For more than 20 years, Brett Caldwell worked for a cable company.

"We were living in Florida, and I was always on call, working long hours and spending time away from my young family," he said.

His wife, Judy, inspired him to pursue his passion of having a small farm.

"She told me that you get only one shot at life and that my passion was growing food," he said. "I didn't want to work all my life and miss out on my (five) kids' childhood."

They saved money, sold everything they owned except their clothes and beds and moved to Oregon City in April of 2012, establishing Caldwell Family Farm on three leased acres of land.

Caldwell, 38, began taking farm-related classes at Clackamas Community College and broke ground this April.

This summer he sold produce at the Oregon City Wednesday Farmers Market, a practice he plans to continue at the winter market.

Along the way, he has made plenty of mistakes, from planting too many varieties of tomatoes to creating a bean structure that collapsed. What he appreciates about CCC's instructors is they are there to lend a hand.

"Even in the summer if I have a question, I can email one of my professors and they will respond. They have so much experience," he said.
The program focuses on an ecological systems approach to sustainable farming principles and practices using organic production methods, according to the college. Courses include food production, food harvest, farm equipment, organic farming, and fruit and berry growing.

"Our classes are hands-on," instructor Bruce Nelson said. "We believe for our students to learn what it takes to be a farmer that they need to get their fingernails dirty, their knees muddy and their feet wet."

He knows he chose the right path for his family.

"I enjoy what I do," he said. "I am at a really good place in my life. There has never been a day where we have questioned what we did."

As he plans for his farm's future, he envisions having visitors come to the farm to harvest their own food and having Farm to Table dinners.

"Having a year under my belt, I feel a lot more confident in my goals and my plans," he said.

-- Kristine Thomas

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