



Daron Joffe

BY HOPE S. PHILBRICK

Dreaming up a wild idea over lunch isn't all that uncommon. But when Daron Joffe pondered his sandwich one afternoon during his freshman year at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, his curiosity ultimately illuminated his career path. "I was literally wondering about its origins," he recalls. "I never grew anything I ate. I didn't know anybody who grew anything I ate. I thought, 'I'd like to know how to grow a sandwich from scratch.' I was really just curious about where my food comes from."

COMMUNITY

After swallowing that fateful sandwich in 1995, Joffe's appetite to learn about farming grew. He queried professors, interviewed local farmers, attended a seminar and eventually landed an eight-month organic farming apprenticeship at the Prairie Dock Farm in Watertown, Wis. Beyond the college credits he earned while working on the farm, Joffe gained self-awareness. "I fell in love with the work, the mission of organic farming, the importance of biodynamic," he says. "Farming had been overlooked in my generation as a valuable career path and a noble job. For me, it fulfilled all my physical, social and entrepreneurial spirits."

Having found his true passion, Joffe worked at farms in Santa Cruz, Calif., and Blairsville, Ga., and then purchased the 175-acre Earthsong Community Farm in

to help launch an organic farm at a youth correctional facility called Log Cabin Ranch in La Honda. Though he returned home to attend the University of Georgia, and later helped develop the farm at Serenbe, Joffe's commitment to connecting communities and farming has never faded. Throughout his career he's worked with multiple organizations including schools, prisons, summer camps, retreat centers, nonprofits and sustainable food organizations, and currently serves on Georgia Organics' executive committee.

A year ago he relaunched the Farmer D brand as a retail store near his family's eco-friendly carwash on Briarcliff Road. "The organic garden center is in response to growing interest in urban gardening," Joffe says. "We provide very hard-to-find products, including our own signature compost and planting mix and raised beds." Farmer D Organics is envisioned as a one-stop shop for organics where shoppers will find knowledgeable staff and quality products.

"It all starts with dirt," Joffe says. "My goal is to grow the most nutritious food possible, and that's all rooted in soil. Enlivening the soil closes the loop of sustainability." Talk about going full circle: Farmer D compost and planting mix is enriched by food residuals supplied by Whole Foods Market—in other words, food that was grown but not consumed is ultimately transformed back into soil to grow more food. Farmer D currently sources food residuals from 14 Whole Foods stores in the Southeast, thus keeping about 40,000

HOW DOES YOUR GARDEN GROW?

Daron Joffe of Farmer D shares how he launched his earth-friendly career from the ground up



Farmer D Organics sells custom gardening beds, chickens and supplies for the urban gardener.

Kickapoo Valley, Wis. "When I built my first biodynamic compost pile, I became enthralled with the spiritual approach to farming, the impact on the earth as a living organism," he says. "Having grown up in the suburbs of Atlanta, I'd never been to a farm or had a garden. To be out there harvesting bushels of organic broccoli and arugula, eating fresh off the farm, keeping free-range chickens and pigs, using pigs to turn the compost pile, it felt very progressive." In 1998, Joffe won the Rookie Biodynamic Farmer of the Year Award from the American Biodynamic Association. He also launched the Farmer D brand through a frozen organic pizza business and falafel cart in downtown Madison, which helped fund the farm through the winter and establish a connection with the community.

As his network within the farming community grew, Joffe was lured to California

pounds a week out of landfills and instead transforming it into high-quality compost. Farmer D compost is certified biodynamic and sold to farmers and gardeners at the Farmer D shops, Whole Foods, Pike Nurseries and a number of other garden centers. Though his products are currently sold only in the Southeast, Farmer D hopes to eventually expand into other regions. "It's empowering and inspiring to help people eat local organic and ultimately to grow their own food," he says.

Joffe laughs at the suggestion that he's a dirt farmer, and then says, "You could say that for sure. Or that I'm an 'entremeneur.'" **SP**

Farmer D Organics is located at 2154 Briarcliff Road NE in Atlanta and 4050 Holcomb Bridge Road in Norcross. For more information call 404-325-0128, 770-734-0009, visit www.farmerd.com, or watch "Farmer D in the Field" on www.mnn.com.