

# Fresh from the FARM

*Decker's community-supported agriculture farm thrives in Hadley*

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Wade Decker holds some tomato plants that have been growing inside the produce washing room he constructed on the side of his pole barn. With Plexiglas windows, the room can double as a greenhouse for starting plants. Below, the spring flock of Freedom Ranger chicks are beginning to feather out. The birds will provide meat for Decker's community-supported agriculture customers.

**HADLEY TWP.** — Two and a half years ago, Wade Decker took a leap of faith, leaving a career in finance to pursue a small-scale organic farming endeavor at the Pratt Road home he and his wife, Cindy, had purchased the year before.

It was frightening and it was risky to leave the job he'd held for more than a decade, especially with three children, but with a dream, a plan, and a whole lot of hope, the Deckers pressed forth, erecting two hoop houses and tilling up several of their 10 acres of land. He had grown up surrounded by farmers in Sanilac County, and she is a master gardener, so the two combined their knowledge and started collecting their first community supported agriculture (CSA)

customers — the guinea pigs for their first year.

The 2014 growing season can be counted as a success, and the shareholders enjoyed weekly boxes of lettuce, spinach, kale and other greens, herbs, potatoes, carrots, green beans, squash, sweet corn, cabbage, broccoli, peppers, zucchini, cucumbers, beets, onions, radishes, tomatoes, apples, applesauce and organic fed, pasture-raised meat

chickens. Whatever was in season and growing successfully was passed on to the customers, and Decker said they actually forgot to count a share for themselves, so they missed out on some of their own produce.

Last year, the second season, the Deckers' shares doubled from 25 to 50, and they took what they learned the previous season and put it into play to ensure another successful season. They also learned the differences the weather can make in which crops do well, and the production timeline. For example, 2015 didn't bring forth as strong of an apple crop, so the shareholders had apples, but there wasn't enough to make applesauce.



Wade is tending about 30 apple, cherry, pear and peach trees on his property, but they're still too young to produce, so he leases some trees at the old Countyline Orchard not far from the farm.



Wade Decker checks the buds that are coming out on a gala apple tree he has planted on his Hadley Township property. He's anxiously waiting for his fruit trees to come into bearing.

As they head into their third season, Wade has planted more berries, built a washing room onto the pole barn (which has Plexiglas windows and can double as a greenhouse for starting seeds), is looking for a commercial cooler, added another chicken coop, and more.

In his off time over the winter, Wade took on some consulting work in finance to make ends meet and keep him busy, but he said he's been itching to get back out in the fields.

This week, he's got leeks and small tomato plants enjoying the sunshine in the washroom, while the strawberries — and dandelions — are blossoming in the berry hoop house. In the other hoop house, some plants have gone in with a variety of organic-approved weed control barriers placed around them. Wade is testing several different styles out to see which works best to control the weeds, which blow freely across his land, seeding themselves anywhere and everywhere.

In the two chicken coops, Freedom Ranger chicks are starting to feather out. They'll provide fresh meat twice during the season for Decker Farm and Orchard customers. In the field, the first spears of long-awaited asparagus are appearing, and they'll make up a small but welcome early distribution to shareholders.

In all, Wade said, the farming project has been a success, and he said he'll keep doing it for the foreseeable future. He's hoping to connect with some local restaurants to provide produce for their customers this season as well.

"It's been fantastic," he said. "Some things have gone exactly like I thought they would, and other things haven't, both good and bad."

"You have this Utopian vision that your family and you will be out in the fields, singing songs," he added.

The reality is that it's a lot more work than that, but it's satisfying and rewarding work, and they all do it together. Wade said he loves to get his hands dirty, doing something he enjoys, and he gets to produce something that others enjoy as well.

"Overall, I couldn't be happier," he said.

For more information about the farm or obtaining CSA shares, visit [www.deckerfarmandorchard.com](http://www.deckerfarmandorchard.com).