

# ECUMENICAL MINISTRIES *of* OREGON

## *Interfaith Food & Farms Partnership*

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## Farmer Profile: Great River Farm

*By Sarah Pruett and Kate Sheridan*

Farmer Alexander Velikoretskikh supplies fresh produce and honey to several local churches through Interfaith Food and Farm Partnership's Farm to Congregation program. Every Sunday from during the growing season, Alex brings his boxes of produce to tables at Kairos-Milwaukee UCC and Holy Redeemer Catholic Church. It's clear that for Alex, an immigrant farmer from Ukraine, it is a delight and a joy to bring his produce to the church, sharing his harvest with the people who will eat it.



*Alex and his bees*

Mr. Velikoretskikh (pronounced "Vel-i-kor-et-ski") was born in Russia. After serving his term in the Russian military, he moved to Ukraine and lived near the Sea of Azov, about 15 km outside of Russia. Alex says he sought to live in America for the political, social and economic stability that characterizes our country. He immigrated to the United States in early 2007, about three years ago, with his wife and seven children; in July of 2008 his youngest daughter was born in Portland. Ten in all, the Velikoretskikh family lives in the southeast Foster Powell neighborhood.

Alex has always been a gardener and farmer, even as a young boy in Russia. The area around the Sea of Azov, in both Ukraine and Russia, has beautiful black soil that is perfect for growing vegetables and grains. He and his family—using hand tools and irrigation techniques—grew potatoes, squash, tomatoes, peppers, beans and green onions among others, vegetables which he currently cultivates at his two plots in Portland: one on Sauvie Island and the other on SE 39<sup>th</sup>, south of Holgate. All of his produce is grown naturally, without the use of pesticides. "Better than organic," is how Alex describes it. He gives a lot of credit for the beautiful produce he grows to the earthworms in his compost heaps, the castings of which he tills into the sandy soil on Sauvie Island.

The trees, birds, sunshine and water are Alex's inspirational allies in his operation to cultivate food for local people, and these elements bring him great pleasure as he works. The challenge of being a farmer, he notes, is in balancing the needs of his children, wife and the garden plots. He also has to be vigilant in keeping out hungry deer, mice and voles. "At the end of the day it helps to take a dive in the pool!" he says.



*Farmer table at Holy Redeemer*

The Interfaith Food and Farms Partnership (IFFP) strives to increase access to fresh, local food for all—especially people with low incomes—and encourages congregations to support small, new and immigrant farmers through innovative market relationships. In the process, we are developing and sharing models for congregations across Oregon and beyond. For more information about IFFP, go to [www.emoregon.org/food\\_and\\_farms.php](http://www.emoregon.org/food_and_farms.php).