

## Natural label catches on

By Aaron Munzer

*For the Poughkeepsie Journal*

NEW PALTZ — Ron Khosla is trying to "change a little bit of the world a lot."

When he's not working with his wife Kate in the fields of their 77-acre community-supported vegetable farm on Huguenot Street in New Paltz, he's promoting Certified Naturally Grown.

The system rivals the Department of Agriculture's organic food labeling, but serves the same purpose for customers, while ensuring small farms can compete with large agribusiness. In so doing, it reinforces a sustainable and local vision of agriculture the word "organic" once stood for.

It's poised to go worldwide now that Khosla is working with the United Nations on farm policy.

Certified Naturally Grown relies on networks of local farmers that adhere to chemical-free standards and sell locally. After barely four years of existence, more than 400 small farmers across the United States sell their produce as Certified Naturally Grown — making it the biggest of almost 20 similar programs worldwide. Another 200 are awaiting inspection, and

applications are doubling every year.

Khosla started the program in 2002 when the National Organic Program restricted the use of the word "organic" to produce certified by the Department of Agriculture.

Although the USDA system can work for large, single-crop businesses, it can cost small, diversified vegetable growers thousands of dollars and countless hours of paperwork to certify each crop.

Compared to USDA certification, Certified Naturally Grown is more or less paperless and free. A \$50 donation is strongly encouraged, and it has a four-page application.

Farmers adhere to USDA organic growing standards and submit to random pesticide testing — something the USDA doesn't require. Farmers in the program inspect each other's farms in what is known as a



Kathy McLaughlin/Poughkeepsie Journal  
Zachary Koop, 12, of Wisconsin, helps his grandfather, Douglas Koop of Kingston, pick green beans at Huguenot Street Farm in New Paltz.

"participatory guarantee system."

Khosla's Certified Naturally Grown label quickly went regional, then national. Now, he is taking his idea international.

For two years, he has traveled the globe, encouraging other countries to start alternative certification programs. In January, he was appointed to the post of national organic certification consultant to India for the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization. Khosla recently returned from India where he helped jump start a certification program similar to Certified Naturally Grown.