

AROUND THE
CORNER

A farmers' market at the door



Rick and Robin Smith



By Guest Columnist Bethani England

Now that the beloved Fresh at Five Clinton Farmer's Market has wound down and summer has officially come to an end, Clinton residents may be on the search to find other ways to access fresh produce throughout the year. Local farms and markets are options for those who crave farm-grown vegetables but don't have a green thumb or the time to tend to a garden.

One option that may be familiar to Fresh at Five regulars is FreshGrown Farm, a local, family-operated business on thirty acres of land just a few miles away from Olde Towne Clinton.

What began as a family affair for Rick and Robin Smith and their three children has turned into an extensive community network for healthy eating and healthy living, where boxes of fresh produce are delivered to subscribers' doors practically year-round. The Smith family is dedicated to growing produce organically, meaning no chemicals or pesticides are used. Also, the fact that "fresh" is in the farm's name is purposeful; they work to provide delivery that happens the same day the crop is harvested.

Rick Smith actually grew up farming.

"It was a different kind of farm, with corn, soybeans and oats, but it gave me a taste for wanting to do this kind of thing," he said.

The couple met in Washington D.C., and later moved to Mississippi, where Smith worked at Mississippi State University before they moved and settled in Clinton. It was in Clinton that all three of their children transitioned from helping on the farm to pursuing careers at Mississippi College. This began the family's endearment towards the university, where they typically hire most of their seasonal farm hands from amongst the many students looking for summer jobs. While Rick Smith manages the farm, Robin Smith enjoys encouraging a healthy lifestyle in her job at the Baptist Healthplex alongside the family business. Although family and career changes were inevitable, Rick Smith said fondly, "So far, over the last six to seven years, each year has been a little more fun than the last."

Depending on what is in season, FreshGrown Farm subscription boxes may include mixed greens, a medley of seasonal vegetables or fruit, and a fresh-cut bouquet of zinnias. Smith explained that most people think of summer crops, like tomatoes and squash, when they think of a fresh produce box, because these are more widely grown in the south; however, he said that, in his opinion, members really get the "best boxes" during the fall and winter.

"The fall is always so much fun," he said, anticipating the next crop. "Fall and winter veggies are the much healthier, super vegetables packed with nutrients, and that's really what we're about, healthy eating."

When asked what kinds of produce buyers could expect for the fall, Smith listed

spinach, kale, arugula, turnips, radishes, cabbage, Chinese cabbage, broccoli, carrots, beets and green onions. He also stated, "Lettuce is what we grow year-round - it is the centerpiece of our boxes and kind of our specialty besides our tomatoes." He said that typically a box will have a mixed bag of freshly washed lettuces and romaine that are delivered the day of harvest.

"It really makes a difference that we give it to [the customer] that afternoon, so it assures [them] it is fresh and won't turn yucky, unlike lettuces sold in stores that have been transported on trucks and refrigerated for a few days at least," Smith said.

Not only does the customer receive the membership box during growing seasons, but they are also included into the healthy lifestyle that the Smiths have curated through friendly blog posts, nutritious recipes catered for specific deliveries, information on how to best store produce, and an overall education on the local farming experience.

Smith writes on the farm's website that he wishes to "be a 'personal' farmer to everyone in the Clinton area who would enjoy getting to know who grows their food and how they grow it." This aspect of educating their audience and ensuring their clients get healthy food is their top priority. Smith explained that in order to grow the most nutritious produce, he conducts yearly soil tests to make sure his farm's soil has all the minerals the vegetables are capable of absorbing.

"Vegetables in the grocery store can look right, but may have not grown in a soil that has, for example, boron, a mineral that we're a little short on in our clay soil in Mississippi. But still so many vegetables need boron, so we treat our soil and add the minerals, almost like following a soil biology recipe, in order to produce the healthiest, best product."

A new development for the farm that can be expected in 2023 is a farm store. Regular clients have become accustomed to coming to the farm to purchase fresh produce.

"We want that to continue and for them to be able to see online what vegetables are ready and could be purchased and picked up at a farm store," said Smith. Smith hopes this would also allow their FreshGrown Farm community to enjoy the authentic farm atmosphere.

As a farmer who started out in South Dakota, Smith states, "The farming can be a little bit hard in Mississippi; it is hot and can get uncomfortable. But, if you do it well, it is rewarding to see vegetables loaded with the vitamins and nutrients you need, just how God made them to be."

For more information, visit the farm's website, FreshGrownFarm.com, or follow their Facebook page Fresh Grown Farm.

EDITOR'S NOTE: To suggest a Clinton neighbor for an "Around the Corner" feature, email their contact information to News@TheClintonCourier.net.