

# SPIN-FARMING™ Is It For You?

*It Makes Agriculture Accessible to Anyone, Anywhere*

*Compiled from the workshop & handouts at PASA's Farming for the Future Conference*

What does SPIN stand for? S-mall P-lot IN-tensive. But it also stands for new hope and promise for independent farmers. SPIN takes the challenges posed by urbanization and turns them to the farmer's advantage.

With this farming method, there is no need to own land, renting a small parcel or several back yard plots are adequate. The multiple farm plots or parts of a single site are then divided into different areas of production intensity. The most intensive area is called the Intensive Relay Area and this is where 3 or more crops are grown on a sequential basis throughout the season. The Bi-Relay Area has sequential growing of two crops throughout the season, and in the Single Crop Area only one crop is grown in the course of the season.

SPIN is becoming popular with a broad, crossover market of aspiring urban farmers, conventional large-scale farmers who want or need to downsize, and part-time hobby farmers. What unites them all is an ability to approach farming in a radical new way.

SPIN farming has been developed at Wally's Urban Market Garden, a half-acre multi-location farm in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan and Philadelphia's Somerton Tanks Farm, a single location half-acre farm.

SPIN was created by Wally Satzewich, who operates Wally's Urban Market Garden, which is dispersed over 25 residential backyard garden plots in Saskatoon, that are rented from homeowners. The sites range in size from 500 sq. ft. to 3000 sq. ft., and the growing area totals a half-acre. The produce is sold at The Saskatoon Farmers' Market.

Wally Satzewich and Gail Vandersteen initially started farming on an acre-sized plot outside of Saskatoon 20 years ago. Thinking that expanding acreage was critical to their success, they bought farmland adjacent to the South Saskatchewan River 40 miles north where they eventually grew vegetables on about 20 acres of irrigated land.

After six years farming their rural site, the couple realized there was more money to be made growing multiple crops intensively in the city, so they sold the farm and became

urban growers. "People don't believe you can grow three crops a year in Saskatoon," observes Vandersteen. "They think it's too much work, but the truth is, this is much less work than mechanized, large-scale farming. We used to have a tractor to hill potatoes and cultivate, but we find it's more efficient to do things by hand. Other than a rototiller, all we need is a push-type seeder and a few hand tools."

"We are producing 10–15 different crops and sell thousands of bunches of radishes, green onions and thousands of bags of salad greens and carrots each season. Our volumes are low compared to conventional farming, but we sell high-quality organic products at high end prices," says Mr. Satzewich. The SPIN method is based on their successful experiment in downsizing, which emphasizes minimal mechanization and maximum fiscal discipline and planning.

Roxanne Christensen, co-founder and President of the Institute for Innovations in Local Farming, operates Somerton Tanks Farm, in partnership with the Philadelphia Water Department. Somerton is a prototype urban farm that serves as the U.S. test bed for the SPIN-FARMING™ method. The farm has received the support of the Pennsylvania Department Of Agriculture, the Philadelphia Workforce Department Corporation, the City Commerce Department, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, and the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Department

Ms. Christensen contends the separation of country and city is a bankrupt concept. "As development erodes the rural way of life, agriculture is creeping closer to metropolitan areas. SPIN-FARMING™ leverages this trend in a positive way — by capitalizing on limited resources and space. Creating Somerton Tanks Farm using the SPIN method required minimal upfront investment, and it keeps operating overhead low."

"For aspiring farmers, SPIN eliminates two big barriers — sizeable acreage and substantial startup capital. At the same time, its intensive relay growing techniques and revenue targeting formulas push yields to

unprecedented levels and result in profitable income."

In 2003, its first year of operation, Somerton Tanks Farm, located in northeast Philadelphia, the fifth largest city in the U.S., produced \$26,100 in gross sales from a half acre of growing space during a 9 month growing season. In 2005 gross sales increased to \$52,200. So in just three years of operation Somerton Tanks Farm achieved a level of productivity and financial success that many agricultural professionals claimed was impossible. And it is providing a way for independent farmers to once again have a viable role in the food production system that has tipped too much in favor of large-scale mass production agriculture.

Ms. Christensen's role at the Institute is to attract and support new farming talent. "The farming profession has been on the decline — and for good reasons. The global economy favors agribusinesses, the amount of available farmland is rapidly shrinking, and family farms are going out of business at an unprecedented rate. It is not an opportune time to become an independent farmer."

But, Christensen contends, SPIN-FARMING™ is a method uniquely suited to entrepreneurs, and provides a new career path for those who have a calling to farm. It is enticing a new breed of farmer who is interested in matters of principle, but who understands that to have a significant positive impact, they have to function within the existing system, pushing their cause while paying their bills.

Learn more about SPIN-FARMING™ at [www.spinfarming.com](http://www.spinfarming.com).

*Editor's Note: PASA will be co-hosting a field day with PA WAg'N on July 24, 2006 at Somerton Tanks Farm on this topic. Watch for our field day calendar in mid-May.*