

VALLEY LIFE



COURTESY OF DALE SHARKEY

Cosmic Apple Gardens marks 30 years of shared smiles

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Contributor

Cosmic Apple Gardens, one of Teton Valley’s thriving local farms, reached its 30th anniversary this year. When asked how 30 years feels, Dale Sharkey, wife and co-partner to Jed, said, “It makes me feel almost like a grown-up — that’s what we’ve been saying.”

“It feels good, you know. We did it,” Dale said. “We have been growing food in the Tetons for 30 years. It’s kind of a big deal; not just for us, but for the community.”

Three decades have brought

much change to Teton Valley; the population has boomed, and the food scene has become more diverse and refined. Cosmic Apple has blossomed right alongside.

On 50 acres of farmland in Victor, they raise certified organic and biodynamic vegetables like arugula, tomatoes, summer squash, radishes, bok choy, sugar snap peas and thyme, as well as cows, pigs and chickens. Cosmic Apple attends three farmers markets a week (two in Jackson and one in Driggs) and runs two CSA deliveries. Their CSA program feeds 200 families.

“What hasn’t changed is our commitment to taking care of the soil and growing real food for people in the Tetons,” Dale said. “It’s always all organic. We’ve never compromised on that.”

For Cosmic Apple, Teton Valley’s growth has been a gift. Every year, Dale and Jed have gladly watched the farmers markets swell with new vendors.

“There’s a lot more small farmers doing it now, which is awesome,” Dale said. “We like to say that until the Sysco trucks stop coming to the valley, there’s room for more.”

Like most ideas, Cosmic Apple started as a seedling — a basil seedling, to be precise.

In the late 1990s, Jed was working at Painted Apple Ranch making pizza. Their basil was supplied through Sysco, and of such poor quality that Jed thought: “I could grow better basil on my living room window.” So, building a little greenhouse off a house on 5th Street, he did.

His basil was used in the pizza and sold to local restaurants. The following year, Jed began leasing land at Painted Apple Ranch to expand production and grow additional

produce. This was then sold at a roadside stand in Victor and at the first farmers market in Wyoming, at the Hardingman Barn in Wilson.

“We actually have the banner from that, which is kind of funny, because Jackson Market claims they were the first one. We’re like, ‘Well, we have a banner,’” Dale said with a laugh.

Demand kept growing, so Jed kept going. The third year, in 2001, eight loyal market customers approached him and asked him to start a CSA for the valley.

More **GARDENS** | B6



COSMIC APPLE GARDENS WEBSITE

Dale explains this photo on their website: I love this photo because it really captured the moment. Our children were tired and wanted to go home. It was late in the day and the season. We were headed to our car when I saw the photographer pull in. I completely forgot her making an appointment with us. Jed was about to head off to get some much needed tractor work done. I talked (pleaded with) the kids to be part of the shoot. Our oldest son, Dagan, was curious but doubtful. Our middle child, Axel, was giving the camera his ninja staredown looking for the truth. Roxanne our daughter looked to her brothers to see what mom was talking about.

Gardens/

from B1

A generous community member purchased 30 acres of land at Painted Apple Ranch for Jed to begin. In 2002, Dale joined to grow flowers and help expand the market. Six years later, Jed and Dale were married, committed to each other and a shared belief in growing organic food. Two decades later, with three children in tow, Dale and Jed have been running Cosmic Apple Gardens together, their generous hands creating a valley-wide impact.

Their story has not been without its challenges.

The growing season here is short, blitzing through from just June to August. The soil is rocky and root-bound, and the weather is intense. Thunderstorms, hail and high winds threaten budding sprouts, and frost can appear as late as June and as early as September — the average frost-free window is just 115 days.

“Something that we keep in our back pocket is that at any point in the year, the garden could freeze. The season is so short it would be awesome if we could have another September. We have friends in warmer climates and they get an extra month of getting vegetables off their plants, and we just watch them freeze,” Dale said. “If we could have another month of summer squash and salad mix, it would be way more financially viable. But that’s just not what this climate does.”

Yet, they have been as tenacious as the sagebrush. In Dale’s words, “There’s pros and cons to every single climate.”



COURTESY OF DALE SHARKEY

According to Dale, they sold their first produce at the first farmers market in Wyoming, at the Hardman Barn in Wilson.

“[The] food is grown from the sunshine here, it’s grown from the soil at the farm, it’s grown from the irrigation [melting] off the pass; the food is really of this place. And when people eat the food from the farm, it connects them more to this place, and it makes them of this place.”

Dale Sharkey

“It is so dry and arid here that mold is never an issue. Our friends in Oregon are fighting mold all the time,” Dale said.

And like most who live in and visit this valley, the long, snowy winter is a perk.

“We know people that farm in milder climates and they’re growing vegetables all winter. We don’t

have to do that,” Dale said.

The best part of their story, though, is the people. This past August, Dale and Jed hosted a 30th anniversary party at their farm. For the event, Dale put together a slideshow. What stood out to her was “the amount of smiling faces in all the photos.”

Each summer, Dale and Jed hire about 25



COURTESY OF DALE SHARKEY

Dale and Jed on their wedding day on the farm.

volunteers, both returners and people new to the valley. Over the last 30 years, Dale estimates they have hosted more than 1,000 people.

“The community is amazing. In growing veggies, we’ve watched parents get produce from us before they had kids, and then they had babies, and then this year one of those babies came back as an adult and is volunteering at the farm,” Dale said. “Just watching families grow, morph and change, and the community support — the people that show up at the market every week, and have the CSA, and just the amount of people that have spent time volunteering at the farm.”

Dale said they are excited about their new product, Cosmic Tallow Balm, made from organic

tallow and organic essential oils. Their balm delivers hydrating moisture and vitamins and has anti-inflammatory properties, and is made year-round and shipped beyond the valley.

They are also looking forward to, like every business owner in Teton Valley, having a stable crew for Jed and her to “ease off a bit.” But overall, Dale said, “We just want to keep growing fresh food for the people of the Tetons.”

As this summer wraps up at Cosmic Apple Gardens, Dale shared a reflection she has been gathering across her 30 years.

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Timberwolves Scoreboard

CROSS COUNTRY Next Up Aug. 27: More Cowbell Invitational, Afton, WY, TBD	Sep. 3: vs Firth @ THS, 4pm
FOOTBALL Next Up Aug. 28: @ Jackson Hole, 5pm	GIRLS SOCCER Aug. 22: vs Marsh Valley @ THS: L 3-5 Next Up Aug. 29: @ Wood River, 2pm Sept. 3: vs Firth @ THS, 4pm
BOYS SOCCER Aug. 22: vs Marsh Valley @ THS: W 5-0 Next Up Aug. 26: @ American Falls, 4pm	VOLLEYBALL Aug. 26: vs Ririe @ THS, 4:30pm Aug. 27: @ North Fremont, 4:30pm Sept. 2: @ Ririe, 5pm

The Teton Jewel Ranch

\$27,000,000

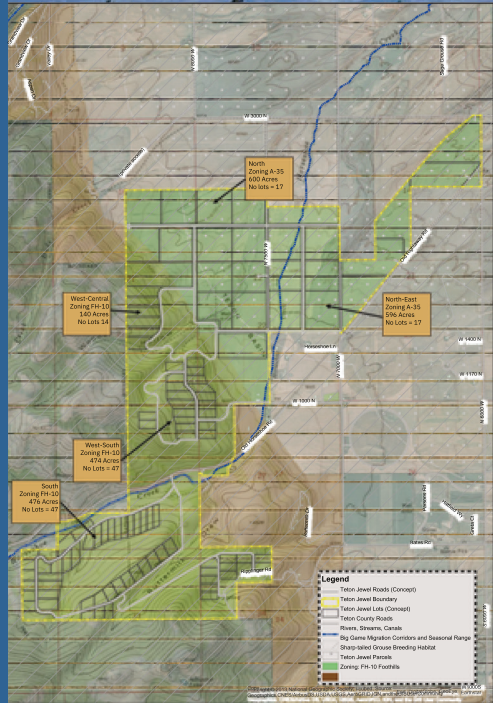
Where timeless beauty meets boundless possibilities.

Teton Jewel is a 2,553-acre ranch located in Teton County, Idaho. As the name aptly captures, this property is truly a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

The ranch was created in the 1980s through deliberate land acquisition with an eye to beauty, utility, and conservation.

Despite its permissible zoning, the ranch has seen only light use and virtually no development, leaving it a rare haven of the old west. The ranch has all three of the primary value-determining attributes for a recreational ranch: live water, contiguity with the National Forest, and extraordinary elevated views of the Teton Range.

Owner’s Retreat | Horse Barn & Hay Shed Development Opportunity



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