NO-TILL ORGANIC MARKET GARDEN

Producer Case Study

Growing Trust, Growing Food

The Story of Camila Correa, Tommy Anderson, and Wilamena's Backyard

Lafayette Parish, Louisiana



USDA United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

NO-TILL OMG! Organically Managed Gardening

CAMP'I Field of DREAMS

Producer Profile

From Containers to Community

When Camila Correa first planted herbs and vegetables in containers on her deck, she never imagined she would one day become a farmer.



Born and raised in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Camila grew up surrounded by concrete rather than gardens. Fresh herbs and vegetables were something she purchased, not something she produced. But in 2019, curiosity led her to plant a few vegetables for her kitchen. Before long, she found herself with more than one hundred surplus tomatoes and a growing fascination with food production.

"We started with a backyard garden and a dream. Healthy soil gave us the confidence to keep growing."

What began as a backyard hobby quickly evolved into something more. After obtaining the permits necessary to sell plants, Camila launched a small nursery business. One opportunity led to another, and soon she and her partner, Tommy Anderson, were building what would become Wilamena's Backyard, a small urban farm dedicated to healthy food, healthy soil, and community connection.



Like many beginning farmers, they faced significant challenges. Limited space, compacted soil, inadequate drainage, and the realities of building a farm business from scratch required persistence and continual learning. Participation in the No-Till Organic Market Garden Project provided access to technical assistance, educational resources, soil testing, and a network of farmers committed to regenerative agriculture.

For Camila and Tommy, the project provided something equally valuable: confidence. The knowledge gained through workshops, field days, and farmer-to-farmer learning helped transform their vision into a growing agricultural enterprise rooted in stewardship and community.

Learning Through Innovation

Turning Challenges into Opportunities

The land that became Wilamena's Backyard did not begin as an ideal growing site.

Years of repeated mowing had left the soil heavily compacted and biologically depleted. Water pooled after every major rainfall, creating stagnant conditions that made the area difficult to manage and unpleasant to work in. What appeared to be a simple backyard contained significant hidden challenges beneath the surface.

Rather than viewing these obstacles as limitations, Camila and Tommy approached them as opportunities to learn.

Through the No-Till Organic Market Garden Project, they began implementing regenerative practices designed to improve soil function while minimizing disturbance. Broadforking, compost applications, mulching, cover cropping, and permanent growing beds became central components of their management strategy.

As they monitored the site over time, improvements became increasingly visible. Areas that once held standing water for days began draining within hours after heavy rainfall. Crop performance improved. Weed pressure declined. The farm became more productive and easier to manage.

The project reinforced an important lesson: regenerative agriculture is not about quick fixes. It is about understanding ecological processes and working with them over time.



NRCS Soil Scientist, Matthew Denton, used a shovel to confirm the compaction and a sniff confirmed the odor of stagnant water at the beginning of the project.

Key Findings

- Improved drainage and reduced standing water after heavy rainfall
- Increased earthworm populations and biological activity
- Implemented no-till production and permanent growing beds
- Expanded understanding of ecological pest management
- Strengthened farm planning and production systems
- Increased confidence as beginning farmers



“I try to work with nature, not against nature.”



Building Healthy Soil

Working With Nature

One of the most important lessons Camila learned through the project was that healthy soil supports an entire ecosystem.

As organic matter accumulated and soil disturbance decreased, the farm began to change. Earthworms became increasingly common. Beneficial insects appeared in greater numbers. Pollinators, predators, and decomposers all became part of a healthier and more balanced system.

Rather than relying heavily on outside inputs, Camila focused on creating conditions where natural systems could do much of the work.

Mulches protected the soil surface. Compost improved biological activity. Cover crops contributed organic matter while supporting beneficial organisms. Together, these practices improved soil structure, water infiltration, and moisture retention.
The results extended beyond soil health.

Beneficial insects such as wasps and assassin bugs became valuable allies in managing pest populations. Increased biological diversity reduced the need for intervention while supporting healthier crop production.

Over time, the farm became an example of how regenerative agriculture can restore degraded urban soils while creating productive growing spaces that support both people and wildlife. Healthy soil became more than a production tool.

It became the foundation of the entire farm ecosystem.

Growing a Farm and a Community

Building Relationships Through Food

For Camila and Tommy, farming has always been about more than growing vegetables.

From the beginning, they recognized that local food systems depend on trust. People want to know where their food comes from, how it was grown, and who is producing it. Farmers markets, direct sales, and community relationships became important ways of connecting consumers with the people growing their food.



Camila and Tommy at a gathering celebrating the graduation of a group of beginning farmers in Lafayette.

As Wilamena's Backyard expanded, so did its role within the local farming community.

Camila became increasingly involved in farmer education and mentorship, sharing lessons learned with beginning farmers interested in regenerative agriculture and small-scale production. Through workshops, demonstrations, and community conversations, she has helped strengthen connections among growers throughout Acadiana.

These efforts now extend beyond individual farms. Inspired in part by successful farm stop models introduced through the project, Camila is actively exploring opportunities to help establish a collaborative local food hub in Lafayette Parish. While still in the early stages of development, the vision reflects her commitment to strengthening markets for local farmers while increasing community access to fresh food.

> *"Having a local food system where you know who is growing your food makes a difference."*

The project demonstrated that healthy food systems are built the same way healthy soils are built—through relationships, trust, and long-term investment.

Looking Forward

Growing the Vision

The future of Wilamena's Backyard extends well beyond the original backyard garden.

Since joining the project, Camila and Tommy have expanded their operation by purchasing the neighboring property, significantly increasing production space and creating opportunities for future growth. The additional land provides room for expanded production, improved infrastructure, storage, and new business opportunities. Healthy soil remains central to their long-term vision.

Future plans include continued expansion of regenerative growing practices, strengthening local market opportunities, supporting beginning farmers, and contributing to the development of stronger regional food systems.

The journey from container gardening to farm ownership has reinforced a simple but powerful lesson: meaningful change often begins with small steps.

A few containers became a garden.

A garden became a farm.

And a farm became part of a growing movement dedicated to building healthier communities through local food and regenerative agriculture.



Key Lessons Learned

- Healthy soil creates opportunities for long-term success.
- Observation is one of a farmer's most valuable tools.
- Regenerative practices work best when adapted to local conditions.
- Community relationships are as important as production skills.
- Small beginnings can lead to transformational growth.

Key Themes from Camila and Tommy's Journey

- Beginning Farmers
- Women in Agriculture
- Soil Health Stewardship
- Regenerative Agriculture
- Local Food Systems
- Food Sovereignty
- Community Building
- Agricultural Entrepreneurship

Closing Reflection

The story of Camila Correa and Tommy Anderson demonstrates how regenerative agriculture can transform both land and lives. What began as a simple desire to grow food evolved into a thriving farm, a growing network of community relationships, and a commitment to strengthening local food systems. Through healthy soil, continual learning, and a willingness to share knowledge with others, they are helping build a more resilient future—one harvest, one relationship, and one growing season at a time.