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## Family juggles farm, jobs

[Email To A Friend](#)[Printer Friendly](#)[Comments](#)By Ashley Trosper  
August 6, 2008*Photo By State Journal/Hilly Schiffer*

Jerron Russell, 10, juggles tomatoes while taking a break from picking. He sometimes juggles at the Farmers Market.

*Photo By State Journal/Hilly Schiffer*

Diane Russell picks tomatoes on her 57-acre farm in Shelby County while her sons Ethan, 12, and Jerron, 10, load the tomatoes onto the tractor. Along with tomatoes, the Russell family grows sustainable produce including spinach, onions, beans, radishes, green peppers and turnips to sell at the Franklin County Farmers Market.

Farming is more than planting seeds in the dirt for the Russell family.

It's a business, math and psychology lesson for sons Ethan, 12, and Jerron, 10.

Diane Russell and her husband, Elie, who have been married 22 years, have 57 acres in Shelby County, where they grow sustainable produce and raise about 25 goats.

It's important for their sons to get the farming experience, according to Diane Russell - herself a product of a dairy farm.

"It gives them the opportunity to have that business experience," Diane Russell said. "They learn that the more they work, the more they earn."

The Franklin County Farmers Market is also a learning ground for Ethan and Jerron because they count money and learn to talk with customers, Diane Russell says.

The boys say they're looking into planting blackberries and peaches for next year.

"They like doing it," their mom said. "It gives them a sense of independence. They are like business partners and I think it brings them closer together."

It also gives Jerron the opportunity to practice his juggling, she said.

"My aunt taught me how to juggle," Jerron said. "I practice a lot."

His mom says Jerron likes providing entertainment for the Farmers Market customers and it definitely gets their attention.

Along with providing a one-of-a-kind learning experience, Diane Russell says the opportunity to grow and sell produce that is not sprayed with pesticides, herbicides or fungicides is another reason to farm.

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"It has its advantages and disadvantages," she said. "It cuts down on the growing season, but the food tastes so much better. It's good for the environment and it's good for your health because you're not getting additional chemicals in the food."

"I don't like to spray the plants," Elie Russell added.

Though the Russells are regulars at the Farmers Market, selling four varieties of tomatoes including German Pink, squash and an assortment of other produce, they are not full-time farmers.

"This year we've had more customers than in the past," Elie Russell said. "People don't realize how much work we put into it."

Elie Russell, who is a full-time electrical engineer for the state, and Diane Russell, who teaches English at Indiana University Southeast, decided to begin farming about seven years ago when they moved to Shelby County.

"It was just natural," Diane Russell said.

They pick their produce the evening before the Market.

"The boys help out a lot," Diane Russell said.

The farm is also home to two beehives, Elie Russell says.

"I always wanted to have bees," Elie Russell said of the hives he has raised for three years. "We have pure honey plus they help pollinate the plants."

Throughout the growing season, the Russell's product menu includes spinach, onions, beats, radishes, green peppers and turnips. There's also potatoes and corn, which the Russells grow for themselves.

Tomatoes are one of their biggest sellers, Elie Russell says. As the growing season winds down, they'll only have them through the middle of August.

And though it can be difficult to fight weeds and other deterrents, Diane Russell says it doesn't have as much impact as a person might think.

"You lose a lot because you have to share it with the environment, but the ground is pretty rich," she said.

The reward, at least for Diane Russell, is being able to sell their produce to individuals with cancer or others who can only eat food that is chemical free.

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