

Miller Family Farm



Jacquie Miller of Miller Family Farm says her interest in farming “started with the question, ‘if I didn’t have a job, how could I sustain myself?’” After reading books and articles about homesteading and self-sustainability, she determined that “the most important thing was food first,” she explains, so she started looking into how to grow.

She researched and read about different methods of farming, but quickly realized that it would “require a lot of capital up-front to invest,” she says. “Then I thought, ‘I have a deck – why don’t I just start growing something?’” Jacquie planted her first two crops in spring of 2012 – jalapeño peppers and tomatoes – in pots on her deck. “When they started growing, I was amazed!” she exclaims. After experiencing this first small success, she was hungry for more knowledge, and a bigger area to cultivate. “I went on farm tours, attended seminars, and looked at websites about growing your own food,” says Jacquie, but came back to the same problem – “I realized I would need a lot of money to do farming.”

Jacquie found out about the Minnesota Food Association at a conference. When she investigated the program, she became excited. “My goals were: number one, to see if I could grow things; and number two, to see if I would like it,” she says, “without having to spend thousands of dollars.” MFA seemed to be the perfect solution. so she applied and was accepted into the program. “The classes and mentorship from MFA were also very needed for me,” she says.

2014 has been Jacquie’s first season in the farmer training program, and is currently farming a quarter acre. “It doesn’t sound like a lot, but it’s huge!” she exclaims. “I love it. I can come early, when it’s quiet and cool, and get as much of my work done as possible. I love the surroundings, being outside in nature, and working with my hands.” Jacquie has discovered that she can indeed grow things, and furthermore, “I have really enjoyed it,” she says. “It’s amazing to plant something and come back and see that it’s growing! I talk to my plants all the time – they’re my babies!” Of course, she has experienced her fair share of challenges, including “lots of bugs” and a long commute, but overall, she has had a great start. Her first sale of 2014 was a beautiful crop of spinach, salad mix, and arugula, and she is especially looking forward to harvesting her green tomatoes.

As an African American woman, “I am from a very under-represented group in farming,” explains Jacquie. “We were taught in my family, if you get an education, you wouldn’t have to do the hard, physical labor, and you could have a job where you were sitting down inside, in the cool, such as a doctor or a lawyer. I worked in corporate America for a number of years, and I got tired of sitting down – it’s not part of who I am or what I like to do.” Her involvement with MFA has helped Jacquie “to go back to where my food came from,” she says.

The future of Miller Family Farm is looking bright. “I want to raise chickens,” exclaims Jacquie. “I would love to see the whole process, from little chick to big chicken.” Her longer-term goal is to buy five to ten acres of land and build a homestead, raising vegetables, fruit, chickens, and bees. “If I hadn’t found MFA, I’d still be dreaming and searching for something like MFA, and planting on my deck,” Jacquie concludes. “It’s a great program.”