

[View this email in your browser](#)



Stewardship Newsletter: Planning Season 2022-23

.....

Planting Plans



It's winter on the farm and we started 2023 buried in snow! This is a great omen for the year to come because snow provides critical moisture for our soil, that will help our crops grow! Since snow usually melts slowly it's easier for the dry soil to take in than rain which often evaporates before it can be absorbed. Winter in northern Montana means short days and often frigid temperatures, but it's the perfect time to hunker down inside with a bowl of split pea soup from last year's harvest! Check out the Crop Spotlight for the recipe!

The winter is a time for our team to rest and prepare for the farming season to come! For us this means continuing our own education to be better farmers and land stewards. Doug has been attending a webinar series on organic agronomy to refresh

and build his knowledge about the impacts of crops on soil health! We also take time in the winter season to share the knowledge that we have built over 14 seasons of organic farming! Check out this season's Stewardship Spotlight to read about the Farm's speaking and teaching engagements this season!

During this season we are also making final decisions about what crops to grow this year, securing contracts for selling those crops, and making a plan for what to plant in each field. Stay tuned for next season's newsletter to learn more about our crop plan and why planting strips and crop rotations are so important to us!

Like any business we start the new year by looking at our profit and loss from last year and creating a budget for the year ahead. Last year we felt the impacts of the climate crisis greater than ever. Summer 2022 saw little to no rainfall and our crops as well as our profits suffered greatly. For the 2022 season we were only able to harvest 9% of our average production. That means that we had to rely heavily on crop insurance to cover our expenses. Crop insurance is limiting because it doesn't value stewardship practices such as diverse crop varieties and encourages monocropping. Our operating expenses were also impacted by last years global economic trends. Our average fuel cost per acre over the last 7 years is \$8.63, but for 2022 our fuel cost per acre was \$16.20. Other members of the supply chain pass those increased expenses down the line. As farmers we have no one to pass to, except mother nature. These factors encourage so much of the agricultural industry to choose practices like monocropping that don't support diverse, thriving ecosystems.

We developed the CSSA program to develop a community that supports us in making decisions that are life giving for all of us. Your purchase of shares helps to cover the cost of caring for our land even when we have bad years. We are so grateful to you all for becoming shareholders and partners in this work! Please take the survey at the bottom of this newsletter and give us some feedback! And as always, when you've finished reading, and taking the survey, try this season's crossword puzzle, linked below!

[Planning Season Crossword Puzzle](#)



PLANNING SEASON: **STEWARDSHIP SPOTLIGHT**



Teaching and Learning

We believe that part of being good stewards to our land base is continuing to educate ourselves. We also feel it's our responsibility to share our experience and knowledge with our larger community. During the winter season Vilicus owners, Doug and Anna, and farm foreman, Paul, have the opportunity to attend that many agricultural conference in our region. This year we had the honor of speaking at several of these conferences!

In November Doug and Anna attended the Organic Connections convention in Saskatoon Saskatchewan. Organic Connections is a non-profit that organizes conferences and trade shows for the organic community in prairie provinces. Doug and Anna they gave a keynote presentation at the convention where they discussed the CSSA model and how Vilicus is re-imagining economic structures. Check out the video of their presentation below!



Our team attended Montana Organic Association (MOA) Conference in Billings in early December. MOA's mission is to bring together members of Montana's organic community, so this is always a great networking event! This conference gave us the opportunity to connect with representatives from Montana State University, AERO, and other farmers and buyers. Paul also participated on a panel discussing Meat Processing in Montana!

The Marbleseed conference is one of the biggest organic farming conferences in the country. This year's conference takes place in late February in La Crosse Wisconsin. **Doug and Anna will be keynote speakers at this year's conference! They will be giving a presentation on Diversity in All Things - Building a Resilient Organic Farm Organism in Turbulent Times. We are so excited to share that their presentation will be live streamed on Saturday, February 25th! Click the link below to read more about their presentation and be on the lookout for an email with the live stream link later this week!**

[Marbleseed Keynote Presentations](#)

Anna attended the Montana Farmers Union Women's conference in early February. We love networking with the incredible female visionaries and change-makers at this event! Anna was part of a panel on storytelling and why it's so important rural agrarians to connect and share their experiences.

We've also had the opportunity to be a part of some other really exciting educational and networking events!

We are on the teaching cadre for Organic Academy Road Show (OARS), which is a regional teaching program for beginning farmers through the Montana Organic Association. Paul, Doug, and Anna supported a session in Billings in December. Doug and Paul supported another session in Fargo in conjunction with the Northern Plains Sustainable Agriculture Conference in January!

Paul has made several trips to DC where he has served as the policy representative for the Montana Farmer's Union on the National Farmers Union Policy development committee. While there he met with Senate and House agriculture committee staff for both the Majority and Minority parties to discuss the upcoming 2023 Farm Bill. He also met with staff from US Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack's office. They discussed ways to improve implementation of USDA programs and funding areas for farmers and ranchers. Paul is also a panelist for the USDA Ag Outlook Forum.

The week of February 13th Anna gave a presentation at a virtual summit hosted by Heart and Soil Magazine. Heart and Soil is a publication about regenerative, biodynamic farming and gardening. If you're not familiar with biodynamic agriculture, be sure to read this season's Partner Spotlight! The Heart and Soil Summit is now available for download as a digital class! The Summit features presentations by Anna and 30 other experts in the field! Click the link below to learn more and download the class!

[Heart and Soil Summit](#)

PLANNING SEASON:**CROP SPOTLIGHT**



Yellow Peas

Yellow Peas on the Farm

One of the foundational crops in the Vilicus Farms rotation are yellow (dry) peas. They are our most commonly-grown pulse crop. Pulses are edible legumes- crops that are food for both humans (or animals) and for the soil!

Legume plants are truly one of nature's miracles! They form a symbiotic relationship with bacteria that live in the soil. These bacteria, Rhizobium, attach to the roots of legume plants. The plants supply the bacteria with carbon, which acts as food for the bacteria, in exchange for nitrogen. Rhizobium are able to convert nitrogen gas, absorbed from the air, into ammonia. Ammonia is a form of nitrogen used as an essential nutrient by plants. So, this mutually beneficial relationship allows legumes plants to "grow" their own nitrogen!

As an added bonus, the bacteria "fix" more nitrogen than the peas need. So, after peas are harvested, they leave nitrogen in the soil that can be used by succeeding crops. This is one of the benefits of growing peas in rotation with grains- the peas and their bacteria "friends" enrich the soil to the benefit of grain crops that follow!

Another benefit of growing peas is that they are a "friendly neighbor" for other plants. We often inter-seed our peas with oats. Inter-seeding is growing two (or more) crops together at the same time. Peas and oats are a good example of this. Peas share

nitrogen with the oats and oats help the peas by providing stems for the peas plants to vine around and by discouraging weeds that might otherwise out-compete the pea plants. Often, peas and oats grown together yield more than either crop grown alone! When peas are the dominant crop in the mix, they usually yield as much or more than peas grown as a monocrop. The oats that can be harvested and separated from the peas are a bonus!

In addition to being a soil-building crop, peas are also a great food crop. Most of our peas are contracted to PURIS Foods. PURIS manufactures plant-based protein, using our peas as a primary ingredient. Demand for plant-based protein is growing and Vilicus is excited to be a part of meeting that demand. Another market for peas is for seed. We grow peas for a local company, Big Sky Wholesale Seeds, in Shelby MT, who cleans and re-sells to other farmers. We also grow some of the peas for our own seed, which saves us money for next season!

[Learn More About How PURIS Uses Our Peas!](#)

Yellow Peas in the Kitchen



Tuscan Split Pea Soup

Ingredients:

- 2 1/2 cups dry split yellow peas
- 10 cups water
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- one white onion
- 2 cloves garlic
- 2 medium carrots
- salt
- black pepper
- dried basil
- dried oregano
- dried thyme
- (optional) feta cheese, crumbled
bacon, fresh herbs for garnish.



Procedure:

- Add olive oil to a large pot over medium heat
- Chop onion, carrot, and garlic
- Add onion, carrot, garlic, and spices to hot oil and cook until onions are softened
- Add peas to pot and cover with water
- Simmer for 1-2 hours until peas are softened
- Top with Feta cheese, bacon crumbles or fresh herbs, and serve!



Vilicus is Growing!

At Vilicus we have always been committed to training new agrarians. We believe that careers in agriculture should be accessible to anyone, not just those with generational land or family farms, and that bringing new and diverse perspectives into agriculture is as critical to our future as a shift in production practices.

For years we have supported the development of new agrarians through our apprenticeship program. But we feel that we can better serve our farm and beginning farmers by creating positions geared towards building long term careers in agriculture. These high growth positions are perfect for those who have done multiple years of apprenticing and are ready for more responsibility and a longer term commitment!

Our vision is to hire highly motivated individuals who will bring initiative and creative problem solving skills to three new flexible positions; Trainee Assistant Manager, Mechanic, and Value Added Specialist. Click the link below to read the full job descriptions for our new positions!

[We're Hiring!!](#)

PLANNING SEASON:PARTNER SPOTLIGHT



Biodynamic Association

Biodynamic Agriculture is a holistic approach to agriculture based on the teachings of philosopher and scientist Rudolf Steiner, who believed that agricultural practices must work in harmony with natural systems. The principles of biodynamics teach us that a holistic ecosystem includes diverse plant and animal species that nourish each other and the earth. Each farm is viewed as an individual organism and the goal is to develop that organism into the healthiest being possible. That health extends to plants, animals, microbes, and us! Creating an economy based on reciprocity and care is a large part of that endeavor. Anna serves on the Economic Alliance Advisory Board for the Biodynamic Demeter Alliance and attended their annual retreat in November.

Vilicus is striving for biodynamic certification. We do not yet meet the standards for use of biodynamic preparations and as of yet the market for biodynamic products in the US is very small and we have not yet found buyers who would like to work with us to transition. Biodynamic is the gold standard for ethical agricultural practices and Vilicus hopes to seek the Demeter certification soon! Click the link below to learn more about biodynamic agriculture!

[Biodynamic Association](#)

**Thank you so much for your continued support of the Vilicus Farms CSSA Program!
Please consider take the survey below to provide some feedback on this program**

Take our Survey!



Copyright (C) 2023 Vilicus Farms. All rights reserved.

Our mailing address is:

Want to change how you receive these emails?
You can [update your preferences](#) or [unsubscribe](#)