

Tomás Silva



Tomás grew up on the West Side of St. Paul, but his family is originally from Mexico, a town called Aguascalientes. He remembers visiting as a child and eating prickly pear cactus and *membrillo* (known as quince in the US). But before MFA, farming “really wasn’t” a part of his life, although as a kid he liked the idea of having a farm someday, and has always liked animals.

Tomás has lots of experience working in other sectors of the food system though, including working at his family’s *El Burrito Mercado* doing everything from cashiering to baking to operations management. It was his interest in food that lead him to the MFA Beginning Farmer Training Program. He had become more interested in food after reading a book on the politics of agriculture, and was troubled by the lack of access to healthy food, seeing that it was often not affordable and not available year-round. He is motivated by his desire to make healthier food available not just to himself and his family, but to the Mexican-American community and the St. Paul community where he grew up.

“I’m excited about farming, I’m excited about learning.”

Does he like the new program? “I love it,” he says. The instructors are knowledgeable, supportive, and very patient. One of the most helpful aspects of the program has been gaining a better understanding of what it means to farm. The program has made the idea of starting a farm less overwhelming, he explained. “Wow, I can do

this, this is attainable, and there may even be a chance to make some money doing it!”

Tomás has already planted an incredible array of produce, including fifteen types of pepper, herbs, onions, tomatoes, tomatillos, squash, melons, radishes, cucumbers, lettuce, carrots, and snap peas. He is focusing on peppers, with plans to sell some to his family’s business and create a line of organic salsas. Some of the challenges are selecting which types of produce to grow that he will actually be able to sell, and finding certain types of organic seeds, such as peppers and herbs. But Tomás has extensive business experience to draw on that will help him meet these challenges, having done accounting, budgeting, projections, and management in past jobs. And he is full of energy and enthusiasm. “I’m excited about farming, I’m excited about learning,” he said. His deep motivation will help him too. Farming is “reflective of a lifestyle I want to sustain,” he explained. He realized he wanted to move away from the business area he was working in, and appreciates the healthier lifestyle offered by farming, including better access to and knowledge of healthy food.

In the future, he envisions having a diversified farming system including chickens, goats, and pigs. His ideas for the future also include using his knowledge to help others. Inspired by challenges in his own life, Tomás hopes to use farming as part of recovery from addictions. He said, “I’d like to be able to work with people on the outskirts of mainstream society.” We have no doubt that Tomás will grow great produce and go on to use his new farming knowledge to contribute to the community.

