

The Seed of Hope Reseeds Itself

PROFILE: Katherine Sims

– Planting Seeds of Change

At first blush, Katherine Sims looks like just another local – cropped dark-brown hair that frames a radiant smile anyone would find hard to ignore. Her combination of youthful exuberance, raw intelligence and heartfelt excitement about what she's doing makes her the perfect choice to facilitate the "Planting Seeds of Change" after-school program at five local elementary schools. Students build, plant and maintain a garden as part of a program that includes plenty of hands-on nutrition and agriculture activities. "The real challenge," she said, "is developing long-term *sustainable* gardens."

Katherine isn't exactly your typical 'garden lady'. She sports a history degree with a concentration in sustainable architecture, and at twenty-six years old, she's lived more than most people twice her age. In Connecticut, she was involved in developing a sustainable food project to help students learn to grow food in an urban environment and she wanted to learn more.

Katherine took a semester off from school and started looking for internship opportunities. "I loved being outside, being right where my food came from," she explained. Unfortunately, most of the working farms she spoke to didn't need her help – until she called Butterworks. Jack and Anne Lazor simply asked: "When can you come?"

And come she did, supplementing an Ivy League education with a graduate degree from the Butterworks Farm school of agrarian life. "Sure, you can read about it, but to see someone actually doing it, actually living it – to see the lifestyle, it made it all seem achievable to me." In the thrall of life on the agrarian edge, Katherine started casting about for ways to live it herself. "How can you not care about good food?" she asks.

She describes her internship as being filled with long days peppered with one discovery after another. But the nights were the highlight of her intern-

ship. "Jack and Anne were always open for late-night discussions about their lifestyle and the world at large." — Discussions that continue today, sometimes hilarious and sometimes heated, but always tempered by Anne's gentle smile and persistent questions. "They mentor me in different ways," she explained, "but really it was all of a piece. Jack's the dreamer, the visionary, the guy who gets as excited as I do about an idea. Anne is the pragmatist who sees through the flash of an idea to the day-to-day work necessary to make it a reality."

Katherine took all these lessons to heart. She'd already met Josh, the local beekeeper, who would later become her husband. Instead of moving back to New Haven, Connecticut, Katherine put down roots in Westfield, Vermont. "Anne and Jack were the reason I came to Vermont," she explains, "and Josh is the person that kept me here. What could be more natural than to have Anne officiate at our wedding?" Katherine works to fill the stomachs of school children by connecting school cafeterias directly with local farmers. Meanwhile, she and Josh have settled not far from Butterworks with their livestock, a couple of solar panels, Josh's bees, and Katherine's mission.

"The kids help me stay inspired about growing food — they are so excited by what they've planted," she exclaims. She, in turn, is excited to provide them with hands-on experiences in her outdoor classroom. "What better place to teach math, science and art?" she asks. Meanwhile, area schools are not only receptive – they are downright enthusiastic. There's a waiting list for the Planting Seeds of Change program and Katherine is hard at work on a new non-profit organization to expand the connection between kids and their food. "My dream is that people who go through these kinds of programs will grow up to garden themselves, or simply become better-informed consumers of the food they eat. As Michael Pollan said, eating IS an agricultural activity!"