

GROWING GREEN

Story and photos by Sara Graca

58-year-old Bill Pennell is the owner of Rootstown Organic Farm in Rootstown. He has been growing organic food since about 1980. Pennell said he originally started growing organic food because he wanted to make sure the food he was growing was healthy for him and his friends. "I didn't want to make my friends sick," he said.

As an organic farmer, Pennell has to follow specific regulations. He cannot use any type of herbicide or petroleum-based products on his crops. Pennell said he sprays them with a mixture of distilled water and seaweed and uses a manure-based fertilizer.



Rootstown Organic Farm owner Bill Pennell looks over his organic plants. "With seaweed, you get all the nutrients you need to grow crops," he said. "It's full of essential minerals that wash down from the mountains' snow caps into the ocean."



Swiss chard is one of the many crops Pennell provides to local consumers. Pennell easily recalls the health benefits of each plant and has several recipe suggestions for his customers at the market.



Bill earns his income in the winter by growing crops in a hoop house that he built himself. The plastic between the metal bars fills with blowing air from an inserted tube and acts as insulation to keep out the cold winter air.



Having a small organic farm means that all of Pennell's harvesting and processing is done by hand and not by any machines, which is unlike any farm most people have seen.



A large part of organic growing is making your own compost. Bill had a special device built by his friend to turn the compost and spray it with water and other natural additives to enrich the soil. The result will be what Bill calls "black gold" -- a good broke down compost with unbounded nitrates.



Pennell visits the Shaker Square Market every Saturday morning to sell his produce. Many consumers have chosen to start buying at local markets due to the environmental concerns of overusing fossil fuels to transport produce.