

Although Tamara Vester has been around produce and agriculture all her life, it's only during the last four years that she has made the leap and became an official farmer.

When asked what the transition was like, Tamara chuckled, "Some days I love it and some days I wonder what I was thinking!"

Tamara's parents were avid gardeners who always had a large garden. In fact, Tamara remembers moving to another home just up the street because the property had more land that her parents could garden.

Perhaps it was the family's love of gardening that influenced her career choice; Tamara worked at Calgary's Sunnyside Natural Market for fourteen years, eventually becoming produce manager. She loved being around the fresh produce and getting to know the farmers that supplied the market's offerings.

It was at Sunnyside that Tamara met her husband, Kris, a supplier who delivered produce on a weekly basis. In 2013, she left her job at the market and began farming with Kris at [Blue Mountain Biodynamic Farms](#). Located on 160 acres of aspen parkland, the farm has 110 cultivated acres and produces cereal, legume crops, forage, vegetables, culinary herbs, poultry, and hogs.

Farm life was a big adjustment for Tamara, and the last four years have been a whirlwind.

"I had never worked with animals so that's been a huge learning curve," she said. "I also never saved seeds before. My days are always interesting!"

She credits her experience as a produce manager for keeping her life organized.

"I am an organized person. I write everything down. I also create systems for me personally as well as farm systems. I've learned to be okay working in the grey zone. Plans change and that's okay."

Tamara and her husband are [Certified Demeter Growers](#), which means that their farm is run on biodynamic principles that enhance nature's life processes to create a self-contained farm. The farm promotes diversity and the interactions between the animals that provide fertility for the soil, the fields that provide food for animals and people, and the plants, forests, and wetlands that provide space for birds, insects, and other wildlife. Tamara encourages farm balance and health further by using biodynamic compost preparations and field sprays to help the soil and plants.

"We are also conscious of the moon phases so we plant and harvest at specific times," she said.

Tamara and Kris are also members of [Slow Food](#), a global, grassroots organization dedicated to supporting local food cultures and traditions, educating people about the food they eat, and showing them how food choices affect the world around them. Kris is the president of the Calgary chapter, and both he and Tamara are very involved in the movement.

The farm operates year-round, with greenhouse work starting mid-March and gardens and fields prepped in April. She and her husband employ five full-time employees. Tamara helps to train the new workers and is proud that their garden manager has been with them for three years and two other workers are now into their second season.

Because farm work is demanding both mentally and physically, finding and retaining workers is always a challenge. Tamara and Kris advertise through a number of channels, including social media, word of mouth, and at farming events.

They also use [The Young Agrarians](#), a network for new and young ecological and organic farmers, and the [Stewards of Irreplaceable Land](#) (SOIL) apprenticeship program.

"We have used the SOIL apprenticeship program since 2012," said Tamara. "We usually get one or two workers from that program. It's a great program. It gives people interested in agriculture a place to start. They set up an online profile and make connections with farms they're interested in. It's like a dating service for farms."

Other than the grain, which they use to feed the animals, Tamara and Kris sell everything the farm produces by participating in farmers' markets, selling to retail locations and restaurants and providing produce to home delivery services.

The farm has also been part of the [Community Supported Agriculture](#) (CSA) box program since 1999. Through the program, shareholders invest in the farm at the start of the growing season and then receive weekly produce boxes for sixteen weeks. In addition to the regular produce box, Blue Mountain Biodynamic Farms offers add-on options for their shareholders.

"They can choose to add the farm's pork, eggs, chicken and fresh cut flower bouquets to their weekly box," Tamara explained. "We have also partnered with [ABC Bees](#) so people can choose to add honey to their weekly box as well. They have ten hives on our farm. We try to make it so that you have everything you need to get you through the week."

During her time with Sunnyside and now on the farm, Tamara has witnessed an upsurge in local food purchasing and the interest in organic foods.

"Organics are becoming more mainstream and people are more interested in knowing where their food is coming from. There's more interest in local food."

At the same time, the cost of farm land has risen dramatically, which makes it harder for new farmers.

"Farm land is really expensive," said Tamara. "It's not accessible to people starting out. Farms are expensive to operate as it is and the land is almost out of reach. We don't own our land right now but we're on track to buy it. It takes a lot."

Despite the hard work and a major learning curve, Tamara has never looked back.

Women in Leadership Positions in Canadian Agriculture

TAMARA VESTER | CERTIFIED DEMETER GROWERS [CALGARY, ALBERTA]

"Farming is the most challenging work I have ever done, but I love it," said Tamara. "Every day is different. The work is never boring and it's rewarding on so many different levels."

For more information on Blue Mountains Biodynamic Farms, visit the website at <http://www.bluemountainbiodynamicfarms.com/>, follow them on Twitter at @blumtbiodynamic, follow them on Instagram at @blumtbiodynamic, or visit them on Facebook by searching Blue Mountains Biodynamic Farms.