



# Foxglove Farm and Garden Supply

Salt Spring Island BC

# Setting down roots

Once upon a time, not so very long ago, a husband and a wife lived in Ontario. Their names were Chris and Marilyn Schmah. Chris was a forester who had graduated from the University of Toronto and worked for the government. Marilyn was a fashion designer.

One day in 1979, Chris and Marilyn decided to drive west to the coast, to a mountainous province called British Columbia. It was a long drive, but eventually they made it. Chris and Marilyn came to look for a place where they could build a house and, in time, retire. They didn't expect to set down roots right away, but that's exactly what happened. Chris and Marilyn built a home on Salt Spring, a small island off the coast of Vancouver Island.

"The character, the laid-back way of life are certainly more relaxed and conducive to make you think that you could live out your days in happiness here rather than somewhere down in the concrete jungle," says Chris. "It's pastoral, beautiful, and with the sheep gamboling in the fields and the apple blossoms out on the fruit trees you think, 'Oh I could just settle down right here and sort of fit right in'. And that's what you do."

Over the next several years, the husband and wife had three daughters—Aleta, Kayla, and Camille. And, instead of returning to their former careers, Chris and Marilyn decided to do something else. They decided to farm.

In 1982, Chris began working for a company called Foxglove Farm and Garden Supply that had started six years earlier selling supplies to local farmers out of the back of a truck. By the time Chris joined

the business, Foxglove had found a more permanent home and had begun to sell everything from hardware to blue jeans to fruit trees.

Five years later, Foxglove's owner wanted to retire. The Schmah family wanted to buy the business, and, eventually, Foxglove became theirs. Every member of the Schmah family became a shareholder in Foxglove, including the youngest, Camille, who was only a year-and-a-half old at the time. "She sat up at the boardroom table and put an 'x' on her spot where she was signing papers," recalls Chris. "The girls have been involved all along."

Because Chris and Marilyn are most interested in farming and gardening, that is the direction Foxglove has taken. But Foxglove still services the needs of local farmers, and it still offers a diverse range of products, from vegetable seeds, fencing materials, chicken feed, and vet supplies, to cut flowers, hanging baskets, orchids, "deer-proof" shrubs, and fertiliser.

In 1994, the Schmahs bought the 32-acre farm next door to Foxglove. There, they began to breed and raise horses. They also currently lease two other pieces of farmland: one 14-acre piece they farm for hay and the other 70-acre piece they use to raise their 70 sheep. The sheep pastures are part of a heritage farm that has operated for over 97 years.

And so the family contributes to Salt Spring Island in many ways. More than that, Chris and Marilyn also contribute to their daughters' enthusiasm for life. Take their oldest daughter for example.

Aleta's personality is boundless. She talks about this and that. Sheep for instance, including the favourable characteristics for which they are bred: wide bodies and hips, small heads, straight legs, snuffly noses. The small clusters of bubbles floating on the surface of her family's marsh, for another instance, are "hydrogen sulphide. From all the rotting that's going on; all the gas bubbles up," she instructs. The wild orchids, which grow in the Schmahs' forest, are yet another instance. She tells me that they will leave the two acres of forest intact because of the orchids. She clammers over fences, pauses quickly, then ventures just as quickly on.

When asked whether she sees herself taking over for her parents at Foxglove in the coming years, Aleta replies, "That's their plan, but I'm not sure. I'd like to stay involved in Foxglove and this farm, but I don't know if I'd ever take it as mine. I like to do stuff for myself."

Regardless of what happens, you can bet that Aleta and her sisters will be as committed, as multi-faceted, and as successful as their parents are.

The end – well, for now, at least.

## FARM FACTS

Employed –  
seasonal: 3

year-round: 12

Gross Farm Sales –  
\$44,000

Land Owned –  
35 acres

Land Leased –  
84 acres