

Climate, food security motivate change

Island couple move to Cariboo to start farm

KATE AYERS

LONE BUTTE – A changing climate is one reason why a Vancouver Island couple moved to the Cariboo in 2021 to start a garlic farm.

Genevieve Jochimski and her husband Colin Failler had moved around several times on the Island, into smaller homes with bigger yards to expand their gardens. However, their most recent move to the Cariboo was the first time climate change factored into their decision.

“I never would have thought about those things 10 or 15 years ago, but it's like, okay, where are the floods? Where are the fires? Where is it too cold? Where's it too hot? Where are things going to grow?” Jochimski asks. “That, for us, is such a real-life thing now.”

The price and availability of land also contributed to their move to the Cariboo. Fortunately, the couple found a piece of property that is mostly protected from potential natural disasters.

“We have nice soil here. We're on a gentle slope. We're on a lake, so we have irrigation,” Jochimski says. “We have kind of set ourselves up for success here. ... We're in an area where we never see landslides. ... There were fires up here when we moved here ... but because there's so many lakes, it would have to jump multiple lakes.”

Jochimski and Failler have always been avid gardeners, hunters, fishers and foragers, but the couple wanted to scale up their food production capacity and began scouting property on the mainland.

One weekend, Jochimski was driving along Hwy 24, also referred to as the Fishing Highway, between 100 Mile House and Little Fort. She was intrigued by the highway's name since she and her husband love to fish but was also enamoured by the trees and landscapes.

“I just pulled over and phoned him and I was like, ‘I think this is us,’” Jochimski says. “There are over 120 lakes up here in this area ... and we were kind of drawn to it. And then that led us down the path of where we are.”

Starting from scratch

Jochimski and Failler started their business, Loon Legacy Farm, from scratch. The name serves as a tribute to the surrounding lakes, resident loon pairs and legacy they want to leave for their daughter.

The couple's first order of business was clearing just under two acres by hand, as they did not have a tractor yet. They modelled their farm's business plan after Norwegian Creek Farm in Midway.

Norwegian Creek owner Len Caron grows between 85 and 90 varieties of certified organic seed-quality garlic on about two acres each year. He had a garlic farm in the Kootenays and then moved back to the family farm in Midway about a decade ago. Garlic is a suitable crop for the dryland farming area Caron is in, which is the main reason he continued farming garlic after moving to the West Kootenays.

“We don't have a whole lot of water, but I do have enough that I can water an acre or two of garlic,” Caron says.

In 2022, Jochimski and Failler jumped into their first season as garlic farmers and recently wrapped up their second planting.



Garlic lovers (and growers) Genevieve Jochimski and Colin Failler moved from Vancouver Island to the Cariboo in search of a region that might be less vulnerable to the effects of climate change. SUBMITTED

Last year, they planted 8,000 bulbs in half an acre using four varieties including Susan Delafield, Chesnok Red, Russian Red, and a homegrown strain of Russian Red called Mystery Red. They transplanted the Mystery Red variety from their previous property on Mystery Beach in Fanny Bay.

The couple's love of garlic made it a natural choice for their farm.

“We love garlic. We put it in everything we make,” Jochimski says. “We just really like to know where our food comes from. And so that for us has been a big driving factor.”

In their gardens on Vancouver Island, they planted more and more garlic each year and learned that it's a relatively hardy and simple crop to grow. Their crop this year seemed to do well at

1,200 metres of elevation where Lone Butte received its first snow in October, shortly after the completion of planting. (Garlic is planted in the fall, overwinters, and then harvested in the summer.)

The couple focus on building soil organic matter through cover crops and tilling in crops they didn't get a chance to harvest. They also want to work with nature, not against it.

“The deer will be right in our garlic field, eating the clover and that's okay. They're not damaging the garlic and they won't eat it – that's the

other thing that's nice about garlic – nothing will eat it,” Jochimski says. “There are eagles here. There are ducks here. There are geese here. We really want to partner with the environment. ... We kind of want to come from a place of do no harm to what's already here and let nature guide us a little bit.”

Looking ahead, the couple are considering building a roadside stand and participating in the local farmers market to sell their produce alongside the handful of other garlic growers in the Cariboo.



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