

As President of the Vashon Island Grower's Association, I welcome you to the 2006 Growing Season! Vashon is such an incredibly abundant place, unique in all of Puget Sound with its combination of natural resources and human know-how. The abundance and diversity you'll find at the Farmers Market this Saturday, April 1st is just the tip of the cornucopia. Behind the lush gardens, productive orchards, animals raised respectfully for their milk, eggs, and meat, and the necessary daily items made beautiful are the individuals who have chosen this work because they love what they do.

How exciting to be part of such a community! I've lived in rural or wild places my entire life, knowing both the finest self-sustaining practices and the most hopeless surrender to poverty. The struggle to retain rural identity and potential for self-reliance amid the opportunity to capitalize on rising market values can be absolutely overwhelming. Yet the citizens of Vashon continue finding ways to maintain the rural character. Farm and forest lands, skilled and experienced craftsmen, and value-added facilities show up in vendor booths on the Village Green each Saturday. Those very same attributes are the resources necessary for creating and maintaining strong, self-reliant, flexible communities.

Now as Spring calls the seeds to stretch out their leaves, translating sunshine and soil into nutrition for our families, I hear new ideas to strengthen Vashon beginning to fill the fields and gardens as well. From Bread Ovens and Community Kitchens to Food Co-Ops and Permaculture Workshops, this Island seems to refuse negativity in order to grasp opportunity ahead. Perhaps that is the nature of an Island – it's easy to think outside the box when you are, well, outside the box!

When you visit the Farmers Market this year, talk with the growers and crafters. Why do they do what they do? How did they get started? Why do they keep going? In my experience, there aren't many of us who are born and raised to be farmers anymore. The challenge to make a living selling bunches of carrots for \$2 each is rarely held as a viable "what I want to do when I grow up" option. So why do so many of us choose small scale organic family farming? My guess is that every person will have a different answer. Maybe, as you look over the amazing natural abundance on Vashon, you'll hear your own answer. If so, talk with the growers and crafters about how we can include you in our community of people doing what we love to do. See you on Saturday!