



Mixed greens planted into high tunnel beds

Schenk Homestead Farm

Carrying A Family Legacy Forward on the Land

Jeremiah Grisa and Amanda (Schenk) Grisa met in college as biology and environmental studies majors on the pre-med track at Hobart and William Smith Colleges. Instead of medical school, they found themselves drawn to a different kind of life science—growing food close to family in Naples, New York.

“I spent a lot of time at my grandparents’ house with the cows,” Amanda said. “My parents didn’t farm, but they had big gardens and canned everything. I always had that connection to where our food came from.”

Her family has deep roots in the area, with earlier generations immigrating to Naples’ rolling hills from Switzerland in 1875. As a tribute to the family members, they named their operation Schenk Homestead Farm.

Today, Schenk Homestead Farm grows produce year-round on four acres, including ~11,360 square feet under high tunnels. With six tunnels, four built with NRCS funding, they grow fresh greens in winter and get a head start on summer crops like tomatoes and zucchini. They sell direct to customers through a CSA, various restaurants, and the busy Brighton Farmers Market outside Rochester.

Improving Labor Efficiency

Like many small vegetable farms, Schenk Homestead Farm faces the dual challenge of managing annual and perennial weeds while maintaining labor efficiency. Jeremiah works full-time on the farm with support from two part-time employees and weekend

help at the market. Amanda balances her time between farming and serving as the Director of Farmland Protection for Genesee Land Trust, an organization that preserves and protects natural lands and waterways in the greater Rochester region.



Amanda and Jeremiah Grisa

“Labor is an issue. We live in a rural area, and there is not a ton of interest in doing this kind of work. If you’re not doing it sustainably, you won’t be doing it for very long,” Amanda shared.

Annual weeds, if not controlled early, can quickly dominate a planting, compete with crops for nutrients and moisture, and produce thousands of seeds that persist in the soil seedbank for years. Perennial weeds pose an even more stubborn threat, spreading via deep root systems or rhizomes and often requiring repeated physical disruption to control.

On a farm that emphasizes no-till and reduced-tillage practices to build soil health, managing these weeds without herbicides or heavy machinery becomes

Farm at a Glance

COUNTY: Ontario County, NY

WATERSHED: Naples Creek, West River, and Seneca Watersheds

CROPS: Organic vegetables

FARM SIZE: 4 acres

SOILS: Channery silt loam

SOIL HEALTH PRACTICES: Cover crops, crop rotation, reduced tillage, organic methods, mulching, soil amendments



Summer squash grown on landscape fabric

All photos courtesy of Schenk Homestead Farm



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Schenk Homestead Farm

highly labor intensive. As part of their participation in AFT's New York Demonstration Farm Network, Amanda and Jeremiah will trial strategies that not only suppress weeds effectively but also reduce the labor required for repeated cultivation, weeding, and mowing.

Innovating in the Aisles

Previously, they relied on tarping, composting, and cover cropping within a vegetable rotation to germinate and eliminate annual weed seeds in the soil. After removing the tarp, a summer cover crop of buckwheat and sunflowers provided fast-growing vegetation to outcompete remaining weeds.

Each September, they terminate the cover crop by mowing and lightly chisel plowing the area, breaking up compaction and incorporating organic matter into the soil. Then, they form and amend beds with a blend of leaves (collected by the town of Naples) and aquatic vegetation from Honeoye Lake, composted for a year prior, and topped with additional compost to create a nutrient-rich planting base.

Garlic was planted into this mulch-heavy bed, and the aisles were wood-chipped to suppress spring's weed growth.

"There were no weeds in that garlic stand—it was great," she said. "After we took out the garlic the following summer, we planted carrots and had another close to weed-free planting of fall carrots with great germination."

Through participation in the Demonstration Farm Network, Amanda and Jeremiah sought to expand on their success by testing various aisle management strategies to suppress annual and perennial weeds while improving labor efficiency and enhancing soil health. Their trial compared three aisle treatments—open, cultivated aisles, paper mulch with wood chips, and wood chips only.

The results: The paper mulch with a thin layer of wood chips required the least labor to suppress and manage both perennial and annual weeds in the aisles.

"The results of this trial have us excited to see the impact of utilizing paper mulch in aisles over the course of a full season on a larger scale. We feel the cost savings may be greater when compared over multiple planting successions", shares Jeremiah.

Shared Learning. Shared Success.

Amanda and Jeremiah see the Demonstration Farm Network as an opportunity to share their insights and learn from other small farms tackling similar challenges.

"I think it's important to be transparent in the everyday running of the farm, whether it's the good, the bad, the technical, or the personal experiences of farming," Amanda said. "We're a profitable farm that supports our family and employees. And it's just as valuable for us to hear what's working—or not working—for other farms in the network."

Through both their on-farm trials and Amanda's mentoring of new farmers in AFT's Women for the Land initiative, the couple recognizes how critical shared knowledge is to overcoming these kinds of challenges—whether it's adopting new conservation practices or managing limited resources more effectively.

By sharing their experiences and learning from others, they hope to inspire fellow farmers and help build a stronger, more connected agricultural community.



Paper mulch and woodchips for weed management in aisles

Early Observations

- The paper mulch with a thin layer of woodchips required the least labor to manage and suppress weeds.
- Bare aisles and chips only required the complete removal of any weeds left in aisles after weeding beds to avoid weeds from rooting and establishing in aisles, an uncalculated labor expense to both treatments.
- Paper mulch had fully biodegraded under wood chips by the end of the first planting succession, but weeds remained absent from aisles in the subsequent successions.

Next Steps:

- Implement paper mulch and chip methods across whole blocks of the farm that have established no-till beds.
- Explore other aisle weed suppression techniques like living aisles between long season crops on Biotella
- Explore controlling bed edge weed control with tillage strips


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NY & NJ Regional Office
(518) 581-0078
newyork@farmland.org
www.farmland.org/ny-nj

USDA-NRCS
(585) 394-0525
3037 County Road 10
Canandaigua, NY 14424
www.ny.nrcs.usda.gov