

**PASA Farmer Profile**  
**Creekside Farm**  
**Pat & Elwood Brubeck**  
**Custom Grown Produce for Creative Chefs**

“It started out with a picnic table at the end of our driveway,” comments Patricia Brubeck, co-owner of Creekside Farm in Marysville, Pennsylvania (Perry County). Pat and her husband Elwood began their farming enterprise about 20 years ago as avid gardeners. “We always loved working with unique flowers and shrubs, but many varieties we wanted to plant were either too expensive or not readily available. So we started a mini growing area in the cellar of our old house to grow our own plants,” says Pat.

An over abundance of plants lead to the creation of Creekside Nursery (a few picnic tables and homemade sign), which grew over the years to also include landscaping, pond installation and more greenhouses. Several years later, the Brubecks have returned to growing vegetables and herbs exclusively.

Currently Creekside Farm consists of eight acres, with seven greenhouses and two high tunnels. A wood fired stove heats three of the 30' x 96' greenhouses and one of the high tunnels. The other greenhouses are still heated with propane but they plan to switch to an alternative fuel in the near future. The small family farm, just north of Harrisburg grows micro greens, culinary herbs, edible flowers and other specialty greens year round in their greenhouses.

Some of the unique micro green mixes include an Asian, Italian, Spicy and South Western blends. Varieties include everything from amaranth, to curly cress, fenugreek, mizuna, and wasabi. In addition to micro herbs, they also offer edible flowers and garnishes.

Most of the farms' customers are chefs from restaurants in the Harrisburg, Camp Hill, Mechanicsburg, Hershey, Lebanon and Carlisle areas. According to Pat, “We take pride in offering only the freshest produce to discriminating chefs and custom growing is our specialty for those chefs who wish an exclusive item on their menu.”

One of their clients, Chef Jerry Labooty, of the Greystone Restaurant in Pottsville (Schuylkill County) drives to Lebanon County to pick up his orders (Creekside doesn't deliver to Schuylkill County). According to Chef Jerry, “Pat and Woody grow the most pristine produce I have ever used in as many years. I am proud to have Creekside Farm associated with my restaurant.”

Chef Barry Crumlich, of the Governor's Residence in Harrisburg enjoys the eclectic variety offered, “We get novel, fresh produce such as popcorn shoots, baby bok choy and oka hajiki (also called land seaweed).”

Pat declares, "The key to success is the ability to grow year round and to grow different varieties – what the chefs are looking for." Creekside's winter vegetable production includes several varieties of radish, baby bok choy, baby fennel & baby leeks.

Customers even have input as to what crops are planted the next year. According to Pat, "Every year after Christmas, we ask them on their invoices if there is a special crop they want us to try out next year. We are growing fava beans as a 'baby' size for the first time this year, along with more heirloom tomato varieties. Last year we grew Asian yard long beans for the first time and will grow them again in 2006."

Creekside not only sells direct to area chefs, but also wholesale through Four Season Produce in Ephrata, to a few grocery stores and with a retail partner. Pat points out that in order to get a good price by selling wholesale, you need to offer specialty crops, something different that not every farm can offer. Items such as popcorn and pea shoots, edible flowers and assorted specialty greens are unique items restaurants and specialty stores are looking for. "Wholesaling allowed us to expand our business, even though don't have a lot of land to grow other crops," she says.

The Brubecks once had a farm stand selling surplus vegetables and greens after orders were filled, but now they sell the remainder through Collectible Treasures, a local retail store right across from the farm. The store regularly offers Creekside's salad mix, spring transplants and some vegetables. Cut flower bouquets are also available on request.

For more information on Creekside Farm contact Pat and Elwood Brubeck, 2025 Valley Road, Marysville, PA 17053, visit [www.creeksidegrown.com](http://www.creeksidegrown.com), call 717-957-3479, or email [herblady@creeksidegrown.com](mailto:herblady@creeksidegrown.com).

## **INTERVIEW WITH PATRICIA BRUBECK**

**PASA:** What do you see as some of the critical issues concerning agriculture today?

**Pat Brubeck:** Number one I would have to say is urban sprawl. This is especially true in our area as many family farms are being sold off to developers. The cost of existing farmland is much more than the average person can afford. Re-education of today's farmers might be an answer to the dwindling farmland problem. So many young people are content to follow old practices just because "That's the way Dad did it." More attention needs to be paid to new methods, from machinery to crop selection. From a vegetable grower's standpoint, re-education of the consumer should be a top priority also. So many commodities are being imported that it's becoming difficult for the average consumer to determine when a particular vegetable or fruit should be "in season." Pennsylvania has made great progress in promoting locally grown produce but

more needs to be done. Please don't misunderstand me, having fresh produce available year round is a wonderful thing, but having fresh LOCAL produce available is even better.

**PASA:** What is unique about your farm?

**PB:** First of all, we're not the typical vegetable grower with acres of sweet corn, beans and pumpkins. In fact, we don't even grow sweet corn. Most of our field vegetables are grown by request for chefs, such as heirloom tomatoes, unique varieties of peppers and eggplant and just about anything that can be harvested "baby" size from beets to zucchini. Year round growing of specialty salad greens, culinary herbs, edible flowers and micro greens are done in greenhouses and high tunnels. There are many challenges from timing succession plantings to variety selection, but the rewards are great.

Everything in the greenhouses is grown in waist-high bench beds. We've found this makes for cleaner harvesting, not to mention being much easier on the back! Since our soil is heavy clay, all the outside beds are raised with layers of compost. The high tunnels have permanent 10-inch high raised beds and are filled with aged compost. It's taken years of trial and error to come up with all the different methods we use and we are still in learning mode.

**PASA:** How has your operation evolved over the years?

**PB:** We were very fortunate to have a Dad who wanted his son to live close to him in Perry County. He scoured the newspapers for public sales and auctions for land for sale. His searches paid off and we were top bidder for the land we live on now. That was over 25 years ago - we could never afford to buy these acres at today's prices.

Creekside started out as a hobby that slowly evolved into a business. We both worked full-time but always had time for gardening. We had been selling a few plants in our backyard when the trucking company Elwood was working for closed its doors. He decided to build a small greenhouse to expand our growing space and one thing led to another. The job I had was very stressful and I looked forward to the evenings and weekends when I could spend more time with plants and other people who loved them. My decision to stay on the farm was a "spur of the minute" one after a particularly stressful day at the office. We've been doing this full time ever since.

We really had no formal training, just common sense and a love for what we do. Over the years, we've met many growers who've shared experiences, read many, many books, articles and traveled to growers' meetings when time permitted. We have several grower friends in other parts of the country who share ideas, problems and successes.

Several years ago, I had lots of basil plants producing much more than I could possibly use. A conversation with a friend led me to her nephew who was in the process of opening a new restaurant. He loved fresh herbs and would buy all I could grow. That started a chain reaction that led us back to our first love - herbs and vegetables. Today, all signs of retail are gone and it's just gotten much bigger! Working with chefs is challenging but so rewarding! They are some of the most creative people I know and are always full of new ideas.

**PASA:** Why did you join PASA?

**PB:** PASA stands for everything we believe in. The land we live and work on is only as good as what we put back into it. Membership allows us to keep in touch with other growers and keep abreast of current issues affecting all farmers. Even though we chose not to be certified organic, sustainable practices make us good stewards. And good stewardship is what PASA is all about.