

Amy Hepworth, Gerry Greco, and Gail Hepworth

Hepworth Farm, Milton

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(From left) Amy Hepworth, Gerry Greco, and Gail Hepworth are three visionary farmers helping plow the path to sustainability; (Opposite)

Amy Hepworth, one of the region's largest-scale and most innovative organic farmers over the last four decades, wants us to understand that "organic is just a box." While everything she and partners Gail (Amy's sister) and Gerry do on their 500-acre Orange County farm is certified organic, she emphasizes how "every movement has a beginning and an end." This individualism and breadth of agricultural knowledge make her a candidate to lead farmers into new ground.

Originally founded in 1818, the family farm was acquired by Hepworth after she graduated from Cornell in 1982. Since then, she has held knowledge acquisition and innovation as top priorities, leading the estate through a transition that made a big splash in the family. As she puts it, "I lost orchards to understand how to control voles (a common pest similar to a mouse) without broadcasting corn."



Her goal is the same today: to protect our soil (which, she tells, is rapidly eroding across the globe) and our food supply. To do that, Hepworth stresses a respect for all farmers, both organic and conventional, and funding for applied research that looks at both organic and synthetic solutions.

Hepworth can be seen driving around the property, inspecting peppers upon which scientists from Hudson Valley Laboratories have placed insect eggs. It's part of a strategy to organically eradicate stinkbugs by introducing Samurai wasps, which, in theory, will destroy stinkbug eggs around the farm. She's hopeful, but the inability to seek solutions beyond the organic perspective concerns her for what she refers to as "food security 2050." She explains, "ecological practices are paramount, but we have to balance it with economics and social justice. We're not going to kill enough stinkbugs to naturally produce the one thing that might succeed as an insect regulator. It's going to have to get synthesized. And if it's economically feasible and doesn't cause any harm to the environment, why not consider it?"



Greenhouse seedlings require meticulous attention from staff.

**"I am 100 percent behind organic, but we have to start looking beyond that."
- Amy Hepworth**

Hepworth's ability to think outside the box grants her respect from fellow farmers, including workers on the property (they hold a 100 percent retention rate). She has a simple principle: "time plus attention equals love." Each morning, Greco leads the entire team in a group exercise. The sisters and Greco get together with workers, visit them in their homes, and they even built them a soccer field on-site.

For all of these achievements, Hepworth remains humble, stressing that the real innovators are the other farms who have been able to survive the struggles each era has presented. "The thing that we all have in common is the soil, and," she tells, "conventional farmers are some of the most eager to find solutions."

