

Jackie King
PopAcres Ranch and Farm

In 2000, Jackie King was living in an apartment in Richardson, Texas and attending seminars sponsored by the Texas Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (TOFGA). While she had envisioned growing her own organic garden, Jackie's life took a decisive direction when she met Donald King at work and found they shared several mutual interests. Both had backgrounds in accounting, but more importantly, they also shared the same passion for sustainable, organic farming and ranching.

The couple married in 2001 and purchased 80 acres in Pursley, Texas and another 43 acres in 2004 that included a house where they now live and operate P.O.P. Acres Ranch and Farm. Their home-based business raises free-ranging grass fed cattle and 80 acres are certified organic by the Texas Department of Agriculture. Using no grain or hormones, the Kings practice "salad bar grazing" through a combination of native and seeded grasses. The diet for their cattle is supplemented with organic feed and minerals that Jackie also sells to area farms and ranches to generate additional income.

The Kings steer clear of chemical fertilizers to ensure their status as a natural beef producer and preserve the land's organic certification. They use natural solutions that include compost tea, molasses and fish emulsion along with humates to condition the soil. While the land is certified, labeling the beef organic would require a certified organic processing plant, which is not available in the region. Instead, the beef is processed, frozen and packaged at USDA approved facilities in North Texas.

It took several years of focused effort to develop the land and raise cattle that met USDA standards, but by 2006 Jackie knew she would need a solid marketing strategy to sell their beef at a fair, profitable price. As she worked on her marketing plan, Jackie recognized that all natural and organic products from local producers needed greater visibility in the marketplace. She looked at the farmers' markets in larger metro areas such as Austin and saw the assortment available direct from producer to consumer at profitable prices. Jackie knew that by pooling their produce at local markets, area local producers could give consumers more flavorful choices while at the same time creating greater awareness for the superior nutritional value of organic and natural products. After visiting the Dallas Farmers Market and finding a limited assortment of organic produce and none that was labeled as certified organic, she saw an opportunity to reach a very large underserved market that was willing to pay top prices.

In 2007, she pioneered the Farmer-Rancher Network, an alliance of local organic producers in Navarro and surrounding counties. If members have produce to sell but can only make it to one market, another member can sell it at another market for them. By pooling their produce through other members, local producers extend their reach to other markets and bring those dollars home to circulate in the local community, a practice that Jackie has now identified as Economic Gardening after attending a seminar sponsored by the Navarro College Small Business Development Center. As Jackie sees it, the more Farmers Markets where local producers can profitably sell their produce while providing consumers with freshly harvested produce will create a win-win for everyone.