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LEARNING TO FARM ORGANICALLY: BUILDING SOIL, SYSTEMS, AND COMMUNITY AT HERCULES ACRES

Article by: Carolina Farm Stewardship Association

Hercules Acres, a nonprofit agricultural charity, was founded in March 2025 with a commitment: if food was going to be grown here, it would be grown with care for the land, the soil, and the people who eat it. As a first-generation farmer, Simonne is learning, with intention and method, how to farm organically. While formal organic certification will come later, the principles of organic production already shape every decision on the farm.



A First-Generation Farmer Focused on Organic Practice

Simonne farms on approximately 2.5 to 3 acres in Irmo, South Carolina, using an elevated, container-based growing system that allows for close monitoring of soil health, nutrients, and water use.

She has approached farming as a learner: studying organic methods, observing outcomes, and adjusting her approach season by season. Her interest in organic farming is deeply personal. A longtime vegan, Simonne wanted to grow food she would feel confident feeding her own family and community. That commitment made organic practices non-negotiable, even as she acknowledges the steep learning curve.

“For me, organic isn’t just a label,” Simonne says. “It’s a practice. It’s about what I put into the soil, what I leave out, and the quality of food I’m willing to grow, eat, and share.”

Organic Systems at a Small Scale

Today, she manages ten elevated beds and thirty containers, using an organic container-based growing system that allows her to closely monitor soil health, water use, and nutrient cycles. She grows peppers, tomatoes, herbs, and brassicas, while experimenting, and sometimes struggling, with root crops.

She carefully tracks inputs, relying on OMRI-listed materials, compost, worm castings, and soil-building practices rather than synthetic fertilizers or pesticides. Crop diversity, polyculture, and succession planting are central to how she maximizes productivity in limited space.



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So far, her most successful crops include peppers, tomatoes, herbs, and brassicas. Root crops have been more challenging, a reminder, she says, that organic farming requires patience as much as planning. “Organic growing doesn’t forgive shortcuts,” Simonne explains. “If the soil isn’t right, the plants will tell you.”

Learning From Experienced Organic Farmers

Simonne participates in the SE TOPP farmer-to-farmer mentorship program and is mentored by Chris Sermon of Bio Way Farms. With over 20 years of experience in agriculture, including more than a decade in Certified Organic production, Chris brings both expertise and dedication to his work. Bio Way Farm produces a diverse range of organic products, such as mixed vegetables, tree fruit, and grapes. Motivated to support the next generation of farmers and give back to people and the planet, Chris willingly shares his knowledge across cover cropping, crop rotation, crop planning, biodiversity, native plants, forest farming, irrigation, soil health, and marketing

“We talk every week,” she says. “Chris answers every question, from soil health and crop planning to conservation practices. We spent almost three hours walking his farm, learning how he manages land and livestock. And he’s coming to visit my farm next.”

“Seeing how someone else manages soil, conservation practices, and crop planning reinforces that organic farming is a long-term commitment,” she says. “It’s not about quick yields, it’s about resilience.”

Organic Farming in Service of Community

As a nonprofit, Hercules Acres is structured around access and education. Simonne’s goal is not just to grow organic food, but to demonstrate how organic practices can be adapted for small spaces, limited mobility, and new growers.

“I want people to see that organic farming doesn’t have to be out of reach,” she says. “You can start where you are and grow into it.”

Committed to the Process

Simonne describes Hercules Acres as being in its early stages, and she is comfortable with that. Her focus over the next 12 to 18 months is on strengthening organic systems, improving soil health, and building the foundation needed for future programs and certification.

“This is a long game,” she says. “I’m not rushing the land. I’m learning it. I’m not assuming certification is automatic or easy,” she says. “Right now, I’m focused on doing the work: building healthy soil, learning the crops, and documenting everything so that organic integrity is real, not theoretical.”



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