Beginnings

New Leaf Farm has an all-pervading peaceful atmosphere that is only partly accounted for by its serene rural setting and inland maritime climate. Situated in the Androscoggin River valley, 25 miles northeast of Portland and 10 miles from the Atlantic Ocean, the orderly farmscape exemplifies years of farmer skill and know how. Dave and Christine Colson have managed the land organically for 20 years, and through considerable fine-tuning, have brought the farm into balanced fertility, sustainable productivity and economic profitability.

New Leaf Farm’s homestead, passive solar greenhouse, barns and plastic greenhouses.

New Leaf Farm is well known in Maine organic farming circles for farmer expertise combined with good equipment and meticulous record keeping. Soil-building practices are paramount on this farm and the Colsons are known for their extensive experience with cover cropping. The fields are regularly rotated out of crop production into regenerative cover crops for years at a time, resulting in high quality crops, maximized profitability per acre in cash crops, and diminished pest and disease pressure. These beneficial soil management practices are a primary contributor to the overall harmonious farm environment.

Dave discovered organic farming as a high school student at the Meeting School, an alternative Quaker school with a small farm in New Hampshire. He then pieced together his own education in a variety of settings over the next 10 years. He started out working on a conventional dairy farm in New York and taking general agriculture courses at Canton College. His fellow students were mostly children of conventional farmers, with only a tiny, embattled study group interested in organic. He moved from there to the Institute of Social Ecology at Goddard College in Plainfield, VT, where he studied biological agriculture under Charles Woodard. His philosophy was influenced by the thinking
of Murray Bookchin, the pioneer who brought ecology into the progressive libertarian and populist movements.

In search of more hands-on experience, Dave moved west. He did an apprenticeship with a diversified small farm in Washington, then an internship in bio-intensive agriculture at the Farallones Institute in California, influenced by Alan Chadwick. After getting his degree in biological agriculture from Antioch University in 1979, he worked on another organic farm in California and then started his own gardening and dried flower business in Oregon.

He began looking for a farm to buy, but the price of land was too high in Oregon. His sister, an architect in Maine, suggested that land was cheaper there, so he visited and immediately started looking for a farm. First, he identified the soil types he wanted. Then, he drew a circle an hour’s drive around Portland, where he planned to market, and looked for suitable soils within that circle. Within a few months, he found New Leaf Farm. His parents purchased the farm, and have gradually transferred ownership to Dave and Chris.

Chris Colson grew up on a small farm in southern New Jersey, helping her family with gardening and preserving the harvest. She has a bachelor’s degree in Environmental Education from Huxley College of the Environment (Western Washington University) and a certificate to teach elementary school. She has worked in carpentry, home remodeling and construction, as well as having taught in both public and Waldorf schools. She and Dave (and sometimes their son Jeremy, too) also play in a contradance band.

In addition to these skills, she brings to the farm an appreciation of the role of food as medicine, as what we eat to stay healthy while maintaining the health of the earth. She belongs to the Weston A. Price Foundation, an organization that promotes eating nutrient-dense whole foods and traditional methods of food preparation as a basis for human health.

The Colsons’ primary commitment in farming is to health – their own health, the health of the workers, livestock, land, and community. They also evaluate their success by looking at progress toward their goals and toward meeting their challenges, maintaining and improving the infrastructure of the farm, and economic viability of the farm in providing an income for two families, their own and that of their daughter, Robin and her husband, Steve Sinisi. Steve has become a partner in the farm. Dave and Chris feel very fortunate to be able to keep their family so close.

They feel they have a good handle on the usual farming challenges of pest management and finding labor. They are more concerned about the challenge of larger industrial farms from outside the region competing for their organic markets and large national chain stores eliminating local natural food stores. What sustains them is their relationship to their customers and their community – people who want
to have a connection to the farm and who are willing to pay an appropriate price for the food to support that connection.

**Mission Statement**

*New Leaf Farm was established in 1982 with the purpose of growing and marketing vegetables, herbs, and fruit organically, while developing and teaching a sustainable agricultural system.*