



One of the new local growers to join the Lakeland Downtown Farmer's Curb Market this year is Bilbrey Family Farm of Auburndale, Fl. Rodger and Carol Bilbrey are the owners of the three acre certified naturally grown (CNG) community supported agriculture (CSA) farm.

Market Watch: Bilbrey Family Farm

By Libby Hopkins

I love farmer's markets and everything about them! I get as giddy as a schoolgirl when I go to them, too. I love looking at all the one of a kind crafts that vendors sell at the markets. I also love haggling with them over prices when I want to buy their crafts. But the thing I like most about farmer's markets are the farmers. They take the time to harvest their best produce and bring it to the market for us to buy. It does my heart wonders to see people coming together to support their local farmers and, most importantly, shopping local.

When I'm in Polk County, I love going to the Lakeland Downtown Farmer's Curb Market. It has been a part of Lakeland's downtown community since the 1920s. The market got its name from customers who would pull up to get the produce they need from the farmers selling it on the curb. Becky Abel is the Lakeland Downtown Development Authority (LDDA) Coordinator. The LDDA sponsors the Downtown Farmer's Curb Market as a marketing project designed to bring people downtown. Abel is responsible for keeping the old traditions alive with the current market, but give it a new and more modern twist. "It's an old fashion name for driving up to the curb and getting what you want and leaving, so it became the Lakeland Downtown Farmer's Curb Market to pay respect to the memory of the original market," Abel said. The 50-week market is a showcase for the

talents and the work of local artisans and local growers. One of the new local growers to join the market this year is Bilbrey Family Farm of Auburndale. Rodger and Carol Bilbrey are the owners of the three acre certified naturally grown (CNG) community supported agriculture (CSA) farm. "We are small in size but mighty in production," said Rodger Bilbrey. As a CNG, their products are produced using organic growing methods. "We follow the USDA's National Organic Program rules and we are inspected yearly to ensure we do so," Bilbrey said. "What this means to our customers is fresh, locally grown produce that is healthier for them and their families because no harmful products were used in our production."

Bilbrey has been around farming his whole life, his parents owned a ranch in Hardee County, so you could say farming is in his blood. As he got older, he continued working in various forms of agriculture but deep down inside, he wanted to own his own farm. "I had been working in the ornamental plant business for over 20 years but what I really wanted to do was get into organic farming because I loved it," Bilbrey said. This past January, the farm Bilbrey was working for closed and he was offered a job that wasn't quite his forte. He got a phone call during dinner with his wife, Carol, and he was asked to come in for a second interview for the job he didn't

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Bilbrey Family Farm

www.Bilbreyfamilyfarm.com



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want. "Carol said if you have your farm and your dream job came along, what would you do?" Bibrey said. "I told her having my own farm is my dream job, so right then and there I decided to start my own farm."

Bilbrey wanted his farm to be a CSA because Polk County doesn't have the many, but to do this, he would need members, and so he looked into becoming a vendor at a farmer's market. He picked the Lakeland Downtown Farmer's Curb Market because it seemed like a perfect fit for him and his wife. "The people there know how to run a market," Bilbrey said. "They are more in tune with having someone there who is a grower verses someone who just buys stuff and brings it to sell." The first month Bilbrey was at the market, he didn't bring any of his produce, he just passed out information about his farm. Then he brought some of his vegetables and within a week, he had people joining his CSA. He now has 21 full-time members and 12 people on a waiting list to become members. Abel loves having Bilbrey Family Farms as one of their new vendors. "Bilbrey Family Farms brings us a new angle on fresh, organic food with the option to join their CSA as a member," Abel said. "Of course, plenty of beautiful surplus produce is brought to the market for general purchase each week, but people who want to step up their commitment to eating organically can join their CSA and get a huge benefit." She also said Bilbrey is very knowledgeable and has a great sense of humor as well.

Bilbrey is thrilled that he is living his dream of owning a farm, but he said all of it wouldn't be possible if it weren't for his wife. "Carol is the most important part of this farm," Bilbrey said. "The two of us make a great team." If you would like to learn more about Bilbrey Family Farms, you can visit them on the web at www.bilbreyfamilyfarm.com



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For more information on the Lakeland Downtown Farmer's Curb Market, you can visit their website at www.downtownfarmerscurbmarket.org

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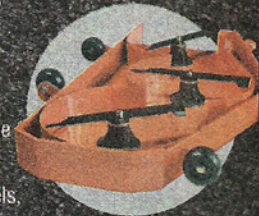
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