



## Dungeness Valley farmer receives \$10,000, accolades

By Diane Urbani de la Paz, Peninsula Daily News  
Article published Jun 5, 2008



SEQUIM — Hand-picked spinach and tears of joy made for an especially hearty lunch at the Sequim Prairie Grange Hall on Wednesday.

Nash Huber and his wife, Patty McManus-Huber, are overcome with emotion Wednesday as they accepted the American Farmland Trust's national Steward of the Land award. This year marked the first time the award is being given to an organic farmer.

Photo by Diane Urbani de la Paz/Peninsula Daily News

The American Farmland Trust based in Washington, D.C., bestowed its 2008 Steward of the Land award on Nash Huber, the son of Illinois farmers who came west 40 years ago to turn 350 Dungeness Valley acres into land that produces fresh, organic food.

This is the first time that the 12-year-old award has been given to a Washington state farmer.

Perhaps more important, Huber, owner of Nash's Organic Produce, is the first organic grower to receive the prize.

The award included a check for \$10,000 handed to him and his wife, Patty McManus-Huber, on Wednesday after a long series of salutes from local and national officials.

Judith Morris, representing Rep. Norm Dicks, D-Belfair, summed up the reason Huber won the award.

"Nash is an inspiration," Morris said, "to younger farmers, to a whole new generation."

The more than 150 guests applauded — and as it turned out, they were only getting warmed up.

In his decades of farming the land fed by the Dungeness River, Huber has been unwavering in his determination to stay organic.

He and his workers use a chemical-free pest control program; they nurture crops with locally blended compost.

The farm is certified salmon-safe due to its protection of stream beds and efficient irrigation.

And Huber has worked with the North Olympic Land Trust and Friends of the Fields, two local conservation coalitions, to save hundreds of acres of farmland.

### **Competative award**

The American Farmland Trust, founded in 1980, gives the Steward of the Land award in honor of cofounder Peggy Rockefeller.

And the field of candidates is a competitive one, said Trust president Ralph Grossi.

The organization searches not just for a good farmer, but also a visionary who awakens his or her community.

Those who know Huber well described him as such — with speeches and two standing ovations.

Huber has been a pioneer who's not only planted seeds; he's also developed new varieties, said Micaela Colley of the Organic Seed Alliance in Port Townsend.

"I knew Nash's kale before I knew Nash," Colley said.

"It's wild-looking, not very orderly . . . and it's flavorful and sweet. It lasts through the winter, it's disease-resistant and hardy.

"It came out of somebody's imagination. And that's Nash's mind."

These days, "organic is good for people and planet," "save the farmland" and "eat local" are on everyone's lips — but "Nash had this vision 25 years ago," said Clallam County Commissioner Steve Tharinger.

### **Tearful salutes**

Tharinger, a Democrat who lives near Huber in Dungeness, spoke in a voice choked with emotion as he added, "There's a great energy in this room. Nash provided that."

The crowd rose, cheering. And as the applause continued, Huber stood up to

acknowledge it, a tear streaming down his rosy cheek.

"Time has caught up to Nash," said Mark Spencer, a longtime friend.

He meant that in the most positive sense — as in consumers are growing more interested in organic, locally grown produce, the kind grown in Huber's fields.

But he doesn't own all of that land. Huber leases much of his acreage from several owners, some of whom have established conservation easements to guarantee that food, not subdivisions, will always grow there.

Wednesday's lunch was a feast of local flavors: Nash's spinach salad, Nash's pork and Three Sisters beef rouleau, Mount Townsend Creamery Tomme cheese, roasted Nash's cauliflower and potatoes, and for dessert "yesteryear strawberry" rhubarb crisp with a rosemary-oat topping and herbed custard creme.

The berries are last year's, frozen for pre-season parties like this, said Nash's Organic Produce staffer Stella Mestre. She predicted that 2008's strawberries will be in around late June or early July.

Nearly all of Nash's staff joined Wednesday's celebration, and sat down for a meal served by Friends of the Fields volunteers.

"The pigs are probably having a party," back on the farm, Mestre joked.

When at last it was Huber's turn to speak, he paid tribute to Friends of the Fields for striving to preserve still more farmland across Clallam County — and saluted his workers.

"I look out at the faces of the people I've worked with, and it's pretty overpowering," he said, as tears sprang to his eyes again.

"You have to be able to offer a future to the next generation. And you can't do that without land."

With that came his second standing ovation, and a kiss on the cheek from Patty.

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