A Farm Story: Panozzo Family Farm

It doesn’t take long in a conversation with brother and sister Alex and Patty Panozzo to discover how committed they are to their father’s legacy and their local community.

The Panozzo Family began farming in the early 1900’s in Kankakee, Illinois. “My father loved collecting farms,” said Patty. “He really knew the value of the land.” Tony Panozzo, Alex & Patty’s father, opened up a seasonal farm stand selling what they grew. It wasn’t long before Tony Panozzo had built up an established reputation for his sweet corn.

Both Alex and Patty have had careers outside of farming. In fact, both of them have been chefs: Patty owning her own restaurant for ten years, and Alex working at the Hartland Health Spa. It is their love of food and family that brought them back to the farm. A generation later, Alex and Patty Panozzo are holding onto the family farm, but things have changed dramatically. The majority of farmland that Tony and Rose purchased throughout their lifetime remains under row-crop production as it has always been. Additionally, out of their love of food, the land and their heritage, Patty and Alex continue the family tradition of devoting 10+ acres to sustainable, non-certified organic produce. (Right: Patty Panozzo)

Since the death of their parents, Alex and Patty established the Tony & Rose Panozzo Center for Food and Agriculture. They rebuilt the seasonal produce market that their parents established in the 1950’s that they fill with produce. And while Alex likes to grow heirloom varieties of produce, their biggest sellers are sweet corn, tomatoes, and peppers. The market runs on the honor system when no one is there to collect payment. A cash box is left out for people to contribute according to what they purchase. (Left: Alex Panozzo)

The farm market is not the only way Alex and Patty are contributing to their community. In 2007, Alex participated in the Renewing America’s Food Traditions grow-out of heirloom varieties of produce.
and bringing them to market. Growing varieties like Amish Deer Tongue lettuce and Nebraska Wedding Tomatoes for chefs in the Chicago area. He hopes to continue working with Chefs Collaborative, and Slow Food on “fine tuning the grower side of the grow-out”.

Patty hosts her own radio show “A Need to Feed” on the local radio station, and Alex has been administering a sustainable agriculture project at the Kankakee Community College. They both have hosted a variety of educational events at the farm for families in the past and now Patty is working on establishing an educational Victory Garden.

There is a quote on the Panozzo Family’s website that reads:

"Food, handed from farmer to consumer, and served to our families the same day is a gift. And when all of the burnt necked, bent kneed men like Tony are gone, there will be a small but measurable slip in the quality of our lives."

One can be sure that Alex and Patty Panozzo won’t let that happen.

(Right: Tony Panozzo, 1919-2005)