm selling at a local farmers' market. In 2003 she came to Homer looking for a farm related job. She was able to purchase some property up on Ohlson Mountain and began farming a 1000 sq. foot plot, providing 4 CSA boxes. By 2006 she was farming 1/4 acre but was forced to take an office job at a high school. Her go-to book has been *You Can Farm*, a good source for people interested in starting their own farming project. Eventually, with the assistance of grants and loans she was able to afford her first high tunnel. In 2009 she built a passive solar greenhouse with raised beds built into a dirt foundation that served as a huge cold frame. She typically starts seeds in the house in February then moves them to the greenhouse in March. She now has a 96 foot Hi/Lo tech tunnel.

Emily grows three crops per season, one spring, one summer and one in the fall. She's built her high tunnel just her height in order to save space to assure optimum sun exposure. She also has a movable tunnel (MHT - movable high tunnel) which she can move around on casters, a trick she learned from Eliot Coleman whose farm she has visited. She does remove the plastic in the winter to avoid it's being destroyed by heavy snows.

For persons who are venturing into such an endeavor she says there are three funding sources: She obtained three high tunnel (HGT) grants; there are USDA loans at 1.25 up to 4.5% interest. There are also Division of Agriculture Alaska Innovations grants, funding that she made use of during the 2006-7 season. Now she is able to obtain block grants.

By 2016 Emily had a 1 1/2 acre vegetable plot, with 30x80 beds, keeping exact standards to allow for the same sizes of tools and materials.

Tools she finds particularly useful include: a broadfork (in lieu of a rototiller), Earthway Seeder and a roto seeder, a wheel hoe, a 6-row seeder, soil blocker and she recommends using pelletized seed.

She is committed to being extremely organized and keeps clear spread sheets for everything from a calendared plant plan to planting tables indicating how much seed she needs, planting dates, etc. Her largest crops are the Brassicas for which she utilized Reemay to keep bugs out and to help warm the soil. Much of her produce goes to local restaurants, some to the food pantry and more to CSA baskets.

For healthy crops she advocates crop rotation (low to heavy seeder crops alternatly), heavy amendment, cover crops, animals (chickens and pigs), seaweed and compost. Now her operation has grown large enough that she buys compost in bulk from a company in Wasilla called Susitna Organics. Still, amendments she incorporates include lime, codfish bone meal, blood meal and LangBenite . Her work force includes one salaried employee, two interns, work traders and one boyfriend! Now, Emily also hosts special events like the Farm to Table Dinners, an 11 course dinner with wine on a dirt floor. She also does workshops i.e. a Sandor Katz workshop on fermentation. She also is an advocate for the Food Hub which can be found on line.

Her favorite farmers/writers include: Eliot Coleman, Jean-Martin Fortier, Joel Salatin, Curstis Stone, Elizabeth Henderson and Ben Hartman.

Toward the end of her talk, Emily said that her preferred Reemay product is "Agribon". She further explained the process of burning spruce logs to serve as fence posts. She does yearly soil tests either through Brookside Laboratories or the Alaska CES. Regarding the use of seaweed as an amendment, she recommends checking with ADF&G to be sure of current regulations.

For her low tunnels (hoop houses) she uses rebar buried in the ground outside of the bed then wrapped in 1" PVC pipe, lath strips to hold the Reemay down and uses 6 mil plastic material

Emily took questions from an enthusiastic audience then posed her own questions as to how people in a low income bracket can benefit from these organically grown vegetables and be taught how they can be used/prepared. Various ideas were floated.

Kathy adjourned the meeting at 3:30 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Roni Overway

Secretary