

ALASKA GROWN

Farmer Profile



Bakers: Family Farms are Important

PALMER— From sod to vegetables to peonies, Gray Owl Farm does it all. In fact, the Baker family was recognized as the Alaska Farm Family of the Year last year. But Craige and Kathy once wanted to be teachers.

They met in Nebraska while attending college. Both came from agricultural backgrounds but pursued degrees in speech, theater and English education. In 1984,

after the economic recession made it difficult to find teaching jobs in the Midwest, the Bakers packed up and made the trek to Alaska. Craige worked on building a dairy farm at Point McKenzie, worked for Matanuska Maid and managed the Musk Ox Farm before settling down in Palmer.

In the early 1990s, the Bakers purchased and began developing the property that would become

Gray Owl Farm. They opened for business selling sod and nursery crops in 1998.

Since then the Bakers have grown and diversified their business. They grow crops such as peppers and eggplant in their greenhouse

after the nursery season ends and they sell produce out of what Kathy calls her “overgrown garden.” The farm boasts beautiful plots in which the Bakers test out the perennials they sell so that potential customers can verify the hardiness of the plants.

The Bakers constantly attempt new and different things on their property. Last year, for example, they started planting peonies to produce them as exports. Though the flowers are two years away from being mature, Craige and Kathy are excited about the opportunity to reach a new market.

The Bakers, who have three children and six grandchildren, are passionate about small family farms and niche agricultural markets. They currently produce on 20 acres but say they don’t want to get any bigger.

“We feel strongly that small family farms are a niche that has survived and stayed strong,” Kathy said. “They seem to be in an area that is growing right now.”



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