

Letter from Gary Anderson

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Greetings,

I really hate being put in the situation to say "I told you so", but others have put me there. So I'll bite....I told them so!

That's right, certain agents of the KY Shiitake Program are now, after just 3 years in the "business", getting out of the mushroom "business". Why? Because a few of them, the most vociferous and adamant proponents of the old timey, labor intensive and expensive short log cultivation method included, have realized that that method IS TOO HARD, TOO EXPENSIVE and NOT PROFITABLE ENOUGH TO BE WORTH THE EFFORT!

Not only did we tell them this privately at every opportunity, I told them this publicly at meetings of The KY Shiitake Program in Frankfort. I also told them not to listen to just me, but to read the synopsis of all economic analyses of the old timey method published in Paul Stamets' seminal book Growing Gourmet and Medicinal Mushrooms. His bottom line...great method for hobbyists, but not the basis for an industry. Ignore us, with (at the time) 10 years of experience, OK. Ignore us and Paul too! Well, now you're just being stubbornly, arrogantly stupid.

Our biggest concern regarding The KY Shiitake Program was that it would sour people on the idea of using mushrooms (either wild or cultivated) to subsidize superior forestry. In our experience, from speaking with land owners and growers, it has done just that. Expectations of yields and revenue were inflated to generate interest, and when the reality hit a few years later, growers got frustrated. We get the calls from dejected and angry former growers all the time.

Now we have to get our message out AND repara the damage done to mushrooms as a concept.

The KY Shiitake Program (TKSP) was never intended to subsidize superior forestry as our method was. In fact, I saw several instances where the method they promoted actually hurt superior forest

management. TKSP was not, in essence, a "natural" or "forest based" program at all. It was based on an agricultural production model. I spoke at length with the principles of this program during its inception about this very issue, and about NET REVENUE. The principles at the time were John Cotten (secondary woods products) and Debra Hill (extension forester). They obviously didn't get it, and several years and a wad of tax payer money is now down the drain because of it. I'm sure the Program will struggle on for awhile. At least until our volumes of quality, lower priced mushrooms fill their markets.

There comes a time when stubbornness and ignorance really cost. It costs time and money for sure. Sometimes with forestry, it can even cost a life here and there. But as people go through the death throws of the oil age, and look to corn, soybeans and whatever else will get them a drop of combustible liquid, ignorance of the true economic and food potential of the forest will definitely have ecological and economic costs. I don't think it's going too far to say that ignorance of the true potential of the forest may even cost us our democratic heritage. Democracy depends upon economic independence, and there's way too little of that these days.

We made over \$43,000 last year in forestry related income and harvested less than 20,000 feet of trees. And that's working part time. It's not only possible, it's routine for us. The mission of The Forest School is to teach others how to do this too. Even to the point of providing access to markets that we've developed over the years. Like Robert DeNiro's character says repeatedly in the movie "Brazil", "we're all in this together".

The basics of how we do this is available for free at our website, www.roughcreekfarm.com. Click on the "forestry" section. No, it is not in the most convenient form, and we will be adding material as we go. But, for the motivated person, most of the background material is all there...with photos.

Here's an issue though. While "the ladies come and go/ talking of Michelangelo", we press on. They keep on talking and having meetings, we keep on taking care of Nature while she cares for us. Mushrooms to us are not a "business opportunity" that we can pursue or drop after a few years. They are an essential and naturally abundant part of our native ecosystem, as are we. In other words, mushrooms are an integral part of our lives, like the deer and the trees and the water and the birds. I walked out to get more firewood this morning, and harvested wild oysters off the wood. Food, fuel, money. Always was this way, always will be this way... "as long as the wind blows and grass grows".

Hopefully, through our various efforts, we can convince those who could help us get this message out that dependability and true net income are superior to novelty and subsidized income. Our message has not changed. Our message probably will not change. Wes Jackson asked me "Are you still working in the woods and messing with those mushrooms?" Yep. "Same as it ever was/ same as it ever was/ same as it ever was/ same as it...ever was"

We hope you all are well, and keep at it.

Gary