



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

helping people help the land

LANDOWNER PROFILE

“People pitch tents here for sleepovers when we have special occasions like Strawberry Days or for picking tomatoes. When they spend the night and wake up the next morning on the farm, they make a stronger connection with where their food comes from.”

— Nigel Walker

A Legacy Statement

Nigel Walker has been farming organically since he began farming in 1998.

“I don’t think any farmer enjoys spraying pesticides. They might feel they have to do it but they don’t really want to,” he says.

Walker is in his third year of transition to organic on 40 acres of land he leases. He has a six-year lease on that ground. The six-year commitment resulted in lower rent, but the fact that he would farm it organically gave Walker the opportunity to farm it in the first place.

“An elderly woman owns the land, but I work through her son. He wanted me to farm it, because his mother specifically wanted it farmed organically. That was a legacy statement,”

Nigel Walker has farmed the 65 acres he owns in Solano County, Calif. organically from day one. Walker grows about 100 crops - everything from herbs and vegetables to grains and beans - along with fruit trees and lavender, among other things, 20 miles west of Sacramento at Eatwell Farms.

More recently, he began transitioning an adjoining 40 acres he’s leasing to organic. “We’re stoking up the soil with rotations, compost from restaurant scraps and manure for five years and then we should be at full speed,” said Walker. An Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) contract with NRCS is helping cover the costs of pest control, nutrient management, crop rotation and cover crops that result from Walker’s transition to organic farming.



Nigel Walker

Build the soil

“You need to build the soil up for several years when you begin farming organically, so the USDA cost-share is important and appreciated,” said Walker.

On his own land, Walker had chickens concentrated on alfalfa fields all



PASTURED POULTRY. Turkeys on alfalfa build fertility fast on Eatwell Farms. Nigel Walker houses some in portable “chicken tractors.”



CHICKENS TO CABBAGE. Nigel Walker's chickens roam alfalfa fields for food and to fertilize for upcoming crops. Cabbage is then planted after alfalfa in his organic rotation. Cabbage is one of his many crops with high N requirements.

last summer, then moved them to strawberry beds in the winter. Most of the chickens roam parts of an alfalfa field with access to movable laying houses, but some are in chicken tractors - bottomless small wire pens that are moved once or twice each day to fresh alfalfa.

“Mob stacking” the chickens on alfalfa, as Walker refers to it, supplies fertility for the next two-years’ crops.

Growing his own nitrogen

Walker has 3,000 layer chickens on the farm. He pastures them on alfalfa, rye and clover.

“Alfalfa and chickens combined are great for soil fertility,” said Walker. “The number of chickens we have drives our cropping patterns and rotations. We’d like to grow all our own nitrogen. Right now, on the land we own, we’re working towards a three-year rotation on three 20-acre plots. The first year of chickens and alfalfa supplies nutrients for the next two years.”

Walker follows that first year with vegetables and other crops that have the highest nutrient needs. In the third year of the rotation, he grows crops with reduced nutrient needs. Then it’s back to chickens and alfalfa as the first year of the rotation starts again.

He is involved with Community Supported Agriculture, supplying 800 to 900 boxes of food a week, 50 weeks out of the year. He says his customers strongly support

his organic efforts.

On-Farm Sleepovers

“People pitch tents here for sleepovers when we have special occasions like Strawberry Days or for picking tomatoes,” said Walker. “When they spend the night and wake up on the farm the next morning, they make a stronger connection with where their food comes from. I don’t have to worry about what they might pick to eat because it’s all chemical-free and safe to eat.”

“People are happy for the experience, and we become friends,” said Walker. “I think they realize we’re on a sustainable journey—they often ask what they can do to help.”

Walker worked part-time on a non-organic vegetable farm while studying horticulture in school. “I noticed the everyday workers wouldn’t eat any of the crops there, even though they were free,” added Walker. “That says something.”

“Working with NRCS and the EQIP program has been a plus,” Walker concluded. “They’re a bureaucracy, but it hasn’t been difficult working with the NRCS. I think they’re excited about what we’re doing and how we can make a difference in the world.”