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▶ Jeff Davidson on living in harmony with the land.



Since 1946 farmers have hauled livestock to Siler City's Carolina Stockyards Company for auction.

PHOTO BY LEAH HUGHES

## Carolina Stockyards timeless, memorable

By Leah Hughes

Six years old with new overalls, old boots and a seat in the middle of my daddy's pickup truck, ready to go to the cattle sale.

There was nothing better during school breaks than jumping in the truck between my father and grandfather and heading to the Carolina Stockyards Company in Siler City.

My childhood is not the only one that includes fond memories of trips to the Stockyard. Since 1946 farmers have hauled livestock to the Carolina Stockyards Company for auction, often with a few youngsters in tow.

The original sale barn was located in downtown Siler City. The stockyard moved to its current location on U.S. Highway 64 in 1972.

"It was luck and hard work, a little bit of both," said Harry Lee Horney when asked about the Stockyard's success. The Horney family ran the business from 1960 until Robert Crabb took the reins a few years ago.

The Carolina Stockyard stands as more than just a place of business. It's an institution. With livestock auctions every Monday and Friday, many local farmers never question where they'll be on sale days.

It has become a ritual of sorts for local farmers, whether they have any livestock to sell that day or not. The stadium seating of the sale barn is often packed by the time the bell rings signaling the start of the day's auction.

The crowd's attention focuses on the stars of the show. The livestock, including cows, goats and sheep, have only a few seconds to strut their stuff in the ring before the auctioneer begins calling for bids.

Bidding is an art in itself. Every buyer has his or her own technique, some as prominent as a wave and others as subtle as a wink or flick of the wrist.

Each auctioneer develops his own style as well. Rhythms and voices are as varied as different radio tunes.

The sale arena may be the main attraction, but many side acts make the Stockyard complete. A cat walk rises above the maze of holding pens behind the arena. Visitors walk the wooden platform to get a bird's-eye view of the day's livestock.

The holding pens are always abuzz with activity. The process begins when farmers unload their haul. Handlers tag the animals and herd them into a holding pen.

A group often huddles at the far end of the cat walk

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## Rocky River Farm

By Judy Hogan

Farmers Will and Tabitha Roberson chose the Pittsboro Farmers' Market for selling their organic vegetables. I was astonished by the beautiful and many-colored peppers, tomatoes, and okra they displayed each Thursday afternoon last summer and curious how these new farmers produced such excellent and appealing vegetables their very first year. I had never seen such vitality in vegetables. It makes you want to eat them on the spot.

I learned they'd spent years preparing. Because he loved digging and working outside from childhood and didn't want a desk job, Will majored in Horticulture at NCSU, where he met Tabitha, a student of Animal Science. On graduation, having decided food crops interested him the most, Will interned nine months at Center for Environmental Farming Systems (CEFS) in Goldsboro, one of the largest organic research farms on the East Coast, where he received a small stipend. Then he worked as a paid apprentice laborer for Peregrine Farm in Alamance County (Alex and Betsy Hitt) for one year and for the new Chatham Marketplace in the Produce Department. Meantime they bought Rocky River Farm on McLaurin Road, southeast of Siler City. Almost all 43 acres are cleared land on what was once a "cow and hay" farm for years and has, as a result, excellent topsoil.

They now have six quarter-acre plots in cultivation, most now in cover crops (combined legume and grains, e.g., rye and hairy vetch, crimson clover and oats). Will uses a tractor and tiller to make his raised beds and then



Vegetables for sale at the Pittsboro Farmers Market

PHOTO BY WILL ROBERTSON

runs the tractor at intervals to press down paths between the beds. This year they plan to do farmers' markets April-November—Pittsboro again and two others. He'll have spring crops, like lettuce, chard, sugar snaps, radishes, and additional summer ones: strawberries, squash, beans, and melons. He will use one fourth acre for spring and three fourth acre plots for summer (each plot being 100 x 100 feet). In early December, when I visited, he still had beautifully dark green curly kale and firm, crisp green onions.

They've just built a passive solar greenhouse for seedlings as they start everything from seed, and a small barn with a roofed porch where they can clean vegetables and then store them in coolers. This past season, without a cooler, they did all their picking the morning of the market.

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Will and Tabitha Roberson at home on the farm.

PHOTO BY JUDY HOGAN

## Sustainable agriculture abundant in Chatham

By Camille Armantrout

More people are choosing to buy locally grown food over "far away" for a myriad of reasons, not the least of which is taste. Those who have purchased fruits and vegetables at a farmers market, or through Community Supported Agriculture, know that local produce is prettier, juicier, and richer in flavor.

In just a couple of months, it will be strawberry season again. There is no comparison between the moist sweetness of local, organic strawberries and those that have been grown using soil fumigant methyl bromide, picked green and shipped several thousand miles. Locally-grown strawberries aren't just tastier, they are healthier. Ditto for local sweet corn, melons, sweet peppers, fingerling potatoes — the list is endless!

It's not a coincidence that local produce is also more sustainable. Let's face it, petroleum-based agricultural chemicals

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