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*"It's about how we as farmers can have the biggest positive impact in our community."*

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With more than 250 varieties, a history of mentoring young farmers and a CSA program 16 years in the making, Patchwork Green Farm is truly an anchor for the Decorah Farmers Market and the regional local foods movement.

Erik and Sara moved to Decorah back in 1997. Erik says that their early garden was only a 1/2 acre in size. They did business with "five gallon buckets, a rototiller, and some seeds." In 1999, they had their first season of Community Supported Agriculture. In 2001, they moved north of Decorah to a property that borders the Seed Savers Exchange and overlooks Canoe Creek valley. They fixed up an old farm house, dug a well and started plowing the "flattest five acres they could find." Erik planted ten 1/2 acre plots (one in perennials and the other nine in annual rotation). Today, he is well-known for the quality and abundant volume of colorful, flavorful and responsibly-grown produce. He continues to farm the five-acre area as well as manage 3 large hoop houses. He hires seasonal help, serving as a mentor and friend to the students who are lucky enough to get a space on his team each year, and he serves on the board for the Winneshiek Farmers Market.

Erik says that the management of over 250 varieties can be complicated and the weather is a "major curve ball" that he swings at the best he can. He says growing at this scale has taught him a lot. There are big differences between his operation and a home garden and he has had to be careful of efficiencies of scale, thoughtful about investing in infrastructure and machinery, and learn when to suck it up and plow a field that's gotten away from him. He has had to teach himself about the business side of things - how to budget and how to keep the farm sustainable. His work ethic has made it possible.

Decorah, Iowa

# PATCHWORK GREEN FARM

Erik Sessions &  
Sara Peterson





He is up and in the field by sunrise and his schedule is rigorous to ensure time for everything - including time with his family. Mondays are for planting and general garden work, Tuesdays and Thursdays for preharvest, Wednesday and Fridays for harvest days and Wednesday afternoon and Saturday morning are at the market. Of course some crops have to be picked every other day and weather variations can mean a whole reworking of the agenda. It's a lot to keep track of, but Erik loves the challenge and isn't easily flustered. He loves the variety and creativity that growing produce offers and still somehow finds time to explore untraditional crops like the tropical-loving ginger plant. He carries himself with a calmness that comes with many seasons of experience and exudes a quiet passion for local food that makes you want to take up both gardening and cooking with renewed spirit.

Being face to face with his customers is one of the many things that Erik likes about the farmers market. He likes to share recipes and storage tips and "assist the adventurous cook who maybe hasn't tried things like fennel, bok choy or lemon basil." He seeks the feedback of his shoppers and asks them the next week if the kids liked the new dish and if the flavor was what they hoped. In addition to CSA shares he offers his customers "market shares" where they can pay up front and then have a running tab at the stand. He says this market share model gives customers an advantage over the CSA structure because they can choose varieties, choose quantities, and aren't wasting produce if they are on vacation.



Patchwork Green Farm is known for its Sungold cherry tomatoes, garlic, and peppers as well as for its overall exceptional scope of produce. Erik follows organic practices, uses rotation to keep pest and disease down, and plants cover crops like clover and buckwheat to enhance the quality of the soil. His family helps with many aspects of the farm (his two youngest girls helped plant the pea crop last year) and they eat many of the seconds that don't make it to the stand for sale. Erik says the food miles for their house are measured in kid's feet.

Shop Patchwork Green Farm's healthy bounty at the Decorah Farmers Market on Wednesdays and Saturdays. Visit the website [www.patchworkgreen.com](http://www.patchworkgreen.com) to learn more about Erik and Sara, read their blog, learn about CSA memberships, purchase a market share, donate a share to the local food pantry and even schedule a time to visit the gardens!

