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## Truffle growers join AMI.

Mushroom News • Dec, 2008 • produce marketing

In 2005 several truffle growers, realizing that the exchange of ideas would be beneficial for the whole U.S. truffle industry, organized into the North American Truffle Growers Association (NATGA). Now in its fourth year, NATGA has about 30 member farms, and the association has recently joined the AMI. There are more than 100 truffle orchards planted in the country, ranging in size from 25 acres with more than 12,000 inoculated truffle trees to smaller half-acre orchards.

Garland Gourmet Mushrooms and Truffles in Hillsborough, NC has supplied the majority of these trees, and several of the orchards are already in commercial production. The first ever North American Truffle Festival will take place at Biltmore Estate in Asheville, NC, March 5-8, 2009. For more information go to [www.trufflegrowers.com](http://www.trufflegrowers.com)

We are highlighting four NATGA member farms to give you additional insight into some of the existing truffieres.

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### GARLAND TRUFFLES

[www.garlandtruffles.com](http://www.garlandtruffles.com)

This company was the first to plant the truffle fungus *Tuber melanosporum* infected trees in the United States in 1979. After trial and error, the first commercial crop was successfully produced in 1992. As a result of publicity and subsequent demand for inoculated trees, Garland established a nursery selling the young seedlings in 1998 and supplying trees has become the primary business for the company. Current production is about 30,000 inoculated plants a year, with plans to grow 30 to 40 percent more trees per year as the demand increase.

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The demand for truffles has grown since the first crop in 1992. At that time, most people thought truffles were primarily a chocolate confection. Now, people know that the chocolates are named after the fungus because of the shape.

The production of truffles is very different from other mushroom varieties. Truffles grow in a mutually beneficial relationship on the roots of filbert and certain oak tree species. Inoculated trees are planted in very organized patterns in truffieres, truffle orchards. Orchards can start producing truffles after four to five years from planting. At full production, an acre can yield about 75 pounds of truffles per year. At \$500-\$800 a pound, potential returns range from \$35,000 to \$50,000 per acre a year, making it the most lucrative farm crop in the world.

### KEEP YOUR FORK FARM

Rick & Jane Morgan Smith

Stokes County, NC

[www.keepyourforkfarm.com](http://www.keepyourforkfarm.com) 336/631-8080

The original research into planting a truffiere came after the owners' interest in growing shiitake. After five years of research Keep Your Fork Farm has prospered through drought and other challenges to become a source of information for active and potential growers from around the country, offering tours and tastings by appointment. The farm is small with 650 trees and came into production in 2006. The last trees were planted in 2006, inoculated with their own strain of the *tuber melanosporum*, named "Friday".

According to Jane Morgan Smith, who serves as president of NATGA, one of the most fun and rewarding aspects of the truffle trade is working with a dog to find the delicacy. She trained their Border collie, Friday, to sniff out the mature truffles. He is a natural worker and looks forward to being rewarded at the end of the hunt with extra playtime. Next season, Dazy, a recently adopted rescue, who is a Boston Terrier/Jack Russell mix, will join them in the hunt.

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The farm was featured on the Martha Stewart Living Show in February 2007. Stewart visited the farm, harvested the first truffles ever produced in Stokes County, and returned to New York with her harvest.

#### PIEDMONT VALLEY TRUFFLES

Aron J. Ponticelli

[www.nctruffles.com](http://www.nctruffles.com) 800/657-4649

Piedmont Valley Truffles was formed in 2002 to propagate truffle development in the United States and to educate consumers, chefs and growers. The company was co-founded by Jack & Aron J. Ponticelli, father and son, along with partner Franklin Garland. It is one of the leading growers and distributors of Black Truffles in the Western Hemisphere, with 110 acres of farmland in the foothills of North Carolina's Piedmont region.

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Piedmont Valley Truffles is leveraging their expertise, and offering individuals consulting services and turnkey packages to help growers establish a new orchard or expand their existing truffiere. Partners Jack and Aron J. Ponticelli were recently featured on ABC's 20/20 news program representing America's modern farmers who rely on traditional tools such as The Old Farmer's Almanac for weather forecasting along with the use of seven trained dogs for seasonal harvesting.

#### ACRES OF TRUFFLES

Craig Magill & Krista Hansen

Truffiere owners Craig Magill and Krista Hansen say their initial attraction to the world of cultivated truffles was the image in an agricultural publication of a man and his dog working together in a field. The couple was deeply entrenched in a business that relied on many employees and envied Franklin Garland, who was shown in that photograph with his truffle hunting Labrador "Chewy." "We could visualize no business better than one staffed by man's best friend," remembers Craig.

Hansen and Magill chose trees inoculated with French Black Perigord-known as the Black Diamond Truffle-from Garland Truffles. In 2005 the first of more than 4,000 inoculated filbert and oak trees were planted in the sandy loam of their farm in the coastal plain of North Carolina. Frequent irrigation throughout the severe drought of 2007 helped the trees thrive.

The aspect of training and using dogs as a harvesting partner excites Krista almost as much as preparing his first homegrown truffle meal excites Craig. The couple has formed a nonprofit to work with area animal shelters and feel they will have a great pool of trainable dogs. Connor and Cole are two adult German Shepherds, each rescued from different animal shelters. Both have shown an affinity for the work. Krista comments, "With each dog we train we will have saved a life."

The name of their truffle enterprise comes from a well-known motivational speech "Acres of Diamonds," the moral of which suggests that each of us is, at this moment, standing in the middle of his or her own acres of diamonds. In other words, "dig in your own backyard," especially when the diamonds happen to be black diamond truffles.

"As the truffle industry grows in North America the truffle growers look forward to contributing to the agricultural and culinary communities supporting local foods as we learn more about our farms and our crop," said Smith, "Every farm is different. We are very excited about our future as we expand on the pioneering endeavor in which we have all engaged. The sharing of information along with our amazingly delicious harvests brings us all considerable satisfaction," she said. Garland has often said, "We hope to be the next Napa Valley of the U.S., but with truffles."

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