

Sofia Colin

“I remember the huge watermelons my dad had growing by the river.”

Sofia has kept the memory of her father’s land alive. As a child in Michoacán, she liked to walk along the river where her father grew watermelons, bananas, coffee—“everything you can think of”. She has grown things ever since, even when she had no land to grow on. During her years as a Hartnell student and pre-k and kindergarten teacher, for instance, she contented herself with little containers of garlic or cilantro or whatever she could make thrive indoors.

Now Sofia has her own land, and like her dad she grows just about everything you can think of—several types of summer squash, at least three varieties of pepper, heirloom tomatoes, tomatillos, beans, carrots, cilantro, kale... the list goes on and on. Sofia graduated from ALBA’s Farmer Education Program (PEPA) in 2010, and immediately began experimenting with variety. She planted 20 different products in her second year at ALBA, and liked it so much that she rented 10 additional acres between Soledad and Greenfield.

It was Sofia’s older children that got her into organic produce (they’re vegetarians). Although she was initially put off by the price, the health and environmental benefits were clear to her, as she had suffered from reactions to chemicals during her years working in the field. Sofia’s youngest child has grown up on Sofia’s land, first at ALBA and then by Greenfield. For him, organic agriculture is the norm.

“You have to like your job,” Sofia believes. “And I do. My products say everything about me: I don’t hide anything, or behind anything, or from anything.” The only problem with Sofia’s land, she says, is that instead of watermelons by the river she has snakes—poisonous ones. “But,” Sofia says, “You have to take the bad with the good, because there is good in bad... I think fear—the fear of loss—holds people back. But you have to try.”

And from the variety of Sofia's produce alone, it is clear that she is giving it her all. Her vision is "to grow old with her vegetables, fruits, and chickens, and to not depend on anybody for anything."