

## **FLATHEAD VALLEY'S ORGANIC FARMERS RECOGNIZED BY FAS**

Flathead Audubon's third Recognition of Outstanding Conservation Achievements was presented to Flathead Valley's six local organic farmers at our April meeting.

Five of the six farmers were able to be present at the meeting for the recognition; the sixth, Katherine Cross, was out of town.

The presentation was made by Lois Drobish, who has for many years served as Flathead Audubon's Welcome Hostess, and is the mother of one of the farmers honored. Below is the text that Lois read at the meeting.

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Tonight we honor the six Certified Organic Farmers of our Flathead Valley for growing organically, providing us with food, preserving our soil, protecting our ground water, avoiding air pollution and safeguarding our environment, our habitat.

These Certified Organic Farmers are:

Katherine Cross  
Julian Cunningham/Swallow Crest Farm  
Kip Drobish/Raven Ridge Farm  
Barry Flamm/Flamm Orchard  
Judy Owsowitz/Terrapin Farm  
John Sheldon/Creston Seed Inc.

Flathead Audubon's Mission Statement includes conservation of habitat and ecosystem diversity. Awareness and appreciation of the natural world is promoted through educational activities and advocacy programs. We work with diverse groups and agencies to achieve sound decisions on natural resource issues. We recognize these Certified Organic Farmers for their conservation activities.

These Certified Organic Farmers are members of the Organic Certification Association of Montana, a non-profit organization, composed of consumers, retailers, processors and growers. This organization promotes local organic food and sustainable farming practices, and oversees the certification of organic farms in Western Montana. The cost to the farmer of certification is several hundred dollars. Certification is provided by the Organic Crop Improvement Association, an internationally recognized farmer owned and operated grassroots certification program, which is committed to an independent and neutral system of inspection.

There are innumerable benefits to growing food organically. Organic growing methods protect the long-term health of the land and result in wholesome foods. Pests are controlled by building healthy soil, resulting in vibrant plants. Soil fertility is achieved through crop rotation, returning organic material to the soil through composting and growing a variety of crops. Inter-planting and cover cropping contribute to a healthy soil-building program.

Consumers are thus ensured nutritious foods from healthy plants without pesticides and other artificial additives. The health of farm workers is also protected. In addition, birds, insects and animals benefit from these practices.

Growing organically improves the ability of farmlands to withstand drought and other stresses. The environment is preserved by reducing soil erosion and the amount of chemicals in the ground water. Organic growing maintains a balance between providing for and receiving from the soil, thus attaining a long-term sustainable relationship.

Information about some Certified Organic Farmers and other Montana farmers is listed in AERO'S Directory for Sustainably Grown Montana Food: ABUNDANT Montana. Copies are on the rear table.

It is for these reasons we respect and cherish our Certified Organic Farmers. Flathead Audubon is pleased to present each with a membership in our chapter, which is a chapter of the National Audubon Society, and our state organization Montana Audubon. Thank you for your invaluable contributions to the health of our community and our environment.

By Ferne Cohen