



Four Winds Farm, home to the Kreutzmann family, is located on the beautiful island of Kauai.

30 Years Later: How the Grateful Dead Saved CCOF

When I asked Grateful Dead drummer and co-founder Bill Kreutzmann what he thinks is the cause of consumer confusion in the marketplace regarding organic labeling, he responded with a question of his own: "How could there be confusion? Organic means no pesticides, no herbicides, and no sulfur if you're a grape grower." I took a sip of the organic green tea Kreutzmann offered me at the start of our interview, and with a gentle smell of incense burning nearby, proceeded to my next question.

In the winter of 1988, the Grateful Dead had already spent decades playing to sold-out crowds across the globe. They'd played alongside Pete Townshend and the Who at Woodstock. They'd befriended Hells Angels, playing free concerts to hippies who happily danced alongside leather-clad bikers. They'd played European tours, performed at the Egyptian pyramids, and left a lasting mark as cultural icons that epitomized a time of free love and consciousness expansion.

Paying their success forward, this group of Bay Area-born musicians had the foresight to give donations not only to international nonprofits like the Seva Foundation and the Rainforest Alliance, but also to CCOF, which hadn't yet (as CCOF's first employee Mark Lipson says) "catapulted from soft altitude into the stratosphere." Guitarist and singer Jerry Garcia

had a taste both for French fries and CCOF-certified Molino Creek dry-farmed tomatoes. Until now, the story of how the Dead saved CCOF from bankruptcy over 30 years ago has only been told in the company of friends as a quaint footnote on CCOF's ever-evolving history.

In the 1980s, the Grateful Dead were more interested in creating music than they were in eating organic. Yet, when approached by CCOF with a request for \$10,000, they unanimously agreed to donate. While reminiscing last July at the Shoreline Ampitheater in Mountain View about the donation, Kreutzmann said, "Isn't that great? This is why we did it. It's nice to wait and see so much time go by, and see something come to fruition, to make it this far. It only took CCOF \$10,000 dollars; it's amazing. And here you are today!"

"The Grateful Dead donation did, in fact, by and large save CCOF," says Bob Scowcroft, CCOF's first executive director. "It had been months since CCOF had paid its employees. We hadn't filed taxes since 1985, we were past due to pay rent, and there would be no foreseeable money coming in until June, when farmers paid their assessment fees." All this information came to Scowcroft before his first day on the job from Lipson. "It was like, 'Welcome to CCOF!'" Scowcroft jokes. Luckily, CCOF employed a few well-connected Deadheads, leading to a remarkable solution to their financial woes.

Lipson is one such Deadhead. When I asked Lipson to tell us his favorite Dead song, he politely told me, "Never ask a true Deadhead that question." Lipson's comprehensive understanding of the dynamic organism that was the Grateful Dead was the driving force behind CCOF's big ask. Lipson reached out to his pal Cameron Sears, Grateful Dead's manager at the time and current president of the Rex Foundation.



Four Winds Farm products (left); Grateful Dead drummer and co-founder Bill Kreutzmann (right)

Knowing of Garcia's taste for Molino Creek tomatoes, Lipson asked Sears if the Dead would donate \$10,000 to CCOF, and thereby propel the organic movement forward. As Kreutzmann recalls Sears' pitch, "This just sounded like such a great idea, and we went for it, we voted for it. We voted on that stuff as a band."

Now, over 30 years later, Kreutzmann (whose father once lived on a five-acre farm off Branciforte Road in Santa Cruz County) and his wife Aimee live at Four Winds Farm in Kauai. At the start of our interview, Kreutzmann announced, "I'm all about organic now. I don't eat anything else, if I can help it. It's actually a problem on the road because you order from room service now and then and it's not quite that good. But you go home and you make up for it." In his autobiography, *Deal: My Three Decades of Drumming, Dreams, and Drugs with the Grateful Dead*, Kreutzmann writes, "Jerry and I made a promise that if the Grateful Dead ever ended, we would both move to Hawaii, get healthy, and live a much different lifestyle." While Garcia never got to realize that dream, Kreutzmann did, and he makes the most of each beautiful day on the farm.

Kreutzmann appears as passionate about organic farming as he is about playing music. He lights up when talking about his land, Kauai, and all the creatures that live there. "Organic farming goes along with loving animals. There's some wonderful connection there that I don't try to attempt to understand." The fauna on Bill and Aimee's farm includes cows, monarch butterflies, and a pet chicken named NayNay. The Kreutzmanns' black Labrador, Lucy, loves to play chase with the sheep and the farm goats (or, as Aimee calls them, "little thieves of your heart"). Bill loves talking about Lucy's relationship to the other animals on the farm. "Lucy's this gorgeous, beautiful, strong dog, and she goes up to the head male sheep, Ramsy, and licks him! They have a licking thing sort of. You see the interspecies relating like that, and it's really cool!"

Kreutzmann claims his interest in farming was born in Hawaii. "I didn't get into farming, honestly, until I moved to Kauai. As soon as I moved to Kauai, I couldn't help myself." He goes on. "You had to farm; you had to do *something*. I started out in Kapa'a, Hawaii. Right around the front of my house I had a little 3-by-40-foot-long white garden bed, and I planted Impatiens." Aimee stops us to laugh lovingly at her husband's first plant choice. Kreutzmann continues, "I just wanted to

plant something and watch it grow. And the nice thing about Impatiens is that you can be impatient and they grow fast! But I just wanted to grow. I moved to another place on Moalepe, which is about a mile from our existing farm, and everything I planted there just, poof!" He makes an exploding motions with his hands, explaining that his plants "went crazy and I actually had a small lettuce farm there too, an organic lettuce farm [formerly known as Grateful Greens]."

"In Hawaii, we say '*Malama 'aina*' which means 'love for the land,'" Aimee told us. And when you talk to any organic farmer, the love they have for the land they tend is overwhelmingly apparent. We often forget the inherent beauty of our natural world, getting caught in varying cultural narratives that, while important, have the potential to tear our attention away from the bountiful harvests that continue to feed us. We forget the power of healthy soil, nourished, tilled, and attended to by blister-heavy hands. But no matter how many callouses grace the fingertips of our dedicated organic farmers, they forever retain a softness that comes only from their true love of organic.

Despite Kreutzmann's self-assessment as a newer farmer, the CCOF Foundation reminded him that he and the Grateful Dead became farmers long ago, when they planted life-giving funds into CCOF. While patience was needed to see this seed through to its full evolution, its growth was worth the wait. Today, CCOF not only certifies almost 4,000 organic producers, but we've been able, like the Dead, to begin our own journey of giving back.

We've only just begun scratching the surface of our capacity to effect change in our communities.

CCOF thanks the Grateful Dead for their donation to us over 30 years ago, and for joining us on this long strange trip. We can't wait to see all that's yet to be revealed.

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