

# GROWERTALKS

## Under an Acre

9/30/2014

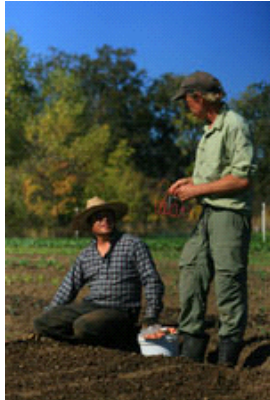
## Connecting to the Vitality of the Earth

Anne-Marie Hardie

Photography by Eric Wolfinger



Let



*the beauty that you see be all that you do; there are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss*

*the ground. —Rumi*

For most farmers, the health of the soil is simply a side note to produce a productive crop. But according to Ryland Engelhart, soil is more than a place to plant crops—it's what will essentially sustain the life in our planet.

Agriculture has been a part of Ryland's life since an early age, growing up on his family's organic/biodynamic farm, Be Love Farm in California. Ryland knew about the importance of creating healthy nutritional food and helped spread this message through the family-owned vegan, organic restaurants, Café Gratitude. Focused on organics and reducing waste, Ryland felt like he was doing his part to maintain the health of the Earth until he went to New Zealand and learned that sustainable and organic practices would only maintain the Earth's current state. These practices alone wouldn't return the health (life) back into the soil.

---

*Pictured left: Ryland Engelhart began Kiss the Ground in a deserted lot in Venice, California, revitalizing the Earth and visually sharing what healthy soil can produce. Today, it's home to garden beds and 30 different fruit trees.*

*Pictured right: At Ryland's parents' business, Be Love Farm, his father Matthew Engelhart (standing), has adopted the practice of regenerative agriculture and has noticed the benefits in his crops.*

---

Ryland attended a conference led by Graeme Sait, an advocate for the regenerative agricultural movement. In just five minutes, Ryland learned that everything links back to the health of the soil, including human, animal and the overall health of the planet. Instead of sharing a dire story, Graeme expressed that there was a simple way to bring life and health back to the planet—focus on the soil. The concept was simple—if humans add just 1% of organic matter back to the earth, mainly through returning organic matter, the earth will become healthy

once again.

“I had a revelation that soil was like a nutritional bank account for life on planet earth. Our current practices of agriculture are 90% withdrawal and very little deposit,” said Ryland. “I just saw the possibility of a new generation of people taking on agriculture. A movement to become regenerative farmers.”

Regenerative agriculture is about bringing life and fertility back into the soil that will eventually help to create high-quality, nutritionally rich food. This movement brings farmers back to the basic principles of the land, adding nutrients (compost) back to the soil, replacing what was depleted.

Upon returning back to Los Angeles, Ryland was inspired to spread the word, from connecting with his father at Be Love Farm to starting a soil conversation at Café Gratitude. And so from these conversations developed the Kiss the Ground movement, a soil revitalization program in Venice, California.

“I knew I had to communicate the reality of this work,” said Ryland. “I couldn’t shake it; I wanted to be able to create a body of information that can also inspire other people to make a real life change at the individual level.”

Kiss the Ground began with a deserted lot in Venice. Here, Ryland and his team began their own soil story, revitalizing the Earth in this plot of land and visually sharing what healthy soil can produce. The team spent months working on growing carbon back into the soil, adding back the nutrients that were depleted. Today, this space is home to beautiful garden beds, 30 different fruit trees and is a lovely resting place where the community of Venice can sit and learn about the soil story.

“It is literally an outdoor space for people to gather and be connected to the earth and having very peaceful signage communicating what happened and what is the intention of the space,” said Ryland.

With the garden, comes the story about the importance of composting. In fact, Ryland became so passionate about composting that he connected with his mayor and local government to build new legislation and laws for a widespread city compost program. Ryland strongly believes that it’s our responsibility to see that all organic matter that we’re connected with goes back to the place where it belongs—dust to dust.

“I wanted to switch the concept of compost from this dirty, stinky stuff to the fact that it is the vitality of the Earth and that it’s my responsibility to give it back to the Earth and back to the garden,” said Ryland. As a secondary piece of this garden, Ryland and his team are working on a five-minute social media-driven soil story that will share both the project and regenerative agriculture movement to the world.

“This is our big foolish project like Noah’s ark to change the tide of agriculture. We are going to just keep telling our story and, hopefully, have this recognition and internal shift,” said Ryland.

One of the challenges with chemicals, shares Ryland, is that they kill both the healthy and unhealthy life in the soil. Regenerative agriculture believes in the importance of inoculating the healthy fungi back into the soil. Basically, this inoculation, shares Ryland, will build the hummus layer that provides mineral density in the food and the capacity for water to maintain much longer in the soil.

At Be Love Farm, Ryland's father Matthew Engelhart has adopted the practice of regenerative agriculture and has noticed the benefits in his crops. These methods include using livestock for rotation grazing and natural composting, adding compost back to the land and using less annual crops to reduce tilling. After an annual crop is produced, the farm typically allocates the land to perennial grasses for three years before returning to annuals.

The soil story to Ryland is much more than changing one plot of land or one farm; it's about reconnecting to the Earth and each other.

"The reason our business has been so successful is we've made love the thing that we are building within the community. We've turned a work environment into a school of transformation, growing their capacity to build and love and trust, connecting with each other," said Ryland. "And that's really what it means to be family. We are using the restaurant experience and the garden to communicate that experience." **GT**

---

*Anne-Marie Hardie is a freelance writer/speaker from Barrie, Ontario, and part of the third generation of the family-owned garden center/wholesale business Bradford Greenhouses in Barrie/Bradford, Ontario.*