

Chapter IX:

Success Stories

Chapter IX: Success Stories

Success Stories--Agritourism, Direct Marketing, Education, Conservation and Agritainment

USDA/NRCS

This website contains links to interviews with 17 owners of successful alternative enterprises and agritourism businesses.

Available in Resource Manual or at:

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/RESS/altenterprise/success.html>

Natural Resource Protection

SARE

This publication is a report on an interdisciplinary study showing that what's good for the wetland and the birds can also be good for a farmer's financial bottom line. The report focuses on farmers that are already using the wetlands program to achieve this goal. It is in the "Ten Years of SARE" publication under the Natural Resources Protection section.

Available online at: www.sare.org

Hardcopies available from: (301) 504-6245.

The New American Farmer

Published by SARE

This publication contains interviews with 48 farmers and ranchers describing their sustainable farm operations.

Available at: <http://www.sare.org/newfarmer/>

Hardcopies (\$10) and CD-ROMs (\$5) available from:

210 Hills Building

University of Vermont

Burlington, VT 05405-0082

Ph: (802) 656-0484

Email: sanpubs@uvm.edu

Adding Value for Profit

Northwest Farm Credit Services

This article in the annual report issue features four producers that diversified to add value to their operations. These entrepreneurs are: customer focused, profit motivated, innovative and responsive, comfortable with change, strategic planners and effective communicators. See Chapter 8 for table of contents.

Available at www.farm-credit.com and going to the customer button where there are hyperlinks to their web sites. For copies contact

Ben Alexander

Sonoran Institute

201 S. Wallace Street

Bozeman, MT 59715

Ph: 406-587-7331

Greenbook 2003: Caring for the Land

Minnesota Department of Agriculture

This publication, updated annually, provides information on how farmers are adopting energy and sustainable agriculture alternative enterprises. The publication includes stories about how people are applying alternative sustainable enterprises. See Chapter 3 for table of contents.

Available online at: <http://www.mda.state.mn.us/ESAP/Greenbook2003/default.htm>

Hardcopies available from:

Ph: (651) 215-0367

Email: Alison.Fish@state.mn.us

USDA Small Farmer Success Story Bulletins

Available online at: <http://www.ams.usda.gov/tmd/mta/publications.htm>

Hardcopies are available from Dan Schofer at:

Ph: (202) 690-1170

Email: dan.schofer@usda.gov

Renewing the Countryside: Minnesota

Senior writers: Beth Waterhouse and Tim King

Institute for Agricultural and Trade Policy and the Great Plains Institute for Sustainable Development and the Northeast Minnesota Sustainable Development Partnership, University of Minnesota, 2001

This publication contains interviews with successful farmers, some of which have started their own alternative enterprises.

Available by calling 612-870-3472 or

www.mncountryside.org

Analyzing and Developing Marketing Strategies for Tennessee's Value-Added Agriculture: Using Case Studies to Enhance Success

Released by the Federal State Marketing Improvement Program

This study looks at various case studies of alternative agriculture businesses in Tennessee, with the purpose of providing farmers with information that will aid them in making decisions related to alternative agriculture.

Available at: <http://www.utextension.utk.edu/publications/pbfiles/PB1699.pdf>

The New Frontier of Ranching: Business Diversification and Land Stewardship

Sonoran Institute; June 2000

By Ben Alexander

This is an informational publication that discusses the benefits and methods of applying business diversification and land stewardship to ranching. Case studies are used to present the diversification possibilities. See Chapter 8 for table of contents.

This publication is available from:

Sonoran Institute
7650 E. Broadway Blvd., Suite 203
Tucson, AZ 85710
Ph: (520) 290-0828
www.sonoran.org

Sustainable Agriculture

NRCS Watershed Science Institute.

This publication contains four success stories that address sustainable agriculture and the productivity, environmental quality, socioeconomic viability of sustainable agriculture. Available online at www.wsi.nrcs.usda.gov/products/sustainable-agriculture.html or call Ph: (402) 437-5178 ext. 43
Email: saschmann@unl.serve.unl.edu

Sustainable Agriculture...Continuing to Grow: Proceedings of the "Farming and Ranching for Profit, Stewardship and Community Conference, March 7-9, 2000"

Western SARE

This publication contains the profiles of the speakers at a conference that addressed sustainable farms, disease, pests and weeds, sustainable ranches, marketing in a sustainable economy and sustaining agriculture. Farmers and ranchers made several presentations on how they are sustaining themselves through alternative enterprises. This gives the reader an understanding of what the speakers do and how they do it. The profiles and overview of the speakers are available online at: <http://wsare.usu.edu/> by clicking on the "publications" link. Or, hardcopies available at: (435) 797-2257 or wsare@mendel.usu.edu

Meeting the Diverse Needs of Limited-Resource Producers

Prepared by SARE.

This guide is intended to inspire agricultural educators to improve their outreach to limited-resource groups. The bulletin showcases nine successful examples across the nation, then points to more detailed resources on the subject. Available online at www.sare.org/bulletin/limited-resource
Ph: 301-504-5230.

SARE 2003: Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program

This publication highlights 15 years of SARE activities by presenting the profiles of 12 projects that illustrate crop, livestock and marketing innovation tested by producers on and around their farms and ranches.

Available online

www.sare.org/highlight/2003 or

Ph: 301-504-5236

The Real Dirt: Farmers Tell about Organic and Low-Input Practices in the Northeast

Prepared by the Northeast Organic and Sustainable Farmers Network

Published by Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE)-SAN

This book is based on interviews with more than 60 farmers in eight states. It summarizes practical methods for ecological soil, pest, disease, crop, greenhouse, and livestock management. Available online at www.sare.org and click on publications. Or order at a cost of \$13.95 (plus shipping and handling).

Available from:

Sustainable Agriculture Publications
Hills Building, Room 210
University of Vermont
Burlington, VT 05405-0082
Ph: (802) 656-0484

The North Central Initiative for Farm Profitability- Case Studies Website

This website has links to a few of their case studies.

<http://www.farmprofitability.org/case.htm>

Horticultural Innovators: Case Studies of Seven Entrepreneurial Growers in New York

Published by Farming Alternatives

Copies are free and may be ordered from Farming Alternatives:

17 Warren Hall
Cornell University
Ithaca, NY 14850
Ph: (607) 255-9832
Email: jmp32@cornell.edu

Pastured Poultry.

This publication describes the experiences of 35 southern limited resource farmers who from 1996-99 participated in a project to produce and market pastured poultry. The publication includes information on pen-building, brooding, feeding, processing, marketing, legal matters, economics, and several other topics.

Available online at: <http://www.attra.org/attra-pub/pasturedpoultry.html>

Hardcopies are available by calling, 1-800-346-9140

Grass Farmers

By Allan Nation

This book contains 37 success stories that provide insight into how people are running their livestock operations.

Cost: \$23.50

Stockman Grass Farmer
PO Box 2300
Ridgeland, MS 39158-2300
Ph: 1-800-748-9608 or (601) 853-1861
Fax: (601) 853-8087

Community Forests: A Collection of Case Studies of Community Forestry

This publication was compiled by the Forest Community Research for the Seventh American Forest Congress Communities Committee

Available at: <http://fcresearch.org/cfbooktoc.html>

Stories Across America: Opportunities for Rural Tourism

Prepared by the National Trust for Historic Preservation

Published in 2001

See Chapter V for copy of abstract and table of contents. Available online at:

<http://www.nal.usda.gov/ric/ricpubs/stories.htm> or

calling USDA/NRCS at 202-720-2307.

Scenic Byways, Trails, and Corridors and Their Impacts

This publication is a fact sheet produced by the Great Lakes Sea Grant Network, Coastal Land Use Committee. It contains case studies of scenic byways, scenic trail systems, river and canal corridors, and special touring events.

Available online at: <http://www.msue.msu.edu/msue/imp/modtd/33520714.html>

Hardcopies available from Cornell University at a cost of \$0.50

Sharon Mullen, NY Sea Grant

SUNY Oswego,

Oswego, NY 13126

Developing Trails and Tourism on Private Lands in Texas: Case Studies on Existing Enterprises

Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences, Texas A&M

This publication discusses the use of trails and sponsoring of biking events as an income opportunity for ranchers. For more information, contact Scott Shafer 979-845-3837 or

Email: Sshafer@rpts.tamu.edu.

You can also order the publication online at:

http://texaserc.tamu.edu/catalog/topics/Recreation_and_Tourism.html

Share Your Heritage: Cultural Heritage Tourism Success Stories

Prepared by the National Trust for Historic Preservation

See Chapter VII for abstract and a copy of table of contents.

Cost: \$25

To order:

Ph: (202) 588-6296

Website: www.nthp.org.

Developing Trails and Tourism on Private Lands in Texas: Case Studies on Existing Enterprises

By C. Scott Shafer and Virginia Dilworth. The demand for outdoor recreational opportunities is growing rapidly. Texas landowners are discovering that developing trail-type tourism activities can be both profitable and rewarding. This publication features details about seven such enterprises, including tips for getting started, creating a desirable

product, and developing partnerships to make such ventures more economical. (40 pp., 22 photos).

Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences. Texas A&M

Email: Sshafer@rpts.tamu.edu or at

[http://texaserc.tamu.edu/catalog/topics/Recreation and Tourism.html](http://texaserc.tamu.edu/catalog/topics/Recreation_and_Tourism.html)

Evaluating Marketing Strategies for Small Farms in Mid-Atlantic Region

This is a 4-year collaborative effort among public and private organization to improve the viability of small farms in the Mid-Atlantic region. Study is looking at successes and challenges of “producer only” farmers’ markets and CSA including a survey of shareholders. Check the web site for status of study and success stories.

www.smallfarmsuccess.info

Marketing Strategies for Farmers and Ranchers

SARE, USDA, CSREES.

This publication provides information about alternative value-added marketing strategies, case studies, and a list of resources that include websites, books and periodicals. The publication offers insight into marketing through farmers’ markets, community-supported agriculture, and new cooperatives.

Available online at: <http://www.sare.org/market99/index.htm>

Hardcopies available by calling, (202) 720-5203

Small Farm Success Project

A coalition of land grant universities, USDA, and nonprofit organizations in the Mid-Atlantic region is dedicated to helping small and emerging farmers improve their financial success. With funding from the USDA's IFAFS (Initiative for Future Agricultural Food Systems) program, the coalition developed this initiative.

Available online at

www.smallfarmsuccess.info

Success Stories

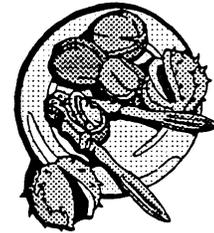
Agritourism, Direct Marketing, Education, Conservation, Agritainment

Natural Resources Conservation Service, USDA

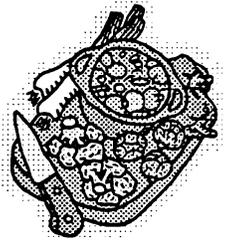


- Family Fun and Education, Pick-Your-Own, and Community-Supported Agriculture —Mark and Kate Zurschmeide
- 221 Melsted Place— Victorian Bed & Breakfast, Dinners, and Tea's--Neil and Lonnette Kelley

- Family Education and Entertainment on the Farm—Steve and Dorothy Enger
- Diversified Value-Added Products—Kim Tait
- 'Agritainment,' Weddings, Reunions, and Organic Dairy Products—Tony and Carol Azevedo
- Organic "Farm-to-Table" Herbs, Berries and Vegetables—Beverly Morton-Billand
- Horse-Drawn Wagon Rides—Larry Edmonds
- Cool's Pond—Fee Fishing, Farm Stand, and Crafts—Sam and Barbara Cool



- Catering, Picnics, Weddings, and Meeting Facilities—Randy Nixon
- Sylvanus Farms--Farm Stays, Hunting Leases, Fishing, Conservation, Education—Paul and Becky Kelley
- Hardwood Forest, Hunting, Conservation/Education, B&B, Birding, Horse Rides—Vern and Peg Knapp
- Pasture-Fed Broilers, Ducks, Geese and Turkeys, Free-Range Eggs, and Veal—David and Lilly Smith
- Fruits and Vegetables/Farmers' Markets—Francisco Resendiz
- Direct Marketing of Dairy Products—Bill Leshner
- Greenhouse Bedding Plants, Welded Sculptures, Wetland Restoration, Hunting and Beef Cattle—Jeff and Lisa Weber
- Cherry Tree Farms—Grass-Fed Beef, Goats, Sheep, Chickens and Honey—Doyle Freeman
- Penn's Corner Farmer's Alliance—Farmer to Chef, Food Stores, Food Bank Marketing—Doyle Freeman





United States
Department of
Agriculture

Natural
Resources
Conservation Service

Resource Economics
and Social Sciences
Division

June 2001

Alternative Farm Enterprises – Agritourism Success Stories

Family Fun and Education, Pick-Your-Own, and Community-Supported Agriculture,

Interview with Kate Zurschmeide, Great Country Farms,
18780 Foggy Bottom Road, Bluemont, Virginia 20135,
540-554-2073, farmer@greatcountryfarms.com,
www.greatcountryfarms.com

What is the history of your farm and farming experience?

Mark, my husband, grew up on a farm in Loudoun County, Virginia. His parents owned and leased land for the pick-your-own and fresh pumpkin market and a pick-your-own strawberry enterprise for over 25 years. They also marketed their products at their own farm market in nearby Leesburg. They were the largest pumpkin producer in the state in the 1980's. I did not get involved in agriculture until 1987 when I married Mark. He was farming by leasing land and growing pumpkins and strawberries in the mid-1980's. Then, we purchased our current farm of 187 acres, of which 50 acres is wooded, 100 acres are planted into vegetables, berries, vine and tree crops. The remainder is farmyard, ponds, agritourism fun areas, parking, and areas to keep the petting farm animals.

Describe the alternative enterprises in which you are presently engaged?

We currently operate a pick-your-own strawberry, blueberry, raspberry, black raspberry, pumpkins, flowers, herbs and vegetable garden enterprises. We are not a certified organic farm, even though most of our produce and berries are grown without the use of pesticides or herbicides. We also have an on farm market retail store. Our orchard crops are

just starting to produce and include apricot, peach, plum, cherry and apple trees.

We operate a 200-member Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) where the produce is delivered for 22 weeks up to 60 miles away. Additionally, CSA members may come and pick a pre-determined amount of the "pick-your-own" crops each week as part of their membership fee. Agritourism is also a major enterprise on our farm during the whole season but becomes most popular in the fall. We focus on education and fun for the family and school children. Some activities are: 60 foot in-hill-tunnel slide, tunnels, mazes, fishing pond, petting farm (pigs, chickens, ducks, goats, goats, rabbits, llamas, a donkey, cows, sheep, and turkeys), pig races, pony rides, three picnic areas for birthdays, business picnics and family reunions, education stations for dairy and chickens, hayrides, and a composting educational area.

We also turn our "vegetable bedding plant starter" greenhouse into a workshop for school groups in spring and summer, as part of our education program is to teach young children, kindergarten to fourth grade, about how their food is produced. This is also done through the "Farm Animal Barnyard," "ABC Garden," "Goat Tree House" and the "Kid Corral" play area.

In 2001, we added a 22,000 square foot greenhouse to grow bedding plants and hanging baskets for the contract wholesale market.

What made you decide to go into the present alternative enterprises? Goal? Vision?

Mark always knew he wanted to farm. Our goal and vision was to have a self-sustaining farm that would support our family. For about 4 years, Mark farmed and worked a full time job as a financial planner and accountant. Pumpkins and strawberries were the main crops until Great Country Farms was purchased. We found that we were always too busy to enjoy life when working two jobs. In 1993, Mark started farming full time when we purchased our farm. I continued to work for Verizon. I would leave for the office on Monday and not return until Friday as my work resulted in long days and frequent travel. We both knew there was “no office politics” on the farm!! It was time for a change.

How did you make the transition?

We knew that leasing of land did not have a future. Loudoun County was developing into a Washington, D.C. suburb so land prices were raising. We found this farm in the western part of the county that had been on the market for several years. We went to the owners, the Mormon Church, with a 45-member CSA agreement and earnest money. They agreed to finance the remainder. So, we became owners in late 1993, and began our CSA in 1994. We also knew from the beginning that agritourism would be one of the enterprises because of the success relatives were having in Indiana. We started our agritourism enterprise with local day care schools in 1994 until we developed the farm, play and learning activities. It was a learning curve for us too.

The farm has several old buildings and several natural springs. These barns and buildings really give the look and feel of a farm that “Grandpa” had. Our major natural spring provides an adequate water supply that keeps a 2-acre pond filled to a depth of 10 feet. This is our irrigation water source for the garden to insure produce for our CSA members, and water for our animals. We

also stock the pond and use it as part of our agritourism enterprise.

A chronological listing of our activities will show how we managed our growth at Great Country Farms.

1992—started PYO pumpkins on leased land

1993—purchased the farm and PYO pumpkins

1994—operated a 45 member CSA, pick-your-own strawberries and pumpkins and started our agritourism and agrieducation enterprise

1995—expanded CSA to 900 members (A big mistake for us).

1996—reduced CSA to 100 members and grew the school tour business.

1997—started to regrow the CSA by adding 25 shares/year, started the Fall Harvest Festival, planted first apple orchards, built chicken coop, pig house, added a dual purpose shed that is used for equipment storage in the off season and a birthday party area otherwise, trained goats to walk up the 10-inch wide board ladder and develop fun activities for the education and agritourism enterprise.

1998—started to build our own house on the farm.

1999—added first greenhouse for CSA and group tours, and expanded the educational programs to the summer and Kate joined the farm full time.

2000—Added maze, pig races and tunnels to play area, built a “Little Farmer Barnyard” (allows the smaller children to play without getting bowled over by the big kids), built a dual purpose machine shed that stores equipment in the off season and is a third picnic area, otherwise, dug another pond by “springs” for tree crop irrigation, and added Haunted Hayride (abandoned it after the first year to re-design.)

2001—Added large slide, and educational signage, built the pig racing barn and the goat tree house, and Fall Festival barn, which serves as retail farm market, CSA processing shed and large party barn, and completed planting of orchards and vineyards.

2002—Added wholesale greenhouse business, and enhanced 200-member CSA delivery by using a delivery company.

What is your business planning and decision making process?

Mark, being a financial planner/accountant, developed a business plan for the farm. We determined the enterprise sizes that were needed to make it a profitable venture. We also develop a business and marketing plan for every enterprise that we have added to the farm. If it does not show a profit, we don't do it. However, this does not keep us from testing new ideas and keep us from being creative. We just don't invest a lot of money until we have tested it.

We also made some very substantial family financial decisions that allowed us to make this move. We traded a larger home and two cars for a happier and more healthier life. I continued to work at Verizon until 1999, when our third child, Jake, was born. Now, I am a full time working partner in the business rather than just on weekends.

What went wrong? and Why? How did you correct it?

The first year of the CSA was so successful that Mark's father and brothers decided to join us. We increased our 45 member CSA up to 900 members in 1995. This explosive growth caused several problems. We found ourselves being a delivery company rather than a farm with some drivers leaving at 6:00 a.m. and not returning till 12:00 midnight, while other drivers would return with a truckload of produce because they did not want to make the deliveries. We had delivery trucks on the road four days a week. Trucks would break down and the long hours were disheartening. It just got out of control! So, in the third year, 1996, we reduced to 100 CSA members and have had controlled growth. We now have 200 members. We are trying a new venture with delivery. One CSA member owns a delivery company and they are going to take one route on a trial bases. We are very cautious as Mark, a relative, or an

experienced employee, made all of the deliveries since 1996.

What went right? Why? How are you building on this success?

Our agrieducation program is focused on young school children. We found the local teachers and schools to be very receptive. Today, we make mailings to teachers by class—from Day Care to the fourth grade. Each education program is developed and presented for that age group. We try new ideas and ways of teaching the children in the outdoor classroom at Great Country Farms. We listen to what the teachers and children want to learn about or type of fun they want when they come to the farm. We are now researching and determining if the farm visit and education program would work for intermediate schools. Teachers and students are traveling over 60 miles to come to our farm.

How do you price your products?

We receive some information from the Virginia Department of Agriculture on the pricing of pick-your-own. We look very close at the competition around us and try to remain competitive. The CSA "share" price is \$645 for a 4-5 member family and \$495 for a one-half share which is developed based upon the costs from the bottom up, including delivery.

Our agritourism and agrieducation prices change by season. School children are charged \$4.00 in the spring and receive a "planting kit" and U-pick item and \$4.50 in the fall and receive a pumpkin, apple cider and an apple" in the fall. The hayride, feed for the petting farm animals are included in the spring and fall. Other visitors are charged a \$2.50 fee or \$10.00 per car between May 1 and September 15, and for the Fall Festival \$5.00 per person, or \$20.00 per car on weekends from September 15 to October 31. Pony rides are \$2.00, and non-group visitors purchase the feed fed to the animals.

How do you acquire your information?

CSA surveys are our biggest source of information. We listen very carefully to what our customers are saying they like or dislike. We attended a seminar on CSA sponsored by the Loudoun County Economic Development Council and grew our CSA business from there. We do an extensive amount of reading about our products and businesses.

How do you market or promote your enterprises?

We have brochures describing our business. We send mailers to the schools for spring and fall visits. I have a weekly CSA newsletter that describes what is happening on the farm and what crops are available that week. It also contains recipes on how to use the produce they receive that week. I place an ad in the local "Convention, Visitor's Bureau" publication for the county, plus, ads in the local and Washington Post newspapers during the Fall Harvest days of September and October.

How do you handle your liability concern?

North American Farmers Direct Marketing Association provided our coverage until this year when they reduced their coverage. We are looking for companies that provide higher umbrella policies. We have so many activities for children that adequate coverage is a must.

What would be the most important advice you would give other farmers considering an alternative enterprise?

- Do extensive research on marketing. You are an entrepreneur and must understand your market if you are to be successful.
- Listen very carefully to your customer as they can see things you don't about your business.
- Don't be afraid to try new ideas or new ways of doing something. Test it and see if it works for you and your customers.
- Customers are special and require special treatment. They can make or break you. They are the best advertisement you can buy. Invest time in them and grow them.

- Use signage to lead people around your farm as they have no clue about what is right or wrong on the farm. They need information on what to pick or not to pick, where to step, how to pick crops, and what not to touch or climb.

What would you have done differently?

We would have controlled our growth at the beginning. It really hurt us financially and emotionally. We still talk about it at least once a week. Our best advice is to start small and grow as you learn. I would also have researched the pricing of products better in all areas of our business. An entrepreneur must have price knowledge; alternative marketing plans, and understands the competition and the customer. We jumped in and planted 400 fruit trees and lost almost all of them to the deer in one season. We dug up the few that did make it and planted them in our "Memorial Apple Orchard" near one of our party venues. We are now replanting and using a number of deer controls including electric fence and dogs.

Where do you plan to go from here?

Our next step is to expand the school program to include children who are in middle school. We need to determine their needs and develop a program to meet it. As our new fruit trees and berry bushes begin to mature, we are going to start a bakery and make fruit pies and other baked goods.

What do you like and dislike the most?

We like making our own decisions and setting our own directions. It doesn't feel like work. We are really enjoying our lifestyle. We feel like we are participating in the world as we grow food and fun and share it with our customers. We love training our animals to do tricks for the children. Our customers have become an extended family. It was unbelievable the amount of assistance we received when our fourth child, Carly, was born in July 2001. They brought us meals and many even brought baby gifts. I receive a special joy from people relating to the farm, open space, and sharing our hopes and dreams. They are so supportive. The

dislike! "The work is never done." There is always something to repair or build on this farm.

Would you start this alternative enterprise business today after learning what is involved?

We would definitely do it again!! We do not feel like operating this farm for growing food and fun is work. It is fun!

What groups/organizations/activities have you joined or become involved in because of alternative enterprises?

We belong to the North American Farmers Direct Marketing Association, Loudoun County Convention and Visitors Association, of which Kate is now a board member, and Loudoun Valley Homegrown Farmers Marketing Association.

What do your customers like the most about your product(s) or enterprise(s)?

Visitors and customers enjoy the "real working farm" and the open space. Our customers also feel a sense of ownership that is shown by their support. They are as excited about our growth and value as we are. They feel like they are part of the farm. Two freezes of 2001 hit our strawberry production and we could not provide the quantity of strawberries that we had in the past. The members accepted this once they found out they received all

of our strawberries. They would not accept any rebate. The CSA customers now understand how they are sharing our risk. If we have a crop failure, they would not receive the produce or berries. This builds the feeling of ownership and support. We also write into our CSA agreement that we do not deliver the fourth week of July, as this is family vacation time. We have never had one unsatisfactory word about this policy. We receive only wishes to have a great vacation!

We believe our CSA customer relationship is very strong. We work on building and keeping this relationship. We measure this success by the fact that 75 percent of our members return every year and by the beginning of the season we have about 50 people on a waiting list. This makes it very easy to build to capacity the following year. Also, we do not advertise our CSA. It has grown by word of mouth.

Would it be ok for people to contact you?

Yes

Do you want additional information?

For more success stories and other information, see:

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/RESS/altenterprize>.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, room 326W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Natural
Resources
Conservation Service

Resource Economics
and Social Sciences
Division

June 2001

Alternative Farm Enterprises – Agritourism Success Stories

221 Melsted Place— Victorian Bed & Breakfast, Dinners, and Tea's

Interview with Neil and Lonnette Kelley, P.O. Box 221,
Mountain, ND 58262, 701-993-8257,
info@melstedplace.com, www.melstedplace.com

What is the history of your farm and farming experience?

Two twenty-one Melsted Place takes its name from the original owner. Sigurdur Magnusson Melsted from Iceland built this 12-room mansion in 1910 for his wife, her parents, and their 10 children. The house had indoor plumbing, running water, gas lighting, hardwood floors, a magnificent stairway, and elegant craftsmanship. This was the largest farm in Pembina County.

Lonnette grew up on a farm in Minnesota and is an LPN nurse. Neil grew up in the city and was a commercial construction contractor. We wanted to return to a rural area with a little land for a garden and horse. We purchased this property the day after we first saw it.

Describe the alternative enterprises in which you are presently engaged.

We have several income-producing activities based in the home and farmyard. We started with the B&B and afternoon teas and added special-request lunches the second year and dinners the third year. We now serve traditional festive holiday dinners and are doing some catering for community receptions and dinners. The community came at first out of curiosity about the place, especially the house. We had to become ingenious in developing continued community interest. We have slowly grown to the point that we now have a major event every month to ensure a steady cash flow.

What made you decide to go into the present alternative enterprises?

We purchased this to be our rural home on this 2-acre site in 1995. The beautiful Victorian house was a bonus. We wanted to be somewhat self-sufficient through gardening, and we saw the potential of the yard with its rich black soil. We began to fix up the house and outbuildings, which had been vacant for a year and a half. The house had been extremely well preserved. In January 1997, we needed a source of income other than part-time nursing for Lonnette and contracting and helping neighbors with farm work for Neil. Several neighbors suggested a B&B. Our main reservation was our location; we wondered if we'd be able to attract people to such a rural place. But it works great.

How did you make the transition?

We sat down as a family (Lonnette, Neil, and daughter Michele), in January 1997. This had to be a family decision because it impacts the whole family and really complicates life. We decided to start with the B&B and tea parties in June 1997.

Describe your decisionmaking process.

We first developed a business plan. Our goal was to provide a high-quality product and the best in hospitality. Lonnette met with community members to get their approval and also got the Melsted family's approval to use their name. She studied books on B&Bs and contacted state offices about licenses and other permits.

How did you obtain financing?

We developed a cost plan as part of the business plan. We knew every item we needed to buy. We

used our own resources as much as we could, including using a credit card to purchase bed linens, dishes, and supplies.

How do you market your B&B and other activities?

We cannot afford a marketing budget. Our biggest job was to develop a brochure explaining why 221 Melsted Place is an important place to visit or stay. We still have limited funds, so we rely mostly on word of mouth advertising. We have been very successful with that approach.

We are located approximately 15 miles from all the 15 communities surrounding us, so advertising would be expensive. We have placed brochures at Interstate visitor centers, but they don't let us know when they run out and time does not allow us to travel those distances. Today, we have a Web site, which is being used more and more by our national and international travelers. Also, we are working cooperatively with other businesses. For the future, we would like to find a representative in each of the 15 communities who would support and promote us. In turn, we would work together for the betterment of their community and provide the representative a dinner or stay at Melsted Place. Our focus is on serving the local area.

How do you price your products?

This is very difficult. It depends upon your community and what it is accustomed to in terms of quality and service. We have searched the 'net to check prices and amenities. Our rooms range from \$80 to \$120.

What went wrong? And Why? How did you correct the situation?

1997 was the year of the Red River Valley flood. Grand Forks was under water, and there were no motels where the Red Cross staff could stay. So we opened early for them. Also, we had to go to Minneapolis to get the brochure printed due to the flood. Then, in July we got 9 inches of rain in 2 hours, which flooded our attic and basement and laundry facilities. One needs to be adaptive and flexible in all cases and to have thought about alternative plans such as going to a laundromat until

your basement dries out. Also, living in a historic home is great, but that also means everything does not work the way it should.

What went right? And Why? How did you build on your success?

We recognized at the beginning that our business had to be versatile and continually changing. It could not just be a B&B and tea room because we needed a monthly cash flow. So, we diversified into several different activities or entities at 221 Melsted Place. We try new ideas and discard the not-so-good ones. This has worked well for us.

The service business is constantly changing. For example, newlyweds who stay their first night with us make up 80 percent of our B&B business. We bought a limousine to pick them up after the dance and return them the next day to open gifts before they begin their honeymoon. We have also had weddings on the grounds and in the house. We have added a screened outdoor spa with a gas fireplace and a one-day a month massage therapist, by appointment.

What would you have done differently?

We would schedule more time for ourselves to get away. The burnout rate is high for a B&B, so that you are considered a master innkeeper after only 5 years in the business. We are now in our fifth year, and we do find that if we don't schedule time for our personal lives it does not happen.

Where do you plan to go from here?

We want to stabilize the business so the monthly cash flow and business expenses are reliable. We don't want to get too big because then you have employee problems to address. We are implementing ideas. First, we had an artist/welder build us a Victorian carriage. We plan to use the carriage as an attraction at 221 Melsted Place and at community events for publicity and as a source

A Typical Year at 221 Melsted Place

January: Christmas carryover

Lounette decorates 15 trees and keeps them up until February. By request only, we serve dinners, luncheons, and tea parties to give people the opportunity to have that holiday party they could not squeeze in during December. We charge \$20 for dinner, \$15 for lunch and \$10 for tea.

February: Valentine's Day and chocolate

Lounette still keeps a few of the trees up and decorates them with valentines. A week before Valentine's Day, we hold a large open house at \$10 per person. We have all types of chocolate candies, desserts, and breads—anything made of chocolate. We also added fruits and other foods, too. This has been working very well since 1998.

March: Rest, catch up, taxes, special cleaning, maintenance

Business has been extremely busy in 2001, to the extent that we needed to hire an accountant.

April: Mother/daughter May Day luncheon

Sometimes this includes a style show. This event is festive with flowers and frills at a cost of \$15. The year 2001 is also our first year to cater the historical society reception.

May—early September: B&B

The B&B includes four rooms and a vacation trailer. A number of family reunions are planned with us—including sleeping, luncheons or dinners. In May 2001, we catered a dinner to a small theater for the first time. This dinner-theater ambience provides a very exciting experience to a small rural town of 1,100.

Late September—October 31: Halloween Granary

We converted a granary into a licensed kitchen and haunted eatery restaurant. We serve children, families, school groups, organizations, and fun-loving adults. Guests are encouraged to wear costumes. The prices range from \$10 to \$15 per person, depending on the type of party selected. Guests arrive at dusk, and we build a bonfire. Then, we walk by torchlight to the granary giving people time to let their minds go scary. The parlor of the granary holds a banquet table loaded with goodies. Then, we proceed into the more frightening second room for dinner. Dinners are served in a very "unusual" way for a very fun experience. It is a night of laughter and fun.

November 15—December 31: Holiday dinners

The home is elegantly decorated inside and outside. We serve dinners Thursday through Saturday. The cost is \$20 for a 5- to 6-course meal served over 2 to 3 hours. We also obtained a wine license which has added an additional flair to the dinner. After dinner, Lounette plays medley tunes and gives a mini-concert on the piano.

of income by giving rides. We may consider nationwide marketing of this carriage. Second, Lounette's favorite dream is having a week-long camp for girls ages 6–12:

tea parties, dress up, bonfires, games, and how to act as ladies. Third, people have been asking for a cookbook that would contain individualized historic

stories, associated recipes, and some of Lonnette's published poems.

What would be the most important advice you would give other farmers considering a B&B alternative enterprise?

1. Anything in your home complicates life. The family must recognize this and agree how the enterprise will affect family life. There must be ground rules as to how you act when guests are present (your professional hat) and when only family members are at home (your private hat). This is very difficult to achieve at times.
2. B&B is an all-consuming occupation when it is in your home.
3. You must build your business up. There will be good days and not-so-good days.
4. You must be flexible and adaptable. A secondary plan is necessary from every standpoint to be ready for the unexpected.
5. It is a high-stress job, but the joy exceeds the stress.
6. Package your product for your area. Think about your community—who they are, what they do, where they go, their likes and dislikes. Keep thinking and adapting and planning.

How did you handle the liability concern?

We have an agent who has no problem with all our "entities"—except no horses. Our basic insurance plan costs about \$2,000 per year for full coverage with a \$1 million umbrella policy. Each of our other entities is an additional cost.

What do you dislike the most and like the most?

We dislike the all-consuming aspect of the service business. One must always say yes to a request for service. We miss family and community activities because we have no backup. Our records show we spend one hour for every guest that we serve. We have a number of dinners where we serve 25 people.

We like the guests the most. Guests are wonderful, and we receive so much joy from them. We had the

opportunity to be host and hostess to President Olafur Grimsson of Iceland. President Grimsson, the brides and grooms, and others are special in their own way.

Would you start this alternative enterprise business today after learning what is involved?

Yes. The business is challenging and rewarding. It takes a lot of work, and being younger would be a great advantage. One needs to plan for backup staff that can fill in if you're sick and provide for vacations.

What groups/organizations/activities have you joined or become involved in because of the alternative enterprises?

We belong to the North Dakota B&B Association and the American Historic Inns, and Lonnette is a member of Quick Response, our community Emergency Medical Team.

What conservation and education activities do you have?

We have no conservation activities on the two flat acres, but people's experiences here are educational. Lonnette has been asked to teach cooking classes. And the camp for girls would be educational.

What do your customers like the most about your enterprises?

Our guests sign a journal and comment on their stay. They frequently note the peacefulness of the rural area, and many comment favorably on our hospitality. This tells us that we've reached our major goal and provided a total experience.

Would it be ok for people to contact you? Yes

Do you want additional information? For more success stories and other information, go to <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/RESS/altenterprise>

The U.S. Department of Agriculture prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, room 326W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Natural
Resources
Conservation Service

Resource Economics
and Social Sciences
Division

May 2002

Alternative Farm Enterprises – Agritourism Success Stories

Family Education and Entertainment on the Farm

Interview with Steve and Dorothy Enger, RR 2, Box 68A,
Hatton, North Dakota 58240, 701-543-3955,
sdenger@polarcomm.com, www.engerfarm.com

What is the history of your farm and farming experience?

Both of us grew up on farms in North Dakota. After college, Steve was an agricultural credit officer and did home construction/remodeling. Dorothy taught elementary school. In 1978, we rented land near Hatton and purchased this farm in 1987; home construction was also part of the business. We are wheat, barley, pinto beans and soybean producers on our 1,450 acres. In 1993-94, we tried producing “high value” crops such as cucumbers, tomatoes, pumpkins and carrots, but lost money on the cucumbers and tomatoes. Today, we raise 130 acres of carrots and 10 acres of pumpkins for the wholesale market. We sell 25 percent of the pumpkins at the farm.

Describe the alternative enterprise(s) in which you are presently engaged.

We have developed “Fall Family Fun on the Farm” that provides entertainment and education for the whole family—from toddlers to seniors. We want to give people something they can go back home and talk about. Education is a major part of what we do. We have developed nine different activities to accomplish this—Corn Maze, Face Painting, Haunted House, Enterprise Golf, Tunnel of Doom, Rat Racers, Pumpkin Patch, Straw Maze and Tess the Cow. All of these activities tell a story about life with the focus being on agriculture and how food is grown and processed.

Education, the center of our alternative enterprise, is designed in a way that everyone has fun while learning about food and agriculture.

What made you decide to go into the present alternative enterprise(s)? Goal, Vision.

In 1997, our church became involved in Heifer Project International. They wanted to raise \$5,000 and challenged the rest of the churches in our “conference” to do the same. The fund raising idea was to have a Halloween party on our farm. Our family converted our old granary into a haunted house, built a straw bale maze, and used another building for indoor games and the garage area for food and other goodies. It was so much work we decided that we would open early to the public (by placing hand made flyers in neighborhood businesses) and then have our Church’s Halloween Party on October 31st. That night we had a blizzard, but the people still came! About 100 people came to the farm that year other than for the church fundraiser.

Our guests told us how much fun they had and asked us to do it again.

We have never set any definite goals. We treat this enterprise the same as the others on the farm. We know that living in a sparsely populated area like North Dakota, an entrepreneur must have new ideas, activities and attractions each year to get the customer to return. Our farm is not located near a city of any size. We are 35 miles from Grand

Forks, with a population of 50,000 and 75 miles from Fargo, with 75,000 people.

How did you make the transition?

We started our Fall Family Fun on the Farm in 1997 by having a haunted house, straw bale maze and pumpkin patch. We served hot cider to our guests. This was the time for us to learn this new business of agritainment. We grew the business slowly. It is too much to comprehend at one time. Some of the things you try don't work as planned and you need time to correct them. It is a step-by-step and area-by-area process to grow your business. It is a time commitment and the mind and body need to adjust and adapt to all the different activities. We grew the agritainment business as follows:

1998—We accepted the challenge of designing something new every year to keep the people coming back. Our daughter, Jennie, 14, developed the theme for the haunted house “Who Murdered Dad?” She wrote the story about how the haunted house was a B&B and some one allegedly murdered Dad. These are guided tours through the haunted house, but actors have been placed strategically to increase the anticipation of the guest as well as the tour guide adding suspense. That year, we planted six tenths of an acre of our yard into a football field size corn maze and coordinated its design with the murder theme and the solving of the mystery. We also had the straw bale maze.

1999—We added the miniature golf course. It is said to be one of the most difficult in the region. It is agricultural based with each “hole” based upon a crop or livestock enterprise in North Dakota. Obstacles are parts from machinery associated with the crop or livestock “featured” at the hole. The fairways and paths from one hole to the other features the design of farm equipment such as a John Deere-A tractor pulling a dairy wagon.

The golf course is very focused on educating the player about farming in ND. Also, we added the “Tunnel of Doom” which is an optical illusion pathway in the dark that gives an effect of fast motion. This was used to create more interest to bring people back again. Teachers tell us this is a

real “brain enhancer” which is used to stimulate the thought process of children who have learning disabilities. We knew we were in the therapy/education family fun business, but not in the treatment of learning disabilities! The five-acre corn maze was about North Dakota, its road system and location of the 53 county seats. The haunted house was filled with scary stories. This was the year we started the school tours and added “Face Painting.” Face Painting was done on children, teenagers and adults.

2000—We added the “Rat Racer” which is eight feet in diameter and four feet wide. It runs along a 150-foot track with rails and bumpers next to the golf course. This location of this attraction was to encourage guests to try the golf activity. This “rat racer” activity is really a challenge because the faster it moves, the faster you have to go. It is fun to watch children get themselves into a very fast mode. The 7.5-acre corn maze was about the United States. The continental 48 states were outlined and trivia about each state was presented. One entered and exited through the “International Peace Gardens.” The haunted house theme was about a girl who inherited the family home. The pumpkin patch and straw bale maze continued to be part of the Fall Family Fun farm visit.

2001—We added “Tess,” the Holstein cow. It was amazing that many of our school children in the rural state of North Dakota did not know that cheese was made from milk produced by cows. Children had great fun hand milking Tess. The older people who milked cows growing up said they would just as soon forget those bad memories. We really enjoyed teaching the children about agriculture, farming and a farmer’s family work and life style. The haunted house theme was the journey of a young girl one stormy night. The eight-acre corn maze was of the human body. It was three-quarters of a mile around the body (skin). Everything was done in proportion so children had a real feel of where the lungs, heart, blood vessels, arms, legs and etc. were in relation to the whole body. It was a real educational reward to see the children respond to information about the body, health, and environment. The pumpkin patch

continued to grow and the straw bale maze was continued.

2002—We are building a “Pumpkin House” this year. It is 12 feet high and shaped like a pumpkin with a stem on top. It will be used as a classroom inside to teach children how agricultural crops are grown and story time about animals, birds, and nature. It will also have shelves to display pumpkins for sale. We are making several improvements in landscaping around the buildings and display areas by using trellis and other structures. We are also planting other agricultural crops such as grapes. The haunted house theme this year is in the planning stages. The 10-acre corn maze this year is “the world.” It will be 750 feet in diameter and will show latitude, longitude, airline routes to major cities and crops will be planted between continents. Since the sun moves 15 degrees each hour, time zones will be represented. We will still have Tess, the Pumpkin Patch, Straw Bale Maze, Face Painting, Golf, Rat Racer and The Tunnel of Doom.

Destination—We have grown to be a destination. Families will come from different cities in North Dakota, South Dakota and Minnesota to meet and spend a day at the farm. We have areas to relax, eat and enjoy the outdoors. Some families travel 300 miles to visit our farm. It is not unusual to have visitors travel 200 miles for a day visit and return home for work the next day.

What is your decision making process?

We really don't have a decision making process. We ask our customers what they like for Halloween entertainment. We design and build around agricultural or other educational themes. We also check with other people in this business to see what worked and what people wanted. We look at this as a challenge. We like to be creative and innovative—to add something new to the business every year. The designing and building everything ourselves is our goal. If we cannot build it, we don't add it to our set of activities. We try to provide most of the labor. Dorothy handles all the school tours and education. This is becoming difficult as schools are now sending all their elementary classes at the same time and help is

needed. During the busy weekends, we employ eight people.

What is your business planning process?

We treat this enterprise the same as the others on our farm. We finance it from the income of the previous year. It has to pay for itself. Steve's background in construction and as an agricultural loan officer helps in planning and costing out our activities. Dorothy's background as an elementary school teacher helps in the design, layout and development of educational materials for everyone from toddlers to seniors. We look at how can we add something new that will benefit the customer. This year we are looking into developing a handicap/wheelchair access to our hay wagon rides. This will permit the disabled customer to ride around the corn maze and other sites on the farm. This should attract the senior centers and other hospital rehabilitation facilities. We know we need to develop the business to attract the local population. There is not a huge population base so we need to design activities to fit the needs of many from young to old. Both of us are inclined to be very imaginative. We are always looking at how “what we see and hear can be adapted to work on our farm.”

How did you acquire your information?

We do a lot of research and reading. The Internet is a great tool. We joined the North American Farmers Direct Marketing Association and have attended their trade shows since 1998. We listen to and meet people doing the same type of agritourism at conferences and trade shows. We discuss our ideas with the friends we have made across the country. We have also attended entertainment trade shows to look at ideas, talk to vendors and other entrepreneurs. We picked up the “Tunnel of Doom” idea at the Chicago Halloween Trade Show. Steve came home and designed and built it.

How do you price your products?

Pricing has been a real challenge. Do we charge a general admission or by the type of activity? First, we did not charge at all because we thought people would come—have fun and buy some pumpkins.

That did not work. So, we charged \$1.00 per person admission. We charged by the activities they did. As our farm events grew, our admission increased to \$2.00 per person, and some activities became free. We have found people in ND feel that having fun on the farm should be free or cost very little. Yet, they think nothing of going to a pro football, baseball or Disney and spend hundreds of dollars. We are in the process of restructuring our pricing policy. Most of the industry is now charging a general admission because it minimizes confusion, labor needs and people trying to obtain entrance to activities without paying. We are planning to make this change this year.

What are your marketing techniques?

Marketing can be very expensive and we have taken the low cost route. Our unique attractions and family fun on the farm have attracted the television and newspaper media. Five television stations have visited our farm and all the major newspapers in ND have carried stories on our agritainment enterprise. We have done several 30-minute radio interviews within our state, Minnesota, and Canada. We put flyers in the local communities around us, we mail special information to the schools, and we take pictures of the school children and put them on our web site. We make extensive use of discount coupons that we distribute at fairs, festivals, and parades beginning as early as Memorial Day. We also send a discount coupon home with every school child and teacher. We support our local blood bank drive by providing free pumpkins to people who give blood. We also support a near-by university by providing a family with a pass to our farm when they are doing a fund drive. We have done some marketing with bus tour companies. Our web site has really helped market the Fall Family Fun on the Farm, but word of mouth has been the best.

What went wrong? and Why? How did you correct the situation?

We have not had any big problems. Steve built the golf course in 1999 and we could not determine why people were not using it as much as we expected. We found out people had not allowed

sufficient time, but more importantly, they did not see it. So, we added signage and landscaped it with native flowers, bushes, and trellis vines. We also noted on our flyers to save time for golf! Activity picked up very fast after the landscape was completed.

Our pumpkins were not selling as well as we expected. By talking to our customers, we found out it was difficult for them to pick 2 or 3 pumpkins and carry them to the car. So, we built pumpkin carts for this purpose. We are also going to promote the pumpkins better through our flyers and the new Pumpkin House.

A real education problem exists among the residents in rural areas, cities and towns. They think all activity exists in town and the city! It is enjoyable for them to go to a farm for a picnic or to play miniature golf. We are now promoting this by being open on July 4th and throughout the summer to play golf. It is just going to take time to change how people think.

What went right? and Why? How did you build on your success?

The haunted house has been a real leader for us. People come back every year to participate in the "new scary theme." People are beginning to enjoy the education aspects of everything we do. The seniors are especially interested in the crops and livestock of ND and say, "I learned a few new things today." Everybody has something to go home and talk about.

Our school education and fun program has really developed very nicely. Whole elementary schools are coming for the fun and education. We work with the teachers to help them prepare the children about what they will see and learn about at the farm. Some schools have been driving over 100 miles, which we consider a real success. We also invite church groups, scouts, 4-H, FFA and other groups to the farm.

Our daughter, Jennie, has gained a tremendous amount of education from the agritainment enterprise. She has been totally responsible for the haunted house theme, decoration and operation. It has made her a very good manager.

What would you have done differently?

We had to change our hours of operation. We have extended our season by one weekend. There is a need for natural resource diversity to attract customers. We are located on the prairie with only a shelterbelt around the farm. We should have added the natural resource side of our education program earlier. We are just developing it now.

Where do you plan to go from here?

We are going to build up the natural resources and develop a nature-based tourism enterprise. We are adding birdhouses, birdwatching, nature trails, signage, and working with conservation and wildlife groups. We are adding equipment to attract the disabled, and promote the sale of pumpkins on the farm. We are going to market to day care centers during the summer and develop educational programs for them. We are seriously looking into farm stays where people pay to help do the farm work. Of course the biggest challenge is developing, designing and building the new attractions. We are also looking into value-added products such as milling and selling our wheat as flour. This would have a very strong education component too.

What would be the most important pieces of advice you would give other farmers considering an alternative enterprise?

We cover 13 points in our presentations at conferences. The most important are:

- One must be willing to give the time, yard, home, buildings and land base for the agritainment enterprise to develop the material and educate the public about agriculture.
- You need to be able to design, develop and build the activities for an agritainment enterprise to keep your cost down.
- You must be willing to meet the public and entertain them with a variety of activities for all ages.
- You need to create memories for your customers and educate them while they are having fun.
- You need to develop a set of peers that is in your business to discuss your experiences and

challenges because you don't know how your business will operate until you open your doors. Each area of the country is different. Ours is being located in a sparsely populated area.

- Most people don't give themselves enough credit for their capabilities. Thus, people are afraid to try and fear failure. Start small and let the business evolve. "Dream it and do it!"
- It takes about 5 years to build your business so be ready for the long hall. Don't give up your other job.
- In our location, we now have about 5,000 + customers a year. We need to work harder to get customers than someone in a densely populated area. You can do it by being innovative.

How did you handle the liability concern?

North American Farmers Direct Marketing Association had a very good program that we participated in but it has ended. Now, Steve needs to look for a new vendor. We generally carry a one million-dollar umbrella policy.

Do you mind sharing your promotional material?

Our major materials are business cards, flyers, discount coupons and the web site.

What do you dislike the most and like the most?

Dorothy dislikes the constant pressure to be looking for new entertainment ideas and activities along with being tied to the farm when community activities are happening. Steve dislikes that some people are never satisfied because the more you do the more they expect. Dorothy enjoys meeting people and learning about their professions. Steve enjoys the challenge of designing and building new attractions. They both like seeing children, parents and seniors having fun and learning about agricultural, sharing with others, and reading the "thank you for the great time" notes. The greatest joy is touching someone's life forever, such as the ten-year-old Tennessee girl that visited the farm in 2001 but died six months later from leukemia. One of her last wishes was to have her uncle in ND

come and tell us about all the fun she had on our farm!

Would you start this alternative enterprise business today after learning what is involved?

Yes. The time required to manage an agritourism business along with a farm has resulted in some very long hours. Farmers and others in agriculture need to spend more time educating the public about how their food is produced. People are eager to learn about this, especially if they can learn it while they are having fun.

What groups/organizations/activities have you joined or become involved in because of the alternative enterprises?

We joined the North American Farmers Direct Marketing Association. We are becoming involved in conservation groups, wildlife associations and organizations to grow our nature-based tourism business.

What conservation and education activities do you have?

We are just beginning the conservation aspects of our agritainment business. We want to share the importance of caring for our land. If we take care of our land, the land will take care of us. We strive to preserve the soil and nature in all our farming

practices. Education, by having fun on the farm, is really our agritainment/ agrieducation enterprise. Dorothy's experience as an elementary teacher has resulted in the development of our education part of the business. We have an outdoor classroom to enhance indoor learning. This technique is applied in designing our corn mazes and other activities. All nine activities we have today have the education component. Since we are a family farm, the education focuses on food, agriculture, farm family lifestyle, health and the natural resources environment.

What did your customers like the most about your product(s) or enterprise(s)?

Customers have thanked us for the cleanliness of our farm, wholesome entertainment for the whole family, and the variety of activities for all ages to enjoy.

Would it be ok for people to contact you?

Yes.

Do you want additional information? For more success stories and other information, see <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/RESS/altenterprise>.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, room 326W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Natural
Resources
Conservation Service

Resource Economics
and Social Sciences
Division

February 2002

Alternative Farm Enterprises – Agritourism Success Stories

Diversified Value-Added Products

Interview with Kim Tait, RR 1, Box 329, Centre Hall. PA
16828, 814-466-2386, e-mail taitfood@vicon.net,
www.taitfarmfoods.com

What is the history of your farm and farming experience?

Marian and Elton Tait purchased the 130-acre farm in 1950. Both were State Extension agents at Pennsylvania State University in State College. The farm is 7 miles east of State College on U.S. Rt. 322. It was the Tait's home and hobby farm for more than 25 years. They raised a daughter (Sandy) and two sons (David and John) as well as 4-H animals, a few Basset hounds, and cut-your-own Christmas trees.

Describe the alternative enterprise(s) in which you are presently engaged.

Tait Farm Foods produces high-quality fruits and vegetables using organic methods; manufactures more than 35 specialty food products; and sells farm-made and local foods and plants and gifts for the kitchen, garden, and home. Our specialty food line consists of Fruit Shrubs (a colonial fruit drink concentrate), international cooking sauces, fresh herbal olive oils, raspberry vinegar, preserves, chutneys, and scone and pancake mixes. Our year-round Harvest Shop specializes in local and regional products, including produce, food products, gift collections, pottery, baskets, herb plants, bedding plants, heirloom roses, seasonal gifts, and kitchen and garden items. The Harvest Shop also offers cooking, gardening, and craft classes and events throughout the year. The farm business also has a 110-family Community Supported Agriculture project

known as Community Harvest. Tait Farm Foods is really seven businesses in one:

- growing fruits and vegetables,
- manufacturing value-added foods,
- selling specialty food products via a retail catalog and Internet site (taitfarmfoods.com),
- selling food products and produce wholesale to restaurants, historical sites, and retail stores,
- operating a retail farm store,
- operating a CSA venture, and
- offering educational classes, workshops, and events throughout the year.

What made you decide to go into the present alternative enterprise(s)?

The Tait's two sons returned to the family farm around 1980. Their vision was to make it a profitable family farm by selling pick-your-own organic/ sustainable perennial fruits and vegetables (asparagus, raspberries, apples), as well as cut-your-own Christmas trees. They knew they had to grow high-value crops at direct marketing prices to the consumer to be successful. I came to the farm in 1989 and joined the existing enterprise and married David Tait a few years later. Between 1980 and today, the farm has made many transitions:

1980–82: Christmas trees and disease-resistant apple cultivars developed at Cornell University were planted. Five acres of apples were planted with the goal of a low-spray program. Two acres of asparagus were

planted along with several acres of raspberries. Trial plantings of blueberries (1/2 acre) were added later. A considerable amount of time was spent learning how to grow and manage the crops.

1981–82: A large vegetable garden was planted, and the produce was marketed at the local farmers market. The hope was to provide some cash until the raspberries, asparagus, apples, and Christmas trees became profitable. The vegetable garden was stopped after 2 years due to the management requirements of the perennial crops and the intensive labor and poor economic returns on the annual crops.

1982–87: The “pick-your-own” business grew, with asparagus in May, raspberries in late June into July, apples from mid-August to November, and Christmas trees in December. The Tait family also attended the late-season farmers market.

1987: A bumper crop of black raspberries blessed the farm, but the weather was very poor for pick-your-own. So the farm picked the berries and froze them, rather than letting them go to rot. The hope was that there would be a winter market for frozen raspberries, but that didn’t turn out to be the case. A friend of the family reminded David of an old Colonial recipe she had once made called Raspberry Shrub. The word “Shrub” came from old English, meaning acid fruit drink. The base of the product was raspberry vinegar, which in this case was a very handy way to transform all those frozen raspberries. And so a value-added food business was born.

1988: The first bottles of Raspberry Shrub were filled and labeled by hand, then sold to pick-your-own asparagus, raspberry, apple, and Christmas tree customers in 1988. The Colonial fruit drink concentrate was very well received.

1988–89: The winter was spent developing a new label and an informative “Book of

Shrub,” which included historical information as well as recipes. In the spring of 1989, Raspberry Shrub had a new look and was taken on the regional road. The first successful sales came at a farm market show and to specialty stores in the State College and Philadelphia areas. The old milking parlor in the barn was converted to a value-added processing area, with a used pasteurizing tank being donated by a family member and inexpensive, used stainless steel equipment purchased from Penn State salvage.

1990–93: The value-added business started expanding. After we attended several trade shows where the product was demonstrated, we realized that customers wanted ready-to-use food products. They didn’t want to have to assemble all the ingredients to make teriyaki sauce from Raspberry Shrub. They wanted the teriyaki sauce already made. So we created Raspberry Teriyaki Sauce. Another seed was also planted in this ever-changing business—gift baskets. The farm began assembling baskets filled with Tait Farm and other local products. This was the beginning of our gift collection business, which today makes more than 2,000 collections each year. We sell them in our Harvest Shop, to regional businesses, and through our mail order catalog and Internet site. During this time period, we sold the value-added products out of a small, mobile wagon located where people purchased their picked crops or Christmas trees.

1992: We built the first farm retail store by converting an old, 8’x15’ turkey shed into the Harvest Shop. The store was open from Labor Day to Christmas.

1994: The farm business known as Tait Farm, Inc., was made into two corporations, Tait Farm, Inc., and Tait Farm Foods, Inc. We put together a business plan to develop more value-added food products, new packaging, and marketing materials. We took the plan to the bank and got a \$25,000 loan to expand the vision. We researched and

developed a new packaging concept using wood-engraved images from 1860–80, and we added three new flavors of fruit shrub, 3 fruit vinegars, two international sauces, and preserves to the line.

1994–97: We developed more value-added products and marketed them to upscale stores in the mid-Atlantic.

1997: We decided early in the year to build a year-round Harvest Shop. We put up a 15'x40' timber-framed building in September and opened it up for business in early November. When my husband, David, passed away in early December, I became solely responsible for running Tait Farm Foods.

1998 to present: The company now manufactures 35 value-added products and sells the line to a variety of wholesale customers, including Colonial Williamsburg, Fresh Fields, Dean & DeLuca, as well as many regional stores. We have an e-commerce site and a 16-page hand-drawn catalog. The company currently has four full-time and six part-time employees. In 2000, a Community-Supported-Agriculture project called Community Harvest was started. The members come to the farm to pick up their produce. The farm supports somewhere close to 100 families each season. All the fruits and vegetables are grown using organic methods. The CSA runs at least 27 weeks, starting with asparagus in the spring and ending at Thanksgiving with the root crops. This year, the CSA added a winter share that extended the season into February.

How did you make the transition?

The farm really did not have a transition plan. Most of the transitions were a result of certain ideas either working or not. After the 1994 division of the farm into two corporations, Tait Farm, Inc., was operated by John Tait. He raised Basset hounds and Christmas trees. David and I formed the other corporation known as Tait Farm Foods, Inc. Prior to the new incorporation,

we had developed a 3–5 year business and marketing plan. This gets updated yearly with the help of the state funded Ben Franklin Transformation Project, designed to help manufacturing based businesses.

Marketing has been one of the major challenges in making the transition from direct to wholesale sales. Our marketing efforts have evolved from the local farmers market, to the roadside stand, pick-your-own, retail farm store, food brokers, mail-order business, and the Internet. Initially, a newsletter was sent out four times a year to customers to promote the asparagus crop, raspberry crop, apple crop, and Christmas trees. It originally contained farm info and seasonal recipes and later was expanded to show gift collections. This was the start of the mail order business, which today is a 16-page graphically designed catalog. (See www.taitfarmfoods.com).

We took two *planned* steps in developing and marketing our products. First, we developed unique products, including Fruit Shrubs and International Sauces for cooking, grilling, and stir fry. Second, we put a lot of effort into selecting images which gave us a very unique identity and attractive labels for the products and catalog. We wanted to create a visual presence that said “Why is this different?” It has worked very well for the company. We have developed a significant market with historical-site gift shops throughout the East. The Eastern National Park Service and Colonial Williamsburg are two of our largest accounts. The e-commerce site has increased mail order business by approximately 25percent since being developed in the fall of 2000.

I have not been embarrassed to ask for help in all nearly all areas of the business, including production, marketing, and accounting. As a result, I have several mentors who have helped the company and kept us from reinventing the wheel.

How did you acquire information on the alternative enterprise? The brothers started in 1980 relying on Extension Service

information. Information regarding organic production methods and marketing was lacking, so talking to others became the main source of information. They asked a lot of questions and searched out the answers, and made up the rest. They went to seminars, conferences, and workshops, purchased books and subscribed to magazines. The network they developed is still used today.

How do you price your products? We price all of the fresh and value-added according to different margin formulas. For the value-added products, we use the cost of product (food ingredients, containers, labor) plus indirect costs (electricity, insurance, water, etc.) plus a margin for profit to arrive at a wholesale price. The retail mark-ups are based on industry margins.

What went wrong? and How did you correct the situation?

The spring and summer rains of 1987 left the brothers with hundreds of pounds of frozen berries and no market. By looking for alternatives, they were able to develop the value-added product Raspberry Shrub. This has led to a whole different set of processed products and direct sales. Most likely, they would have stayed in the business of direct marketing perennial crops had this situation not occurred.

Value-added products led to better business planning and marketing management. We would have never obtained loans without the business plan. I found myself in charge of all production, marketing, and administration of the business without any training. Being able to ask people for help saved me from going frantic. These mentors have been a life-saver for me and continue to be a strong base of support and advice. The business plan developed in 1994 also provided a strong guide as to where we wanted the company to go.

What went right? How did you build on your success?

People liked our food products and they wanted more! We listened and expanded our

product line. The first gift baskets were nicely decorated and filled with various value-added items. This resulted in people buying a \$20–25 basket rather than just a \$7.50 bottle of Raspberry Shrub. These early successes paved the way for many of today's offerings.

My strength in the company is my creativity. I love to cook, so working with my product development person is a real joy. Coming up with the new ideas for the business is fun.

What would you have done differently?

If I had known early on all the turns my path would take, I would have been very tempted to walk away. But I have always felt that a certain sense of purpose, stewardship, and fate have kept me on the farm.

Where do you plan to go from here?

The company is focusing on expanding the offerings at the Harvest Shop, as well as the wholesale business. I hope to open up more market opportunities, including specialty and natural foods stores. I am also going to hire more brokers to sell our products in a broader geographical territory.

In the Harvest Shop, I plan to add more locally and regionally made products. My goal is to support as many local agricultural producers and artisans as possible. Another dream of mine is to have a display and cut-your-own flower garden, as well as a tea house located in the flower garden.

What would be the most important advice you would give other farmers considering an alternative enterprise?

- Don't hesitate to ask other people to help you. Most people are willing to be of assistance. This helps you avoid mistakes.
- Capital planning is a must. Develop a business plan that addresses management, growth, and other types of assistance. Do your homework before you start.

- Love what you do! You need a passion to succeed because this is “a road less traveled.”
- Develop a loyal local following. This will be your primary customer base.
- Be honest about what you don’t know because you will only deceive yourself!

How did you handle the liability concern?

I highly recommend using a good insurance company. Most farm policies do not cover value-added and other direct marketing enterprises. I have a \$5-million umbrella policy for Tait Farm Foods.

What do you dislike the most and like the most?

My dislikes include the administration, management of people, and financial stress. I like the creative aspects of new products, creating collaborations, and marketing. I love providing beautiful food, information, and inspiration to our customers.

Would you start this alternative enterprise business today after learning what is involved?

When one enters this type of an enterprise, you are not really sure where it will lead you. On bad days, I wish Tait Farm Foods were a simpler operation, more like it was in the early days. However, the creativity needed today to develop new products and new markets is very rewarding. Next time around, I would wish for less stress and loss.

What groups/organizations/activities have you joined or become involved in because of the alternative enterprises?

I have become involved in sustainable agriculture and business groups. I am Vice President for the Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture, which has about 1,500 members and holds an annual conference with 1,200 farmers and others attending. I am also a member of the Chamber of Commerce and Professional Business Women’s Group of State College, PA.

What conservation and education activities do you have?

The farm’s conservation activities are focused on sustainable/organic agriculture. We won the 2000 Pennsylvania Recycle Award for the re-use of composting bins and the composting of municipal leaves to provide soil fertility. One of the company’s goals is education through a series of workshops, talks, walks, and farm/garden tours.

What did your customers like the most about your product(s) or enterprise(s)?

The customers appreciate that we are a family farm, sell unique products, are local, and are committed to the environment. We symbolize and provide a connection to the land.

Would it be ok for people to contact you?
Yes

Do you want additional information? For more success stories and other information, see the website:

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/RESS/altenterprise>

The U.S. Department of Agriculture prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA’s TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, room 326W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

come and tell us about all the fun she had on our farm!

Would you start this alternative enterprise business today after learning what is involved?

Yes. The time required to manage an agritourism business along with a farm has resulted in some very long hours. Farmers and others in agriculture need to spend more time educating the public about how their food is produced. People are eager to learn about this, especially if they can learn it while they are having fun.

What groups/organizations/activities have you joined or become involved in because of the alternative enterprises?

We joined the North American Farmers Direct Marketing Association. We are becoming involved in conservation groups, wildlife associations and organizations to grow our nature-based tourism business.

What conservation and education activities do you have?

We are just beginning the conservation aspects of our agritainment business. We want to share the importance of caring for our land. If we take care of our land, the land will take care of us. We strive to preserve the soil and nature in all our farming

practices. Education, by having fun on the farm, is really our agritainment/ agrieducation enterprise. Dorothy's experience as an elementary teacher has resulted in the development of our education part of the business. We have an outdoor classroom to enhance indoor learning. This technique is applied in designing our corn mazes and other activities. All nine activities we have today have the education component. Since we are a family farm, the education focuses on food, agriculture, farm family lifestyle, health and the natural resources environment.

What did your customers like the most about your product(s) or enterprise(s)?

Customers have thanked us for the cleanliness of our farm, wholesome entertainment for the whole family, and the variety of activities for all ages to enjoy.

Would it be ok for people to contact you?

Yes.

Do you want additional information? For more success stories and other information, see <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical.RESS/altenterprise>

The U.S. Department of Agriculture prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, room 326W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Natural
Resources
Conservation Service

Resource Economics
and Social Sciences
Division

May 2001

Alternative Farm Enterprises – Agritourism Success Stories

‘Agritainment,’ Weddings, Reunions, and Organic Dairy Products

Interview with Tony and Carol Azevedo, Double T A-Cres
Ranch and Museum, 22368 West 2nd Avenue, Stevinson,
CA 95374, 209-634-0187, fax (209) 632-1965

What is the history of your farm and farming experience?

We’ve been dairying for 27 years. I’m second generation in the business in this country in that my father came from the Azores Islands of Portugal. But even back in the islands, my grandparents had dairy cows. We’ve been organic now for probably three years or a little bit longer, and we started our transition probably about five years ago.

The conventional dairying and farming was losing us money. We needed to find some way to turn things around other than doing what my neighbors were doing, which was expanding by doubling and tripling. We didn’t see them in any better shape than we were.

Describe the alternative enterprise in which you are presently engaged.

We have a collection of carriages, and the family also had a collection of paraphernalia—more than 100 kerosene lamps, for example. We organized these artifacts so groups of people could come out and see what we had. We held class reunions, company parties, and other activities along that line. We kind of fell into a situation in which our bread and butter turned out to be weddings.

The weddings are probably about 95% of what we do. Once the family has made an appointment with us, we take care of the details of putting on the wedding—the setup, the cleanup, other details. All the weddings are done with a

horse-drawn carriage. The things that we don’t do are the cake, the tuxedos, the flowers, the wedding dress. But other than that, we take care of all the details.

What made you decide to go into this enterprise?

Several years ago, we had a large anniversary party for Tony’s parents. About 500 people came, and they enjoyed the ranch. After that, we started getting calls wanting to know if we could do this or that for them.

We found out that the American public is looking for an adventure as long as the bathrooms are clean and the food is good. So when we do a wedding we focus not so much on the bride and the groom, but on their guests. If the guests have a good time, the bride and groom have a good feeling about what they did, and we keep getting more and more customers from there.

Describe your business planning process.

We critique every event. The first thing we found was that if this turned into a full-fledged business, we would quickly get tired of it. So, we focus it just from April to the end of October. We also focus it to one or two days a week.

Has anything gone wrong?

At the beginning, it took some time to get the logistics straight. The county [Merced County] was very firm about telling us that they could not

give us police protection, so we have to have our own bonded security. We have to have fire inspections to make sure we can take care of things like that. This is a very specialized type of facility even though I think there can be a facility like this every 50 miles. They would all do well.

Once when we were expecting 300 people, the beer cooler broke down. We had to hustle and find half barrels and chill down the beer. Sometimes, our security hasn't shown up. One time one of the cooks got in a car accident and almost didn't make it with the food.

What would you have done differently if you could start over again from the beginning?

We have ongoing discussions about having more indoor events. Even though we're open only at certain times of the year, it's hard to hit the right temperature all the time. The problem is that if you have a temperature-controlled building, it becomes harder to say no. Suddenly you find yourself open year-round.

Where do you plan to go from here?

We want to improve on what we have. We don't want to expand because it could become a monster that consumes us. We think that we could enhance the appearance of the ranch.

What is the most important advice you would give other farmers or ranchers considering an alternative enterprise?

1. Do what you like doing.
2. Be very aware of your neighbors. Farmers need a little time to adjust to a business like ours.

How about financing?

We built our business little by little because, first of all, we couldn't take this idea to a bank and say, "Hey, guess what we're going to do in the middle of Stevinson." It took the bankers a little time to adjust to agritainment as an enterprise.

How did you handle the liability concern?

You just need to have a million-dollar policy. That's all that's required. The liability insurance

that is hard to get is the insurance concerning horses. And we just kept our homeowner's policy. That was kind of a plus because a farm is a residence.

For a wedding, the client also has to provide additional insurance. They usually pick that up off their homeowner's policy. If there was an injury—and so far in 9 years we haven't had any—their policy would pay first before ours kicks in.

The strategy behind that is two-fold. First, it should not cost the client extra to pick up one night's entertainment. Second: If you have guests who get hurt, they have to sue their host before they sue us. This gives us a buffer for those people who are out there making a living suing other people. It also makes our clients more cautious.

What do you like most about the entertainment business and what do you dislike?

We like serving the public, we're forced to keep the yards neat and the flowerbeds cleaned up. We dislike watching mothers and brides go through the torture that they go through not realizing that they have nothing to worry about because we take care of it all. We give them a list of what they need to bring. If they go down the list and check it off, we'll do all the rest. We also dislike the cleanup work.

What groups/ organizations/activities have you joined or become involved in because of the entertainment business?

We were already boosters of FFA, 4H, Girl Scouts, Sober Grad Night, and the historical society. Now other museums are visiting our museum trying to figure out how they can generate more visitors.

Because of the kids, we were always involved with the community. Now we're starting to get international guests. We were invited to go to Ethiopia to see if we could help their farmers. There wasn't much we could teach them because they were on their third year of a drought. We thought it would be much more important to try to get some immediate aid. So when we came back

we focused on getting 38,000 pounds of whole powdered milk distributed there.

What conservation and education activities do you have on your farm?

We had a school program that we had targeted for fourth and fifth graders. The program was going so well that the schools were actually canceling their trips to Columbia [Columbia State Historical Park is a restoration of a Sierra-Nevada Gold Rush town] to come here. We hosted a hands-on day when kids would be split into groups and they would learn square dancing, how to shell and grind corn and other basic farm work. It was just a full day of early Western activities, but we had to quit it because of the liability. If we were to chase down a grant, it would be one that would allow us to open up that project again.

Do you do dairy tours?

We do the dairy tours in conjunction with the organics, but because we're not the average dairy it is very difficult to do tours as a California dairyman. We do organic dairy tours for the Ecological Farming Association and charge the visitors only if we do a lunch.

What do you think your customers like most about Double T A-Cres?

Most of our customers don't come from our local area. Most of them are from Turlock, Modesto, or beyond. We get a lot from the Bay Area, and I think that they're looking to go someplace different for their event that's more of an adventure. A lot of them have commented that they like the idea that they are off the main roads, their children are safe, they can enjoy the evening because they know their children can't get into the street, and no one is going to take off with them. They relax more.

Are you willing to share your information? Yes

Do you want additional information? For more success stories and other information, see the website:

www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/RESS/altenterprise

The U.S. Department of Agriculture prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, room 326W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Natural
Resources
Conservation Service

Resource Economics
and Social Sciences
Division

May 2002

Alternative Farm Enterprises – Agritourism Success Stories

Organic “Farm-to-Table” Herbs, Berries, and Vegetables

Interview with Beverly Morton-Billand, Patowmack Farm,
Loudoun County, Virginia, tel. 540-822-9017,
patowmackfarm@megapipelnet

What is the history of your farm and farming experience?

Patowmack Farm grew from our love for good and healthful food, the farming lifestyle, and Nature. During the course of several years, we have looked for niches that would help us continue farming when traditional farms are struggling to survive. My partner, Chuck, and I have been avid gardeners wherever we lived.

We purchased this 40-acre farm in 1986, high on a hill overlooking the Potomac River in Loudoun County, Virginia. The farm was named Patowmack following the old English spelling. George Washington ran a trading company in the area with the same name, and the Piscataway Indians migrated to an island opposite Point of Rocks, Maryland, in 1699. The farm is surrounded by wooded hills with a Potomac River view and the Catoctin Creek on the edge.

Early on, I took the Extension Service Master's Gardener course, which helped me develop and care for extensive gardens—herbs, vegetables, and flowers. I am the full-time farmer, and Chuck has two full-time jobs, the farm and his career, which takes him to Washington, D.C., on a commuter train.

Describe the alternative enterprises in which you are presently engaged?

Before we decided on our niche market, we did extensive research. First, we wanted to farm organically. The farm began with fresh herbs and vegetables. We now market elephant garlic, herbs, tomatoes, peppers, a variety of seasonal

vegetables; pick-your-own/market strawberries, blueberries, blackberries and raspberries; and organic free-range eggs (from our 80 free-range layers) and market all at our Wayside Market and in “Dinner in the Garden.” We grow several different herbs that are fresh cut with the customer at my side, 20 varieties of tomatoes, and 25 varieties of peppers. We produce value-added products, which extend the season. Adding jams, herbal vinegars, salsa, and pesto adds a longer period of revenue to our business.

What made you decide to go into the present alternative enterprises? What were your goal and vision?

We always wanted to be farmers. We were gaining considerable experience with our large suburban garden. We also knew that we wanted to be in the alternative small farm category. Plus, we raised herbs in our garden.

We have a very definite mission, vision, and goal. Our mission: Promote an economically viable, small, family-owned rural enterprise that provides safe, healthful, and highest quality foods while protecting the environment and countryside. Our vision: “Sustaining the environment while developing a strong family-owned business.” Our goals: (1) Develop value-added products; (2) Market directly to the clientele; (3) Educate the public about safe and healthful foods and the need to protect the environment; (4) Rely on and support family members and local employees to ensure the delivery of highest quality products and services;

and (5) Promote rural economic development by partnering with other rural enterprises.

How did you make the transition?

In the early 1980's, we had the opportunity to work overseas. During that time, we developed a strategy that would allow us to purchase a farm. During our 5 years in a foreign country, working as a nurse and for USAID, we researched the possibilities. Upon our return, we purchased the farm. We now produce herbs, berries, vegetables, and eggs on approximately 7 acres and run "Dinner in the Garden," a farm-to-table dining experience which overlooks the Potomac River.

What is your business-planning and goal-setting process?

Before purchasing our farm, I did an enormous amount of research about what products we could grow within our budget. I developed the business plan so that we could see a 5-year projection. The business plan is the basis for our decision making and operation. It has been revised many times and is a work in progress. The cost of production/investment had to be very low because we did not have unlimited capital.

We encourage people to share our farm and join us in fulfilling our dream. We communicate and listen to our customers. Our "Dinner in the Garden" restaurant provides a tremendous amount of information, as I visit all the tables every evening and listen to people's ideas for future planning.

How did you acquire your information on the alternative enterprises?

I do a considerable amount of research and information gathering, from which we develop our business plan. This has been done for every phase we have entered into. I research, read, go to libraries, attend special classes and seminars, talk to people, and visit markets. I joined associations such as the Virginia Herb Association, Chamber of Commerce, Loudoun Visitor and Convention Association, and Organic Trade Association, and I stay active by speaking

to interest groups. I subscribe to the leading publications in the area that I am interested in or that I am researching.

How do you market your business?

I have an extensive, low-cost marketing plan. In 2002, we plan to only spend \$100 per month to market all of our enterprises, including the restaurant. Marketing has been the most difficult area for me due to the lack of any formal education or experience in this area. I have attended classes and seminars where networking is done and the business can have the most exposure.

In 1997, the Loudoun Convention and Visitors Association held a conference on "Eco-Tourism: A Rural Escape to Northern Virginia," which was developed and presented to the Association by Patowmack Farm. This project gave increased exposure to the farm.

My major emphasis has been on press releases. I draft press releases several times a year and send them to the neighboring small-town newspapers as well as the Washington Post. I follow that up with telephone calls to obtain editors' reaction to the news release. I advertise in the local papers, the Loudoun County Convention and Visitors Bureau guide, and the local Chamber of Commerce paper, and I maintain a mailing list of about 3,000 customers. I mail a newsletter twice a year and send out a reminder card when the restaurant is open for the season.

Of course the best advertising is a satisfied customer. In our restaurant, we give a small gift such as preserves or similar organic products to customers celebrating birthdays, anniversaries, or other special occasions.

How do you price your products?

I visit local stands and markets and price to be competitive, even though our products are organic. I also consider my production costs (which, because we grow organically, tend to be higher), especially the value-added jams, vinegars, salsas, and pesto. I occasionally give

quantity discounts to customers. I do not bargain for price. I check the wholesale price of products. I look at the national listing of organic wholesale prices. Finally, I determine what the market will bear! I have been too low at times and too high at times. I make the necessary adjustments.

What went wrong? And why? How did you correct the situation?

When I first started growing herbs I produced some of them in volume such as elephant garlic. I found it was difficult to market these volumes from my farm. I re-evaluated the herb business plan and decided to increase my variety and sell smaller quantities at my Wayside Market and to restaurants.

Marketing surprised us. I soon found that I was not prepared and had not researched or studied the direct marketing business. So I became involved in the Mid-Atlantic Direct Marketing Association and went to seminars, workshops, and conferences. As I look back, I should have taken some marketing courses since I had no experience or training in that area.

Advertising is a must. We found that our advertising budget was too small, but we could not do anything about it. Now, although we have developed a marketing plan, it is still low cost. This aspect of the business will continually be revisited, especially as the restaurant grows and the goal of promoting the wayside stand strengthens.

Labor supply has been a challenge. I am not large enough to keep full-time employees, and as age creeps up I find that working from sunup to sundown requires assistance. Because I could not provide full-time employment, I went to neighboring farms and found that the need for labor was the same. By working cooperatively, we were able to provide full-time jobs for the laborers. Everybody was happy.

What went right? And why? How did you build on your success?

I communicate with my customers at the Wayside Market and through the mail. We ask

for feedback and suggestions. We make changes and improvement based on this feedback. One needs to combine this with "watching what you are doing and feeling" and build upon the successes. This is how "Dinner in the Garden" was started.

We participate in the Loudoun County Farm tours. In the spring tour of 1998, we served organic soup and samplings to people visiting our farm. The visitors asked us to start serving dinners. By mid-1998, we cleaned up the Wayside Market and set up tables to serve 20 people four evenings a month. In 1999, we expanded to outdoor open air seating on a terrace, which provided an exquisite view of the Potomac River. Here we could serve about 40 people four times a month. We set up a tent on the terrace in 2002. The Washington Post did a feature story in its Food Section in 2000, and we have been full every night since. Now, we are starting construction on a pavilion, commercial kitchen, tent, and gazebo that will seat 125 people.

What would you have done differently?

I would have learned more about growing the crops before I started producing so many for market. I would have taken some marketing courses to better understand how to develop and implement a marketing plan. This has been a very difficult learn-as-you-go process for us. I would have started to partner with neighbors and others sooner since the benefits are so great for all.

Where do you plan to go from here?

Our main focus for 2002 is to expand our organic Farm to Table enterprise. Working with the local government to establish a rural enterprise has been a challenge. Throughout the years, we have made significant changes that have enhanced our viability and created an opportunity for others to share the experience of this serene lifestyle. Completing our construction so that we can open with a new facility in 2003 will be a test of durability. This must be done

while still running a successful business during the current season. Marketing the "Dinner in the Garden" will be different for 2003. We must market to a different audience if we want to add weddings and corporate parties. Better marketing our pick-your-own enterprise, partnering with local businesses to develop and market products, and expanding the value-added enterprise will benefit our overall goals. We will continue to partner with other local businesses to enhance the rural economy. We make every effort to partner with other businesses, such as those promoting overnight stays with bed and breakfasts, we serve Loudoun County wines, and we encourage customers to visit sites and farms in the County. We are all different farmers, but we can share information, customers, successes, and failures. This benefits us and gives the consumer more choices.

How do you obtain your financing?

The house was on the property in 1986 when we purchased it. We built the barn (storage for hay and equipment) and later the Wayside Market when we recognized the need for an onsite sales point. The chicken coop is a modified old outbuilding that accommodates the hens. The barn is still waiting to be finished because other production cost needs have been more pressing. We have chosen to minimize our debt; therefore funding becomes a challenge every spring. Offering diversified products and a longer season helps extend the revenue period. Funding the large farm-to-table expansion is a risk and borrowing money will be a factor.

What do you consider the most important advice you would give other farmers considering an alternative enterprise?

- Don't be afraid to dream the possibilities.
- Have a strong business plan.
- Remember, you are the CEO of this business; run it like a business.
- Market your products, experiences and yourself well.

- Most of all, laugh, enjoy, smile, and have fun.

How did you handle the liability concern?

We obtain our insurance through a local independent insurance broker at a cost of approximately \$1,200 per year for a \$3 million umbrella policy. We keep the farm clean and clear of debris. I rope off areas during large events. We inform the public about the dangers of farm equipment and the importance of being cautious. We have not had a problem, and we don't have areas where accidents are waiting to happen. I also make extensive use of signage on farm tour days and for our Wayside Market customers.

Do you mind sharing your promotional material?

I have promoted my enterprises in several ways: newsletters twice a year; postcards; press releases to local, regional and national papers; speaking before groups; and advertisements. Finally, I am an advocate of producing healthy food and a safe environment. As a result, I am involved in interviews and asked to speak on occasion. For example, the Washington Post would do a story only if it involved more farms. So they came out and did a story on three farms in Loudoun county. I have been interviewed on television about USDA organic regulations and visited by Australia's Secretary of Agriculture. I have been interviewed by three national television stations on small farms and alternative agriculture. I was on "The Morning Show" in 1996 as a follow-up to the story in the Washington Post. This has all helped market my business and enterprises.

What do you dislike the most and like the most?

I like meeting customers and discussing organic foods. I dislike the stress caused by the lack of finances to carry out the business plan as designed. This especially occurs in the spring

when there are not enough funds to purchase all the crops and inputs needed for the farm.

Would you start this alternative enterprise business today after learning what is involved?
Definitely yes! I am living a dream!

What groups/organizations/activities have you joined or become involved in because of the alternative enterprises?

I belong to the Loudoun County Convention and Visitors Association, the Chamber of Commerce, Mid-Atlantic Direct Marketing Association, and Organic Trade Association; I am involved in Extension agencies; and I was a former member of the county's Agriculture Advisory Commission. In 1999 I was recognized as the Loudoun County Agri-Business of the Year, and in 2000 I received the Loudoun County Small Business of the Year Award. Patowmack Farm was photographed and featured in the Loudoun County Chamber of Commerce book *Loudoun County: Blending Tradition with Innovation*.

What conservation and education activities do you have?

I am a certified organic grower of vegetables and berries and producer of free-range eggs. In 1996,

The U.S. Department of Agriculture prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, room 326W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

we joined in partnership with the Virginia Department of Forestry to develop a Forest Stewardship Plan for the farm. Our nature trail along the Catoctin Creek identifies 25 species of trees for our dinner guests and other customers to enjoy. We have a thermal heat pump to conserve energy.

What do your customers like the most about your place?

Our customers like the freshness of our products. We pick the herbs fresh upon order. Customers like to know where their food is produced and who produces it. Customers really like feeling part of the farm family. We are marketing a relationship with the customer as well as an edible product.

Would it be ok for people to contact you? Yes, we welcome sharing information.

Do you want additional information? For more success stories and other information, go to: www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/RESS/altenterprise



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Natural
Resources
Conservation Service

Resource Economics
and Social Sciences
Division

March 2001

Alternative Farm Enterprises – Agritourism Success Stories

Horse-Drawn Wagon Rides

Interview with Larry Edmonds, Three-Rock Ranch,
Spokane, Washington 99026, 509-466-4936,
3rock@omnicast.net, www.3rock.com

What is the history of your farm and farming experience?

My wife and I purchased this ranch of 25 acres 15 miles northwest of Spokane in 1980. I worked for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Spokane, and the ranch allowed us to pursue three career goals: living in the country, ranching, and a full-time job for me. We purchased the ranch to raise Monmouth Jack stock, which are horse-sized donkeys.

Describe the alternative enterprise(s) in which you are presently engaged.

I provide wagon hayrides during the Christmas season in a residential area of Spokane, which is nicely decorated for the season. I use two Clydesdale mares for raising the Monmouth Jacks and for pulling the wagon. I initially provided free wagon rides at church functions, Grange events, and other community activities.

For the Christmas hayrides, I operate from the second Saturday in December to December 30.

When I started the hayride business, I set myself up at a corner of the neighborhood and waited for the people to come. Now 90 percent of the riders make reservations by telephone or e-mail to avoid waiting, especially in cold weather.

My rides are 30 minutes long, and I schedule five rides each night. If the temperature drops to zero or if it gets too windy, I cancel the ride. If it snows, I schedule more rides each night.

I replaced my old hay wagon with a brightly painted trolley that has a roof. We have lights and music powered by a small 1,500-watt inverter powered by two dry cell batteries. Over 60 percent of my customers return each year.

I have a helper. This young man started when he was 10 and would help for a free ride. Now, I pay him to help me.

What made you decide to go into the present alternative enterprise(s)?

Neighbors and friends started to come out to the ranch to see the mules, horses, and Jacks. I had an old wagon, and I would give them rides. It was very low budget. Once, I was at the local county fair with the mares, and I was asked if I could haul people from the parking lot to the fair. We gave free rides to several hundred people in the following 3 hours. Also, these people were very interested in how the horses were harnessed, hooked to the wagon, and driven.

How did you make the transition?

I made some improvements by putting a fifth wheel on the wagon so I could turn shorter more safely. Thinking about safety led me naturally to think about liability, so I bought insurance for \$400.00 to protect myself and the family. Insurance started to increase, so I switched to a different insurance, which costs us \$700.00 today.

Then, 12 years ago I started the Christmas wagon hayride business. I obtained a business license and went to work. I advertised in the paper and on the radio, local TV, handed out business cards, and put an ad in the Nickel. I was even on national TV one time.

How do you market your services?

I advertise in the entertainment section of the local newspaper, put up flyers, and hand out business cards to everyone I see. I place a 2-inch by 2-inch ad in the local paper eight times during the season. The ad runs Friday through Sunday for a total cost of \$630.00. It reads "Horse Drawn Christmas Lights Tour, call 509-466-4936." Now I put in my e-mail address. My wife takes care of all the appointments.

This ad generates about 200 to 300 calls a week. I use the radio to market free rides. I have a total of 1,000 to 1,200 customers per year.

On some occasions, I provide free rides for senior citizens and the disabled.

How do you price your products?

I charge \$5.00 for adults and \$2.50 per child ages 3 to 12. For groups such as nursing homes and others, I charge one price for the whole group rather than per person.

What went wrong? Why? How did you correct the situation?

I spent too much money on advertising. I would spend about \$400.00 a year on radio alone, plus newspaper ads. I found out that flyers, business cards, and advertising only in the entertainment section of the local newspaper have been the best advertising value.

I had to buy manure bags for the horses. One year the horses messed the street in front of a house that was having a party. It turned out terrible. I cleaned the carpets in the whole house.

What went right? Why? How did you build on your success?

I have a 60-percent return rate on customers. They tell me that they keep coming back not for the ride

but because of me. Building personal relationships with people is very important. I guess I just have a very friendly personality that people appreciate. I don't rush the customers. I am on time. Kids drive the team and build self esteem, and I give a little talk about the area and about ranching. They love it.

My focus is on the ride, horses, Christmas music, and Christmas decorations. Thus, I do not serve cakes, cookies, or hot cider. That would take more help and take away from the ride. Also, the health regulations are complex and expensive to comply with in Spokane.

What would you have done differently?

I could charge more.

Where do you plan to go from here?

I plan to get a new wagon that's easier to get into. I need a new team of horses; my mares are very old. My neighbor has started to raise bison. We are talking about giving sleigh rides through the herd. We are going to check this out during the winter of 2000-01.

What would be the most important advice you would give other farmers considering an alternative enterprise?

1. Have, or develop, people skills.
2. Look at the enterprise as supplemental income.
3. Cost it out.
4. Pick a business that makes sense.
5. Study ads in your papers to determine what you want to do.
6. Get your niche and do it well.
7. Price low enough to keep the competition out when there is not enough business to go around.

How did you handle the liability concern?

I purchased insurance through my local agent.

What do you dislike the most and like the most?
I dislike the liability aspect of the enterprise. I work with the horses all day, but there are so many people around and something could go wrong. I like the kids the most. This is a non-monetary reward that cannot be measured. I get an opportunity to meet special people and groups. One example is an entire wagon of 22, a nationally known group called the "Singing Nuns" who played their guitars and sang the entire trip.

Would you start this alternative enterprise business today after learning what is involved?
Sure!

Do you want additional information? For more success stories and other information, see the website:

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/RESS/altenterprise>

The U.S. Department of Agriculture prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, room 326W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.



Alternative Farm Enterprises – Agritourism Success Stories

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Natural
Resources
Conservation Service

Resource Economics
and Social Sciences
Division

May 2001

Cool's Pond—Fee Fishing, Farm Stand, and Crafts

Interview with Sam and Barbara Cool, 14425 Edgemount,
Smithsburg, Maryland 21783, 301-824-6353,
scool6353@aol.com, Web site: www.cool-homes.com

What is the history of your farm and farming experience?

This farm has been in Sam's family since 1878. There were 102 acres in orchards and raspberries for many years. Now, the farm is 70 acres—40 acres in orchards and 30 in woodland. Sam grew up on the farm and joined the Air Force at the age of 18. He moved back to the farm in 1975 after 10 years in the Air Force. At that time, his Dad and Mom raised several different fruits and berries. Today, we have peaches, apples, raspberries—and the fish.

Describe the alternative enterprises in which you are presently engaged.

We have two catch-and-release, fee-fishing ponds. We rent fishing rods and sell bait, sodas, candy bars, and other prepackaged foods. Three years ago we started tent camping for groups who want to fish all night. At this time, groups—seniors, YMCA, church, special education—started to come, and we prepare barbeque lunches and dinners for them.

We also make wooden miniature replicas of people's homes, artfully scaled and hand painted in detail. This year, our newest venture has been to duplicate homes as birdhouses. See us at *cool-homes.com*. In June, we will advertise in *Country Sampler* magazine. These crafts have proved to be unique gifts and cherished keepsakes. We have shipped this work all over the country.

What made you decide to go into the present alternative enterprises? What were your goals and vision?

We were forced into developing another source of income after our crop was frozen out. We looked at ways to make the resources on the farm bring in additional income. Sam's father had put in an acre pond in the 1950's with Soil Conservation Service (now Natural Resources Conservation Service) assistance. The pond is 15 feet deep and clear, and it is fed year-round by a 55-degree spring. It has never gone dry. The pond's main purpose was to provide irrigation water during drought. The cold water is perfect for trout.

How did you make the transition?

We did our production research—reading magazines and research reports, talking to other aquaculture entrepreneurs, etc. We got a lot of technical assistance help from the University of Maryland and their alternative enterprise Extension agent. We decided to raise catfish, trout, and bass and added local bluegills and crappies. As the business grew, we added another half-acre pond above the older pond.

We also added the open-air market and enclosed the roadside stand. We sell in-season fruits, berries, vegetables, crafts, eggs, milk, and baked goods. We use this store for renting rods and selling baits and sodas and prepackaged snacks. Some people asked if they could tent camp, and now we have campers during the summer. We use an honor system at the pond to collect fees. People who come and fish at the pond simply drop their money through the slot of a lock box. We have come home after a 3-day weekend to as much as \$200, even though a lot of people misread the "fee fishing" sign for "free fishing."

Groups started to come and Sam likes to barbeque, so we have provided this service on several occasions.

We did not have a business plan. We would think about an idea and discuss it over breakfast. Then, we would go ahead and test the idea. We did a little bit at a time—take small steps so if something went wrong we would be able to pay for it with side jobs or withstand the financial cost using the other enterprises without jeopardizing the farm. We still use the same decision process today.

We did essentially all of our own financing. If we did not have the money, we did not do it or we did it for less. We had a couple of bad crop years and developed the craft business in order to survive on the farm. It works out great because most of the craft business is during the winter when farm chores are at a minimum.

How did you market your products?

We started out by advertising in the local paper thinking we would be overrun by people on the first day. Not a single person came. We have found the "Cool's Fishing Pond" sign and word of mouth are our best advertisers. We spend about \$200 a year on a classified ad in our local newspaper. We developed a brochure and placed it in the visitor centers along the Interstate.

If we want to open a new market, we talk to the group. This is much more effective than writing a letter or putting an article in the paper. Taking pictures of people fishing and sending them to the newspaper is the best free advertisement. Local newspapers are always looking for stories about people.

How do you price your products?

We just look at our costs and then set a price that will turn a profit. For example, we started fee fishing at \$3.00, but we were losing money at that price so we quickly increased it to our current rate of \$5.00. Now, we charge \$5.00 whether you fish all day or for 20 minutes. We charge children and adults the same fee. We rent rods for \$2.50 and sell bait at \$2.50 a container. We sell frozen 9-inch fresh berry pies for \$6.50. We list Cool-Home products on our Website, www.cool-homes.com.

What went wrong? And Why? How did you correct the situation?

Our first idea was to raise caged trout for the wholesale restaurant market. But we found that we raised enough fish for only about a one-month supply. So, we let the trout out of the cages and put up a sign that said "fee fishing." Our business has been growing ever since. When we first started, we charged a modest fee to fish and a separate fee for each fish caught. Soon, we found out that too many fish were being caught too quickly. We were being fished out. So, the business quickly became catch-and-release fishing. People could still keep fish, but now we charge \$5 for every fish kept.

What went right? And Why? How did you build on your success?

The fishing enterprise has saved the farm financially several times over the past 15 years due to crop failures, low prices and droughts. People love to be outdoors. We have a beautiful view of a rural farming valley. People love the peace and quiet. They love to see their children catch fish or enjoy catching fish themselves.

I purchased my trout rather than obtaining them from the state fisheries. I have a Maryland "fee fishing" license. This eliminates the problem of having a fishing license to fish at my pond. In Maryland, any State stocked fishing requires an angler to have a license before he or she can fish.

What would you have done differently?

Nothing!

Where do you plan to go from here?

In the past two years, we have gone into the craft business. We use our Web site to market our crafts, and we ship them all over the country. This has made up for the bad years. It is hard to make a good living on a farm our size without these alternative enterprises. They have carried the farm. We hate to say it but the small family farm is going to be a thing of the past.

What would be the most important advice you would give other farmers considering an alternative enterprise?



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Natural
Resources
Conservation Service

Resource Economics
and Social Sciences
Division

October 2000

Alternative Farm Enterprises – Agritourism Success Stories

Catering, Picnics, Weddings, and Meeting Facilities

Interview with Randy Nixon, 2800 Nixon's Farm Lane, P.O.
Box 70, West Friendship, MD 21794, 410-442-2151,
nixonsfarm@nixonsfarm.com

What is the history of your farm and farming experience?

My Dad and Mom purchased this farm of 165 acres in 1952 as a place to raise the family. It was a working, diversified farm. Today, we lease out about 90 acres for corn silage and all but 20 acres is used for hay. In 1952, we lived in the barn because the house was so old that it toppled down. Dad converted one part of the stalls in the barn into the living area, and the cattle were at the other end.

Describe the alternative enterprise(s) in which you are presently engaged.

We are a service business. We provide food, open space for entertainment, weddings, conferences, retreats, and seminars. There are basketball courts, swings, slides, and jungle jims, a water dunk tank, open space for soccer and ball games, and hiking paths. We mainly serve groups: church groups, corporate picnics, family reunions, other organizations. Last week we fed 2,000 people, and this coming week we are feeding 3,000 people. My Mom is the head chef but does not spend much time in the kitchen now. She is 74. I operate as a restaurant 4-5 times a year as a promotion for the business.

What made you decide to go into the present alternative enterprises?

My father died in 1972. My mother did some research and found the most valuable use of land is recreation. She said, "What can you do with a farm?" She developed the farm into a catering

business and a recreational farm. As she said, "We are growing people!" And you can keep on growing people because they grow forever. This was her view, and in the late 1970's we started this service. We first started with church groups and just grew to where we are today with weddings, seminars, business meetings and conferences. My mother loved to cook. So she went to work.

How did you make the transition?

My Dad formed the Small Businessman's League of Baltimore. This League was formed because Black and Jewish businessmen could not join the Chamber of Commerce. As the group grew in size they migrated to the farm for meetings and a place to go on Sunday with the family. It became the League's Country Club, and a membership fee was charged. My mother loved to cook and so as the people began to come she felt a responsibility to feed them. The business just grew from there. I was a corporate lawyer for 5 years and quit to run and grow this people business. I do not have any formal training to operate and manage a service business such as this. I read, listen, and talk to people in the business. Most of all I listen to my customers. I have been operating this business for 13 years.

Describe your decisionmaking process.

We went through the strategic planning process with goals, objectives, and mission. That is important for the long run. But the "Battle Plan" is the important one. It shows every single aspect of this business. From the minute detail of how to take

a telephone call, to an inquiry about the use of the facility, to how to order food for the kitchen. Every staff position has a job description and what it entails. I have this in hard copy and in the computer. I have developed this over the years. This runs the business.

How do you obtain financing?

I just obtained a loan to build a “state of the art” kitchen, remodel the upstairs to the barn, septic, bathrooms, walk in freezer, etc., for \$1.5 million. It was difficult to get the loan. I had a business plan and history of business activity. But it was still difficult to convey to them that I am a great manager and that this is a sound business.

How do you price your products?

School groups are charged \$10.00 per person, and they get a meal and fun activities depending upon the season. Weddings are \$50.00 per person. Retreats, seminars, and conferences cost \$30.00 to \$70.00. Corporate meetings are \$20.00-\$40.00.

What went wrong? And Why? How did you correct the situation?

When Mom first started the business, she hired caterers. Their quality was inconsistent, and several other catering problems arose. She kicked all the caterers off the farm and started to do her own cooking. A person needs to have firm goals but also to be flexible about achieving objectives to accomplish those goals. There is a Spanish saying, “Act boldly, and unforeseen forces will come to your aid.” Or as they say in business, “Jump off into a business and build your wings on the way down.”

What went right? And Why? How did you build on your success?

I make sure my staff and I deliver a very consistent service that will have a very good predictable outcome. I do a lot of teaching in my work to both the staff and the people who visit the farm. Consistency is the most important product. We do things one way when serving people, and that is *my* way. I have received comments from people that my staff speak and act as if I am sitting on their

shoulder. I team up with entrepreneurs in the area—like rural golf courses. Businessmen come here for the meeting, then we take them to the golf course 10 minutes away and then they come back here for dinner. I train my staff in food service at a cost of \$1,000 per person. This has gotten me several contracts because my competitors are not as fully qualified as I am.

We have a rural setting to sell and we make the most of it! And, it is working.

What would you have done differently?

One needs to be sure to maintain the courage to succeed in your business. Don’t get sidetracked. I hired a manager but did not have a clear set of plans and responsibilities developed, so the manager could not help me achieve my goals. It took several years before I was ready to jump in and take over the management myself. A plan must be in place to accomplish your goals; otherwise you will get sidetracked by others, including paid consultants. You need to process all the information you receive in the context of your goals.

Where do you plan to go from here?

My next step to begin government and institutional feeding. I plan to grow this business into a \$16–20 million a year food and conference service business.

What would be the five most important pieces of advice you would give other farmers considering an alternative enterprise?

1. Market your product
2. Be consistent
3. Be efficient
4. Provide the service one way—*my* way!!
5. Have trained staff.

How did you handle the liability concern?

We purchase our insurance through regular agencies. I called several insurance agents in search of specialty coverage for a theme park or pick-your-own business. The prices varied considerably. I have \$2 million umbrella coverage today, and I plan to increase it. It costs me about \$4,000 a year.

- Don't put pressure on people. Give them freedom to fish. Be helpful but not judgmental. Help them make the most of their experience. Help them feel welcome.
- Remember: Your customers are your guests.
- Do your research. Contact the NRCS, Extension, state university system. Talk to others, and go to seminars.
- Be realistic. Ask how this enterprise fits into the family goals. What are the start-up costs? What are the labor requirements?
- Build and learn. You will never develop the perfect plan. Don't grow too fast.
- Maintain the water and the grounds to keep them neat and clean.
- Keep good records and use them to determine what does and does not work.
- Use a guest book to get names for mailings.
- Have a good source of water if you are raising fish.

How did you handle the liability concern?

We have a \$1 million liability policy on the

farm. It covers the pond because aquaculture is considered a part of agriculture for insurance purposes. The insurance is very low cost.

Do you mind sharing your promotional material? (Including your prices.)

We tag some fish. Anglers who catch a tagged fish can claim a prize (\$10-25, or fishing equipment). This has really stimulated interest.

What do you dislike the most and like the most?

Our favorite part is meeting the people. It's something to see the little kids come in and catch their first fish. Some people who came when they were kids themselves are now bringing their own kids back to learn to fish.

We dislike the difficulty of working with the state and county governments. They are not very supportive of helping farmers implement non-agricultural businesses on their farm. We tried to put up rustic cabins but forgot the idea after seeing all the county requirements. State and county requirements were inconsistent.

Would you start this alternative enterprise business today after learning what is involved?

We farm by choice. But in today's world, our farm is pretty small. Doing what we've done with the pond, crafts, and store has helped us keep the farm. We are having a great time. It gets hectic at times but it is very rewarding!

Would it be ok for people to contact you?

Yes!

Do you want additional information? For more success stories and other information, see the website: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/RESS/altenterprise>

The U.S. Department of Agriculture prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, room 326W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Natural
Resources
Conservation Service

Resource Economics
And Social Sciences
Division

Alternative Farm Enterprises – Agritourism Success Stories

Sylvanus Farms--Farm Stays, Hunting Leases, Fishing, Conservation, Education

September 2001

Interview with Becky Kelley, 1741 Creamery Road, Afton,
Iowa 50830; 641-347-5310; kelley@mddc.com

What is the history of your farm and farming experience?

“Sylvanus” means woods, and it also refers to the Greek God of Woods and Trees. We manage Sylvanus Farms’ 600 acres on three farms in Union County, southern Iowa, which we purchased over the last 40 years. We raised the traditional cattle and hogs for 20 years and corn and soybeans for 30 years. The land was put into the Conservation Reserve Program in 1990. My husband Paul recently retired (1996) from the Burlington Northern Railroad, and I retired from being a former Certified Dental Assistant. We have planted native grasses, trees, and riparian buffers and instituted wildlife habitat management. The farms are in a state of use similar to what they were when they were first homesteaded in the mid-1800’s.

Describe the alternative enterprises in which you are presently engaged?

The conservation and habitat improvement on the farms are conducive to wildlife such as deer and turkeys. Neighbors and others were always asking permission to hunt, and of course some did not. We said yes to some and no to others, and it became controversial. In 1999, an out-of-state hunter leased the 600 acres and sold deer hunting packages. We reserved the right for turkey, pheasant, and quail hunting. The hunters asked if we could provide lodging, and we said yes. We had purchased a railroad crew car (sleeping and eating facilities for four railroad workers) in 1996 for relatives to sleep in during visits to the farm. We changed the crew

car—what we now call our “Bunkhouse”—to include a kitchen, bath, television, and dining facilities for four. I provide the linens, towels, utensils, and basic household supplies.

What made you decide to go into the present alternative enterprises? What were your goal and vision?

Our county rents cabins on Three-Mile Lake near us. These cabins are always full in both summer and winter. In January 2000, the county asked us if they could send the overflow to us since we had the Bunkhouse. We said yes and immediately found out that we also had an overflow lodging problem. We finished off the upper level of the building we had constructed over the crew car to increase the lodging space. We call this the “Loft.” It includes a sleeping area for six people, kitchen/dining area, bathroom, and living room. We also built a fish cleaning station and picnic areas, installed grills, and built a bonfire pit. We have several bird feeding stations for various species, including hummingbirds. We have constructed birdhouses for bluebirds, wrens, and wood ducks. We have cut walking trails to our ponds and through the woods. All of the trails are mowed and maintained for easy access and use. The woods and trails are very conducive to wildlife sightings and birdwatching. One pond is stocked with bass and bluegill, while the other ponds contain a variety of fish, a number of which have been placed there by our friends and guests.

How did you make the transition?

We moved slowly as the business grew. We started with two to three hunters for three to four days or three to four fishermen for two or three days on two or three weekends a month. This has grown from one-night stays to two-week family vacations. In August 2001, our Loft and Bunkhouse were in use 28 out of 31 days, and only one weekend is left in June 2002. This growth rate over the past 20 months has allowed me to learn aspects of the lodging and hospitality business such as scheduling, bookkeeping, room cleanup and maintenance, personal time management, and catering to the customers to make sure their stay is as pleasant as it can be. Being able to find out how to meet every little need of our guests to make them feel welcome and have a very happy time is our major goal.

What is your decisionmaking process?

The lodging business has grown without any real planning other than providing our guests the best experience possible. The demand has been greater than our supply of space. Paul and I discuss the larger construction type projects that we need to accomplish. As far as day-to-day needs, I make the decisions, which are really in response to requests from our guests. I ask them what they need to make their visit more pleasant.

What is your business planning and goal setting process?

We don't have a formal business plan or process. I have a two-year degree in Business Administration. I use my training continually in running and growing our business. I do have a business plan outline, which I developed if our banker asks us for information.

How did you acquire your information on the alternative enterprises?

I developed and taught a seminar course at our local community college on non-traditional agricultural enterprises. I found local landowners were very skeptical of this type of income-producing opportunity, so I decided to act upon the opportunity rather than let it slip away. Now that I

have been successful, maybe others will be more inclined to try some new enterprise. This has given me a very solid base for organizing, operating, and managing our non-traditional enterprise.

How do you market your lodging business?

I have done very little marketing outside the farm. Our business started from referrals and continues to grow. I leave my business card with many people. I focus my efforts on relationship marketing, and my guests do the marketing by word of mouth. A satisfied customer is our best marketing tool. Paul and I take every opportunity to make our guests feel welcome and very special. We provide the best personal service we can to each individual.

How do you price your products?

I price my lodging so families can afford to come on the fishing trips rather than just the father taking a trip "with the boys." We are developing our business to meet the needs of a family. We could probably charge more, but we are very happy with the revenue we receive. We are part of the community and plan our business to support and grow the community.

What went wrong? And why? How did you correct the situation?

We underestimated the capability of our plumbing in the Bunkhouse, mostly due to the age of the faucets and water lines, since they were all original to the crew car. We had to make some fast repairs. One guest acted in a very indignant way and was asked to leave. As a result, we put up signage and guidelines about what is expected of our guests and there have been no further problems.

What went right? And why? How did you build on your success?

Paul and I are very interested in people. What do they think? What do they do? As a result, our guests feel very welcome and receive the best service we can provide. This is measured by our repeat business; one fisherman returned five times with his family in 2000. With all the seasonal activities of fishing (water and ice), hunting, camping, and fall foliage, we are busy every month

except March when the ice is going out on the lake and there is no hunting season open. We enjoy making our guests feel extra special.

What would you have done differently?

We receive numerous inquiries about cabin lodging. However, people don't turn us down when they find out we have a Loft and a Bunkhouse. I would have considered building a few cabins if I had realized the need for lodging in this area was so great.

Where do you plan to go from here?

The demand is very high in our area for lodging, and there is no competition. We are now building a lodge with four bedrooms, four baths, a fireplace, a kitchen, a television, lounge and dining areas. The lodge is located on a ridge overlooking a small rural town in the distance, beautiful oak timber, hills, and a pond. The lodge will be completed at the end of 2001, and it is already rented for December (Five months before it is completed.). We have a laundry facility in each location; although this facility is primarily for laundering the bedding and linens, our guests may use it, but only with special permission and for special reasons, such as the children fell into the lake or pond and soiled all their clothes.

Where did you get your information on how to build your lodges?

Paul lays out the dimension of the building, and I began designing the inside. I draw out the room sizes, storage, kitchen, bath, and lounging areas. We have not hired consultants on layout and design.

How do you obtain your financing?

We have been using our own capital except for the large projects such as finishing off the Loft and constructing the Lodge. We tried to obtain funding from Federal and State grants or loans. We found no grants available, and government agencies absolutely were not interested in funding our enterprise. So we went to our local banker who supported us.

What do you consider the most important advice you would give other farmers considering an alternative enterprise?

1. All family members need to be included in the decision and must be in favor of the enterprise.
2. Some family members must love to work with the public, as you are in constant contact with people.
3. Be realistic about the cost of getting started on a new project; it's easy to underestimate the cost.
4. Keep good records and document events
5. Enjoy what you are doing, or get out of the business.

How did you handle the liability concern?

We carry a \$1 million umbrella policy. This was obtained from the same insurance agent and company that insures our farm.

Do you mind sharing your promotional material?

I want to prepare a brochure for our guests to take back with them to share with their friends. We plan to do this after the new lodge is completed. Now, I just hand them my business cards. Again, our biggest promotion effort is to make our guests feel special.

What do you dislike the most and like the most?

I dislike cleaning the facilities, but this is the most important job. I am known for very clean lodging and for the special personal touches I give the place. I like meeting all the different people no matter how young. For example, one guest is a professional turtle trapper. It was such an educational experience for us to see how he traps turtles and how he can tell the ecology of a pond or lake by what kind of turtles turn up in the traps. He sells the turtles mostly in the Far East and Australia, usually live, where they are considered delicacies.

Would you start this alternative enterprise business today after learning what is involved?

Yes.

What groups/organizations/activities have you joined or become involved in because of the alternative enterprises?

We have been very active in our community and serving on national boards. We have not joined any additional groups or organizations pertaining to our business.

What conservation and education activities do you have?

I have displayed state publications on wildlife in rural Iowa that the guests can use as they walk the trails, fish in the ponds, and look for birds, flowers, and trees. I have a state plant identification handbook that can be used to identify the plants. The children are very interested in doing that activity. The state has a poster showing all the plants and animals in Iowa by different areas such as dry prairies, wetlands, mesic prairies, and oak savannahs. I make sure every child receives one of these.

Paul has been involved in conservation his entire life. He has been planting trees on all the farms from the day he purchased the land. Since the 1980's, the farm bills have had several new conservation programs to help farmers improve their soil, water, plants, animals and air. Paul has been very involved not only on our farm, but as a member of our local RC&D (Southern Iowa Resource Conservation & Development Area, Inc.). He is also President of the North Central Region of RC&Ds and a member of the National Board of RC&Ds in Washington D.C. These programs were used to transition the farm from traditional agriculture into non-traditional uses. We are enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program to retire cropland and return it grasses, which

encourage wildlife. The Wetland Reserve Program helped us restore 20 previously drained acres; this land now attracts waterfowl and wildlife, as do the six ponds that we have on the three farms. We used the upland and stream buffer program to enhance water quality and wildlife habitat, and the agroforestry program to increase forestry on the farms. Our long-range plan is to have sufficient wildlife on the farm to provide the needed income through hunting and lodging so we do not need to use our land for crop and livestock production.

What do your customers like the most about your place?

This is best shown by the comments in our guest book:

- "Awesome."
- "Best place I have ever stayed and will ever stay."
- "You're the best ambassadors for Afton, Iowa."
- "My 3-year old daughter is still talking about the bonfires and the deer a month later."
- "You have a wonderful place."
- "We are going to bring Mom down."
- "Thanks!!!"

Would it be ok for people to contact you? Yes

Do you want additional information? For more success stories and other information, go to <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/RESS/alenterprise>

The U.S. Department of Agriculture prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (braille, large print, audiotope, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, room 326W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Natural
Resources
Conservation Service

Resource Economics
and Social Sciences
Division

September 2001

Alternative Farm Enterprises – Agritourism Success Stories

Hardwood Forest, Hunting, Conservation/Education, B&B, Birding, Horse Rides

Interview with Vern and Peg Knapp, 43778 Thompson Run
Road, Titusville, Pennsylvania 16354; 817-827-1092;
knapping@csonline.net; www.pafarmstay.com

What is the history of your farm and farming experience?

The land was part of the Holland Land Company, which was granted to William Penn by the King of England in the 1600's. The Knapp Farm dates back to 1813. Daniel Knapp of Vermont received this land for fighting in the War of 1812. Vern represents the sixth generation of Knapps on this farm. We've been here together since we married more than 30 years ago. The farm is more than 1,000 acres in hardwood forest and cropland. We switched from dairy and grains to beef backgrounding in 1991. We now operate a hunting preserve and a bed-and-breakfast with rural farm amenities, and harvest hardwood trees from our Pennsylvania-certified tree farm.

Describe the alternative enterprises in which you are presently engaged.

In 1995, we converted the 1870 farmhouse into a bed-and-breakfast. This is a country style building with four bedrooms, private baths, front porch, dining room, large living room, pool table room, kitchen, and business office. We use farmhouse only for guests. We moved into a smaller house next door that Peg's mother had built in 1979. Then, we established the hunting preserve for deer, wild turkey, and other upland game. In 1996, we added trail rides, and by 1998 we started to add and enhance the wetlands. We rent the best cropland to neighboring farmers. We are currently

developing fishing, bird dog training, guided nature trail walks, and bird watching/listening.

What made you decide to go into the present alternative enterprises?

We knew we had to consider alternative enterprises by the early 1990's, when the changes in agriculture had put us into a financial bind. We had the old farmhouse and Peg's mother's house and more than 1,000 acres, which is a very large farm for northwest Pennsylvania. We enjoyed visiting B&Bs and thought about how we would enjoy that kind of operation here. Because Vern was a member of the soil and water conservation district board, he was very aware of the land capabilities. Our county, Crawford County, had been covered twice with glaciers, which resulted in some of the best hardwood production conditions in the United States. On the other hand, 40 percent of the county could be considered wetlands, making it poorly suited for crop and livestock production. So we decided that the best way to keep the farm in the family and have it pay its own expenses was to manage and preserve our natural resources for income-producing sportsman and tourist enterprises.

How did you make the transition?

Vern talked with a neighbor who had extensive deer and turkey hunting experience on our farm. He asked him about possibility of being a guide for our new business venture. He was very excited about the idea because it was something he had always

wanted to do but did not have the land to make it work. He also suggested that we consider an upland bird hunting enterprise. He shared his experience, knowledge, and involvement with raising pheasants from chicks and eggs. He was the one that put this enterprise into action. About the same time, a nearby upland hunting preserve shut down. They were happy to sell us their equipment and share their knowledge, encouragement, and help. The timing was just right for us to start this enterprise.

We gradually added more activities and improved on the ones we already started. We converted a woodshop into a clubhouse for the day hunters. This building is also our customer greeting area; we use it for safety briefings before each hunt. In Pennsylvania, you can purchase a license to make your farm a hunting preserve. This lengthened our hunting season from a couple of weeks for deer and turkey season to about nine months—September 1 to April 30. The upland game hunting includes pheasants, chukar, Hungarian partridge, and quail. We also added an upland bird cleaning service and provided food service upon hunters' arrival. We added bird dog training and horseback riding so we could develop our farm into a year-round business.

We rented our productive cropland to neighboring farmers and began a program of reclaiming (converting) our marginal lands back to wetlands. Vern went to the Natural Resources Conservation Service and told them that he wanted to participate in the Wetlands Reserve Program by reclaiming some of the wet areas that had been drained more than 40 years ago. Our local soil and water conservation district board works with many partners to restore and enhance our natural resources. In 1994, our first pond was funded in part by Ducks Unlimited along with Federal, State, and local agencies. We have constructed 11 ponds since then. A total of five ponds are multi-functional wetland and fishing pond combinations.

The transition has been slow and methodical. We have been able to progress with the help of government agencies, friends, and neighbors.

What decisionmaking process did you use?

We started small and added new activities that seemed to fit the needs and requests of the guests. We started with 350 pheasants plus the wild deer and turkeys. In 2000, we raised over 3,000 pheasants. We buy our other upland game birds from an area entrepreneur on an as-needed basis. These numbers have grown at about the same rate as the pheasants. We do not do any actual planning in this area as the number of hunters determines it. The hunting decisions are made with the guides. We have a very tight set of guidelines for raising the upland game, releasing, and hunting. We meet often and take the guide suggestions as to needs and improvements for the preserve. The guides are the ones in the fields working with the hunters, and we greatly respect their thoughts. Our decisions for the most part are by total group agreement. We operate as a team and conduct each hunt as a team effort.

We make the B&B decisions jointly. We have gathered lots of ideas from others who have been in the business. We did not have a formal business or marketing plan at the beginning but we highly recommend it. We now operate with a business and marketing plan. It helps us avoid mistakes.

How did you acquire information?

Vern grew up in rural America, and he understood wildlife and their habitat requirements. He basically changed the management of the resources from cropland and pasture for livestock to habitat for wildlife. The State Game and Fish Commission, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Natural Resources Conservation Service provided great technical assistance in wildlife management, wetland development, and pond management. In Northwest Pennsylvania, we have accumulations of heavy, crusted snow (132" total accumulation in the winter of 2000) which creates quite a challenge in meeting wildlife needs. The grasses we grew for livestock did not meet the requirements of nesting birds. So, Vern started planting warm-season grasses to provide the nesting needs and winter food needs. The eastern gamma grass and switchgrass are serving these needs.

We joined several B&B organizations, attended their meetings and upon return home, tried to

implement their suggestions. We learn from others and from listening to our customers.

How did you finance your enterprises?

We were very fortunate to have inherited the land and buildings. This has helped us get started in the B&B and guided hunting businesses. We have understanding lenders who have shared our vision. We were fortunate to have some savings to draw upon. We grow fine hardwood—furniture grade cherry, maple, and oak—that provides a source of revenue. We are very careful with our growth and investment. We justify any changes that we make. Our labor and guides are subcontract employees at this point, so this helps with insurance and taxes. We will eventually need full-time employees, but the subcontract labor has been a great help getting the business off and running. We grew slowly, carefully planning each step, but have remained flexible.

How do you market your business?

You can have the most wonderful idea and facility, but if you don't market it properly, no one will come! We market the B&B, horseback riding, and tourist related activities through organizations such as Tourist Promotion Associations, B&B groups, Pennysaver newspapers, visitor centers, Internet, brochures and flyers. I place brochures wherever people allow me to. Word of mouth is a good advertiser for our B&B. Also, we work closely with other local B&B's in sharing overflow bookings.

Marketing the hunting is a completely different approach. We work sport shows to have actual contact with the hunters who come looking for places to hunt. We are very people oriented, and really enjoy visiting and listening to the hunting stories. Also, we have good luck with hunting magazines and newspaper ads. We are very careful to advertise the hunting only in the hunting-related sources. We have produced a video of the hunts on the farm, and play it at the sport shows. This really draws the crowds. We send out hunting newsletters several times a year. We keep mailing lists of all hunters and calls, and keep in contact as often as possible.

We have more marketing plan ideas to scope out but they take a lot of money and time. It is all worth the effort, but time is so very important, and we do not want to neglect what we have now. It is possible that we will hire a professional marketing team at some point in the near future.

How do you price your products?

We discussed the B&B prices with other operators in the area and priced our rooms in line with theirs. The same process was used for horseback riding. The hunting is sold as packages, which may include birds, dogs, meals, lodging, and other services. The prices depend on the services wanted. Packages are very attractive to the customer calling for information. The word "package" and what it includes helps sell the business. We will be developing more packages.

What went wrong? And why? How did you correct the situation?

There was a horse arena on the property. We hoped to use it for financial gain. We employed a horse manager to arrange and conduct horse activities such as team penning, roping, cutting, barrel riding, etc. The manager failed to obtain national and state sanctioning twice, and this doomed the enterprise. The smaller non-sanctioned events were poorly attended, so we eliminated the business.

What went right? And why? How did you build on your success?

The B&B was a hit because the guests loved the farm and country atmosphere. But they also liked their privacy and really wanted private baths. The first winter, we shut down the B&B and put in private baths and business increased rapidly. Also, guests requested larger beds so now the rooms have king and queen beds where possible.

The hunting grew very fast. We had to hire more guides and order more upland birds. Our pointer dog had puppies that we sold. This added another enterprise of bird dog training and a kennel. We added ponds throughout the property for the hunting dogs' comfort and to improve the habitat for the wildlife. We have outgrown our clubhouse (old woodshop) and have plans to enlarge the

facility. We sell electric dog training collars and instruct owners on how to use them properly. We continue to grow as our guests and the industry identify new needs.

What would you have done differently?

We would not have invested so much money preparing for the horse events at the arena. There were a number of start up costs—electricity, food preparation and eating area, prizes, and etc. One needs to be more financially conservative when you start a new project. You need to go a little bit slower even though you have faith and belief in the new enterprise you are starting.

Where do you plan to go from here?

In the spring of 2001, we concentrated on improving the existing ponds for fee fishing. Also, we are adding three more ponds in the preserve area. We will improve our native grasses and have the neighboring farmer plant corn in the preserve areas. We added small primitive cabins in the preserve areas during the summer of 2001. Campers can use these during the tourist season, and hunters can use them to temporarily escape from the weather or just to take a rest. The cabins are sparsely furnished with bunks, table, chairs, gas stove and a few pots and pans.

Near-term goals are to build a large picnic shelter where we can have picnics for the hunters before and after the hunting season. This will be a fun-time gathering of hunters, their families and hunting buddies. We will also enlarge the clubhouse and install restrooms with showers. Long-term goals are to enlarge our farm by purchasing adjoining lands. We also plan to construct some type of a practice shooting area. We also plan to add some type of horse-drawn buggy or carriage rides for those who would like to see more of the farm, but cannot walk or ride a horse. We would like to conduct off-the-farm seminars for youth on gun handling and safety, hunting dogs and the different breeds and abilities, and wildlife habitat management. Then, we would take these youths to the farm preserve and demonstrate first hand the joy of hunting safely and show them how we manage the habitat. Finally, we

would like to work with the game commission and extend this to the scouts and other youth groups interested in hunting and fishing.

What would be the most important advice you would give other farmers considering an alternative enterprise?

1. Build on the activities in your area. Cooperate with the existing facilities. For us, Pittsburgh University is nearby. The Drake Oil Well, the first oil well ever drilled, is nearby as are water and golf activities.
2. Develop a business and financial plan that outlines how you will develop and operate your business.
3. Obtain a good quality, people-oriented, well-educated workforce.
4. Use the Internet to market your business, as over 80 percent of our business now comes from people who have seen us on the Internet.
5. Work closely with your accountant, lawyer, and insurance and financial advisors. They can be of great help.
6. Be proud to be a farmer.

How did you handle the liability concern?

We worked closely with our lawyer, who advised us to incorporate our business. The state of Pennsylvania helps protect personal assets through the incorporation process. Our accountant advised us how to set up the bookkeeping system, so that all activities were in this “incorporated account” and protected. We also purchased a \$1 million liability umbrella policy. This also offers small medical coverage for the guides. We purchase the insurance from an “outfitters” insurance company, as they are familiar with our type of business.

Do you mind sharing your promotional material? (Including your prices.)

No, people helped us, we would be happy to offer guidelines for others.

What do you dislike the most and like the most?

We dislike the need to make major changes this late in life. Vern worked all his life to get the fields drained and maximize crop production. Now, we're

changing back to wet fields! We did not like telling our neighbors that the farm is now a preserve and that they could no longer hunt on the property. Some of them had been hunting on our land since they were children. This was a very difficult period for all of us, but we are all still friends. The old family farmhouse has been changed from large roomy bedrooms that are now small and the closets are gone. It is also chopped up with lots of bathrooms. It was a time for us to change or sell the farm to someone and watch them change it.

We like sharing the farm we love and watching others enjoy it. We hear such nice complements, like “the magic of this farm,” “this little paradise here,” or “we’ll be back and will tell our friends.” It is very enjoyable meeting new people from around the country and the world. Every weekend is different; you get lots of practice remembering names. It is very nice to have the bills paid at the end of the month, and have extra left over to go out ourselves.

Would you start this alternative enterprise business today after learning what is involved?
Yes.

What groups/organizations/activities have you joined or become involved in because of the alternative enterprises.

North American Game Bird Association,
Pennsylvania Farm Stay Vacation Association,
Western Pennsylvania B&B Association, Crawford County Tourist Promotion Association, and Oil Heritage Tourist Promotion Association.

What conservation and education activities do you have?

Educational activities include guided nature walks, guided bird watching and listening, fly fishing lessons, horse riding lessons, and instructional shooting. Conversation around the B&B breakfast table is often educational about farming and the oil history in the area. All of the hunters go through a safety instruction course before each hunt begins.

Conservation practices include 10 acres of highly erodible land in the Conservation Reserve Program tree plan since 1985. As part of the fishing and nature trails, we plan to use the hunting clubhouse as an educational center where we can show videos and discuss the wildlife on the farm. Every tree cut plan includes den and cavity trees to be preserved for the wildlife. The Wetland Reserve Program is used to develop the eleven areas in the preserve.

What do your customers like the most about your product or enterprise?

The B&B guests tell us they are coming to see the country, farming, and rural areas. They like the down home feeling, and many remember visiting their grandparents’ farm. It brings happy memories to many.

The hunters comment on the quality of our guided hunts. Several have hunted across the nation from large estates to the wild. They compliment us on our farm being as close to an actual wild hunt as possible.

Would it be ok for people to contact you? Yes

Do you want additional information? For more success stories and other information, go to <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/RESS/altenterprise>

The U.S. Department of Agriculture prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA’s TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, room 326W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Natural
Resources
Conservation Service

Resource Economics
and Social Sciences
Division

October 2000

Alternative Farm Enterprises – Agritourism Success Stories

Pasture-Fed Broilers, Free-Range Eggs, and Veal

Interview with Lilly and David Smith, Springfield Farm,
16701 Yeoho Road, Sparks, MD 21152, 410-472-0738,
dsmith0011@comcast.net

What is the history of your farm and farming experience?

This farm has been in our family since the early 1700's. It was originally part of a 5,000- to 10,000-acre farm granted by the King of England. My great grandfather was deeded this current farm (65 acres) in the mid-1800's. I grew up here. The farm has been leased since my Dad retired.

Describe the alternative enterprise in which you are presently engaged.

My wife Lilly and I raise pasture-fed chicken broilers using the Joel Salatin cage method. We also produce pastured free-range eggs and pink veal. We have a few ducks, geese, and a pair of peacocks for scenery.

What made you decide to go into the present alternative enterprise(s)?

I wanted to make this farm profitable again, and alternative enterprises are the only way this is possible. The farm is not big enough for us to make a living on corn, wheat and beans. We tried a vegetable garden the first year, about one-half acre. Everybody was doing that, and the work is very hard and time consuming. So I investigated and researched what small-scale enterprises were not being done in this area. Entrepreneurs had greenhouses, U-Pick, and forestry, etc. So I ended up with chickens and pink veal.

How did you make the transition?

I retired from the Army after a 23-year career and retired again after 13 more years in corporate

America. In 1999, I started going to meetings and conferences, subscribed to magazines, went to on-farm workshops, researched the library and the Internet, visited other small farm entrepreneurs, and talked to a lot of neighbors and local farmers alike. We started with 75 layers, a few broilers, and four veal calves. Word of mouth sold the broilers and calves before they were ready for market. We were selling the eggs locally from the farm and through the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) venture of a neighbor. Then we met a chef who wanted to buy eggs for his restaurant. By January 2000, we had four regular customers buying 200 dozen eggs a week and six more restaurants waiting until our new layers started producing. In 2000 we have 10 veal calves, 1,000 layers, and 225 broilers.

Describe your decisionmaking process.

We do not have a formal business plan. My industry experience was in planning, production, and marketing. As a result, the business plan is in our heads. The demand far exceeds the supply, so this has delayed formal planning. We are investigating other alternative enterprises.

How do you obtain financing?

We have been able to provide all of our own financing. If we don't have the money to buy something, we wait until we do.

What do you charge for your products?

We sell small eggs for \$1.50 a dozen and large/jumbo eggs for \$2.00, mostly to restaurants. We sell pastured chicken for \$2.50 a pound and

pink veal for up to \$9.60 a pound wrapped weight. We could charge more, but we are making a good profit.

What production methods do you use?

I went to the ACRES-sponsored Joel Salatin workshop in July 1999 to study his pasture-fed operations and marketing techniques. Joel advised that your labor requirement should not exceed 6 hours per day in order to leave adequate time for marketing, management, and other farm work. Our labor requirement for the livestock and poultry we have now is 28 hours per week.

What kind of modifications did you have to make at the farm?

We remodeled the farmhouse, built a caged house and brooder house, and added refrigerators and now recently a walk-in cooler.

What went wrong? and Why? How did you correct the situation?

The veal calves had diarrhea and pneumonia the first year (we lost one), and we had to nurse them back to health. After I discussed my problem with a local rotational grazing and seasonal grazing dairy farmer using the New Zealand method—feeding the calves with a nipple attached to a hose in a barrel. The barrel is seldom cleaned, which allows bacteria to develop and the calves to become naturally immune, thus eliminating the pneumonia. The feeding of milk through the sucking of the nipples generates saliva, which is a natural antacid for the calf, which eliminated the diarrhea.

What went right? and Why? How did you build on your success?

I selected the right enterprises, and they are growing by themselves at this time. Word of mouth has sold everything that we have been able to produce. We have a nursery, so as soon as a chicken gets sick it is taken to the infirmary.

What would you have done differently?
Nothing.

Where do you plan to go from here?

We have discussed these enterprises with our daughters. One said that her husband is considering early military separation to become a partner. Another daughter's husband is a doctor, and he is thinking about quitting and also becoming a partner. Our plan for the year 2001 is to have 1,500 layers, as many as 13,000 broilers, and 25 pink vealers. This should gross us over \$250,000, which would yield a profit of over 50 percent. We plan to produce pastured chickens for restaurants on a 12-month basis. This means we will need freezers and equipment to properly prepare and store the chicken for the winter months. I am also in the process of getting the farm organically certified by Maryland.

What would be the five most important pieces of advice you would give other farmers considering an alternative enterprise?

1. Learn how to market, the most important aspect of success. No customers = no sales
2. Know your limitations
3. Balance financing and overhead with income
4. Limit yourself to 6 hours per day on production
5. Become an involved observer of your animals so you can immediately spot needed corrections

How did you handle the liability concern?

We have a standard farm rider on our homeowner's policy. By year's end, we will have a company policy as a part of our incorporation process.

Do you mind sharing your promotional material?

We send out a newsletter to our customers at the beginning of the year. I have visited some restaurants and given them a few dozen free eggs. Otherwise, we have a roadside sign and rely on word of mouth. We do supply eggs to our neighbor's 30-member CSA subscription customers for 25 weeks during the year.

What do you dislike the most and like the most?

We especially like being on the farm, working with the animals and telling visitors about our activities.

If there is anything we like least, it would probably be the time it takes to clean and grade the eggs.

What groups or organizations do you belong to, and what presentations have you made?

We joined the Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture (PASA), The American Pastured Poultry Association, Chesapeake Association for Sustainable Agriculture-Future Harvest (CASA), and ACRES. We order "Small Farm Today" in addition to the organization publications. I will be speaking at the Future Harvest workshop in January 2001.

What conservation and education activities do you have on the farm?

We overseeded a 15-acre pasture with a no-till drill that we rented from the Soil and Water Conservation District. I am in the process of getting the farm organically certified by Maryland and working with the USDA-FSA and NRCS to improve the pond and creek and better understand the soil characteristics of the farm.

Are you willing to share your information?

Yes!

Do you want additional information? For more success stories and other information, see the website:

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/RESS/altenterprise>

The U.S. Department of Agriculture prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, room 326W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Natural
Resources
Conservation Service

Resource Economics
and Social Sciences
Division

September 2001

Alternative Farm Enterprises – Agritourism Success Stories

Fruits and Vegetables/ Farmers' Markets

Interview with Francisco Resendiz, 4342 Geer Road,
Hughson, California 95326, Telephone 209-883-0100

What is the history of your farm and farming experience?

My parents traveled from Mexico to California each year to work in the fields. They would return home in the fall so the children could go to school. I was 13 years old when my parents made their first trip, and I also worked in the fields. My plan was to go to college and get a job in Mexico, as I did not like the United States. But I was the oldest and had to work to help support the family.

At 15, I started working full-time on a 350-acre almond and peach ranch. I would return to Mexico during the winter for visits, and I still wanted to get a job and live there. At 21, I set a 5-year goal to be a farm manager and save enough money to buy a piece of land. In a year and a half, the owner made me the manager. I made all the production decisions for the ranch. At 23, I started attending conferences and seminars on agriculture, which gave me confidence about farming. I also set a goal that I needed to change my attitude about agriculture and the United States. Then, everything became positive. I learned to read and write English, but speaking was very difficult to learn as we always spoke Spanish at home and in the fields. I worked there as an employee for 10 years and as the manager for 20 more years. My wife and I purchased our 33-acre farm in 1987.

Describe the alternative enterprises in which you are presently engaged.

The Resendiz family owns 53 acres and rents 50 acres for the production of fruits and vegetables. My wife Gregoria, son Diego, daughter Diana,

youngest son Frankie, and I operate the ranch with the assistance of 35 employees. We grow four cherry, six apricot, four apple, four grape, ten plum, and seven pluot varieties, and about 70 varieties of peaches and nectarines. We also raise tomatoes, squash, peppers, melons, okra, eggplant, strawberries, onions, and cucumbers.

We sell our produce at the ranch—The Resendiz Family Fruit Barn—and at 25 farmers' markets each week in the San Francisco Bay Area (120 miles away). The Fruit Barn also houses our offices and a commercial bakery. We bake fresh fruit pies made from scratch, bread, scones, cookies, turnovers, and apple dumplings. We use six greenhouses to produce vine-ripened tomatoes (about 20 lbs. per plant). I am building a 3-acre farm park to show adults and especially children how their food is grown. We will demonstrate how local vegetables, trees, and landscape nursery crops are grown. How irrigation is used. We will also have a working miniature feed mill. The park has a large pond for fish and a pet farm.

What made you decide to go into the present alternative enterprise?

We purchased the farm with the idea of growing fruits and vegetables for the direct sales market. I planted 15 acres for fresh fruit sales and some vegetables. (The main purpose of growing the vegetables was to keep my children busy. My father always made sure that his children were busy and out of trouble. I followed in his footsteps.) I set up the roadside stand as a means of selling the fruit and vegetable produce. My 5-year old son, Diego,

had to be at the stand with my wife to understand and translate customer requests. It was fun for the children and successful. In 1987, our first year, we sold about \$36,000 worth of vegetables and fruits. This has grown to over \$700,000 with the associated products and services.

How did you make the transition?

I managed both ranches for 11 years. I supervised 50-60 employees at the 350-acre ranch and 3-4 employees at my ranch. An 18-hour day was common, especially during the growing season. We outgrew the small roadside stand in a couple of years and expanded on a temporary basis. In 1994, we built the 3,500-square-foot Fruit Barn. It is a hip roof styled barn that is very cheerful, open, and customer friendly. In 1999, I quit my job and applied all of my production, marketing, and management skills to our ranch. We continued to expand our farmers' markets and roadside stand sales.

It was difficult to obtain all the permits and approvals for the Fruit Barn. The County Commissioners turned down our first request. But after a little explanation, we received our permit. It was also difficult to obtain the health certificates and clearances since we are located in the country. This process took more than 6 months.

What was your decisionmaking process?

I attended several seminars and workshops. I wanted to do something new and different that was not discussed at the marketing conferences. Everybody was selling vegetables and crafts, but no one was heavily into the fruit business. So I decided to build my business around a fruit stand.

Describe your business planning/goal setting.

We did not have a formal business plan when we began in 1987. I started with the idea of having a garden and some fruit trees to keep my children busy. This grew into the roadside stand and the farmers' market business. We still don't have a formal marketing plan. We stop and look at what we are doing and what types of new ideas we need to develop and implement. We test new ideas and move ahead with the good ones.

How did you acquire information?

I attended several seminars and marketing conferences in California and the West. I heard farmers and ranchers speak about their businesses. Most of these were pumpkin and apple businesses, and some were very large.

How did you obtain your production information?

The ranch owner taught me a substantial amount when I was working on his ranch. I went to many conferences and seminars on production practices for peaches and almonds. I read publications, books, and magazines about fruit production.

How did you obtain financing?

We saved our money for 6 years. It took us quite a while to understand the land real estate market, finances, and the loan system. When it came time, I went to the Federal Land Bank for a loan. Since then, we have mainly used our own finances to make improvements on the ranch.

How did you market your products?

We started by being very local—with our friends, support group, and people who just drove by our roadside stand. We started advertising in the local newspapers. This is very costly, and the response is not very great, but it is necessary when starting a new business. We have a \$10,000 advertising budget today, but we don't spend it on newspaper ads. We have been holding a "Festival of Thanks" every October since we built the Fruit Barn in 1994. The Fruit Barn, 3-acre park, and the festival are designed to entertain adults and kids.

The festival began slowly and reached close to 10,000 people in October 2001. Everything is free—hay rides, horse rides, games, 1,500-bale hay maze, free gifts, music, and fruit. We also have crafters, police cars, a fire truck, and an ambulance for the kids. We have a pumpkin patch where kids can pick pumpkins. We also show them how their food is produced.

School tours come constantly. The tours started with 300 children in 1994, and in 2000 we had 4,800 students. We charge them \$2.50 apiece and they get a one-hour tour, and a bag of goodies

(pencil, coloring book, apple, cinnamon crisp, and a pumpkin). We also have them plant crops such as broccoli that we harvest and deliver to the school for the students to take home.

Our goal is more than just numbers and dollars. We want our customers to be happy—happy so they go tell a friend. We want a balance between our customers and ourselves that results in a friendly relationship. We look at it as our social responsibility. We give all of our leftover bakery items, fruits, and vegetables to the local Salvation Army every day.

A very important part of marketing is a name. We started as the Resendiz Farm Market, but we found it was difficult for people to pronounce our name. Also, my family and I realized what it means to use your name on a business. It is such a responsibility to represent that name properly at all times. People need to consider this when selecting a name. We are proud of our name but needed something more unique, so we call our business The Resendiz Family Fruit Barn. The public calls it the Fruit Barn. It is a good marketing trademark that stands for freshness, quality, and service.

There are now five similar businesses in the Modesto, California, area, which has a population of about 500,000.

How do you price your products?

We arrive at a price that is fair to our customers and ourselves. Our fruit is fresher, high quality, fruits are sweeter and vegetables more sound. My production management practices are designed to bring out the sweetness of the product. Our 9-inch pies are \$9.50, bread is \$3.95 per 1.5 pound loaf, apple dumplings are \$3.00, and turnovers are \$2.25. We also sell scones for \$1.00 and cookies for \$1.00.

What went wrong? and Why? How did you correct the situation?

We made a few mistakes. First, I over-planted watermelons—5 acres was just too much. I tried new varieties—like yellow watermelon. They tasted great, but they had to be red for people to buy them. I had difficulty learning how to prune all the new varieties correctly. Some years I had more

fruit than we could sell, but there was not sufficient time to wholesale the produce. I tried tomatoes of different sizes and shapes. It did not work as I planned because the customers wanted red, round tomatoes. Today, the market has changed, and there is a niche for these tomatoes. I tried to use hormones to reduce the spray requirements. The idea was good but sound research was lacking. It was too risky and I lost money for a few years. Today I use about half hormones and half spray on the fruit crops.

What went right? and Why? How did you build on your success?

When I became manager of the ranch, I treated it as if it were my own. My accomplishments in management grew. It was educational, and it prepared me for buying and managing my own ranch. I was able to build a considerable level of confidence in my ability to manage a ranch, and I was not afraid of trying ideas and making them successes. Our Fruit Barn has become known in the community, and the people understand what we are trying to do. So they are very supportive of the business. They would drive out of their way to purchase our products. Now, we give back to the community through our Festival of Thanks.

What would you have done differently?

Basically, I would not have done anything differently. One always has to develop new ideas in a competitive business of this type. This places a considerable amount of stress on you and the family. These new or unique ideas and products are needed to continue to build your business. However, they can also be the cause for failure if not implemented or managed correctly.

Where do you plan to go from here?

We need the next few years to get better at what we are doing. The business has grown very fast. We need to make changes to make it better. I want my children to receive that all-important college degree and then decide what they want to do. I want to grow fun! I have a responsibility to help my community to grow, which will require more of my

time. My dream is to have a special place for children to learn about agriculture.

What would be the most important advice you would give other farmers considering an alternative enterprise?

1. The business/enterprise must come from the heart.
2. You must be yourself in your business and not copy somebody else.
3. You must be committed to the enterprise.
4. You must be willing to serve the public.
5. You must have and maintain a quality product and/or service.
6. You need to maintain a community/business balance. You must develop a relationship with the community. The business cannot be focused only on making money. You must return something to the community. The community needs to understand and appreciate what you are doing as a farmer.

How did you handle the liability concern?

I have a \$3 million umbrella policy with my farm insurance company.

What do you dislike the most and like the most?

I find working with and serving the people the most enjoyable part of the business—especially working with the children. We have 400-500 children on this ranch at one time many times during the year.

I dislike the uncertainty that weather has on food production. People just do not understand how weather affects the quality and types of food they see at the farmers' market.

Would you start this alternative enterprise business today after learning what is involved?

Yes.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, room 326W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

What groups/organizations/activities have you joined?

I have not joined any groups associated with my farming or marketing activities. I have made presentations at seminars and to schoolchildren about agriculture.

What conservation and education activities do you have?

I have been involved in conservation activities since the first year. I have tried many different hormones and used minimal pesticide application management techniques such as Integrated Pest Management. We plant cover crops to attract beneficial insects and use irrigation water efficiency technology. I am very much into educating the public about agriculture and how their food is produced. My agricultural park is my main education activity, but I hope to interest neighbors in building upon my actions to teach people about agriculture.

What did your customers like the most about your product and services?

They enjoy seeing the Resendiz family and employees working as a team. They appreciate seeing who we are and what we are. They see us as producers of quality, flavorful fresh fruit and vegetables. They also appreciate our honesty and our policy of bring it back if you don't like it.

Would it be ok for people to contact you? Yes

Do you want additional information? For more success stories and other information, go to www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/RESS/altenterprise



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Natural
Resources
Conservation Service

Resource Economics
and Social Sciences
Division

October 2000

Alternative Farm Enterprises – Agritourism Success Stories

Direct Marketing of Dairy Products

Interview with William W. Leshner, Way-Har Farms, P.O.
Box 325, Bernville, PA 19506, 610-488-1281,
fax 610-488-9308, lolly@early.com

What is the history of your farm and farming experience?

The farm has been in the family for three generations. My father and uncle were diversified farmers, but dairy (about 70 cows) and crops (1,000 acres of corn and wheat) were the dominant enterprises. Their focus was crop production. We own 265 acres and rent 100.

Describe the alternative enterprise in which you are presently engaged.

The business really got started in 1970 when my father and uncle installed a bottling unit to open an on-farm retail store. They increased the herd to 95 milking cows. Today, we have four Jerseys and 91 Holsteins.

Our business is direct marketing of milk (chocolate and strawberry) and ice cream—40 flavors at an on-farm retail store and at four farmers' markets. Two of these markets are indoors and open year-round, and two are open from May to October. We have a small delivery route of 15 customers to whom we deliver once a week. We also have had a wholesale business since 1987; we deliver twice a week to 25 or 30 restaurants. In 1997, we added a mobile ice cream and milk store.

We also started farm visits in the 90s.

What made you decide to go into the present alternative enterprise(s)?

My father and uncle wanted to increase their income. Crop production could not easily be expanded. Thus, a higher price for the milk was the

only alternative. There was a location advantage, as they lived on a very heavily traveled two-lane highway. Then, the papers advertised that farmers' markets were being opened and needed vendors, and we started that in the 90s. The mobile ice cream and milk store grew out of people asking for ice cream for special occasions. In 1997, we bought a covered trailer to which we added two sales windows, a freezer, a refrigerator, cabinets, a sink, and storage at a cost of \$4,000.

About 1,000 children come to the farm each year, mostly from Reading, which is 25 miles away. We take the groups on a 2-hour tour of the farm and give a talk on milk production and the care of animals. There is a picnic area where the children can eat lunch. We charge \$3 per person for groups, and the children get ice cream and a mug.

We also rent out the mobile unit to non-profit groups, who use it as a fundraiser. The only condition is that they have to buy the ice cream and supplies from us. This builds relationships and is great advertising.

How did you make the transition?

The milk-processing firm that bought the milk this farm produced was a small one. When it went out of business in 1970, my father and uncle decided to sell directly to the consumer. They began marketing the ice cream and milk at the farm. They joined the Pennsylvania Producer Handlers Association to learn about direct marketing. I majored in dairy

science at Penn State, and when I graduated in 1987 I bought my uncle's share of the business.

Financing is very difficult for a farmer who wants to do direct marketing. We developed a business plan and pulled together all the farm records before discussing a loan with the banker. We had to educate the banker about the retailing business. Now, that banker is one of our biggest supporters.

What are your goals for the operation?

We want to keep this a family operation of high quality. We're proud of the products, the farm, and the animals. The health and treatment of the animals are a high priority for us. The cows are our pride!

What went wrong? And why? How did you correct the situation?

Direct marketing is becoming more difficult. In 1970, there were 350 direct marketing dairies in Pennsylvania, and today there are 30. They've sold out to the big milk producers. The change in retailing where stores sell everything from clothes to food and milk has been a factor. Also, the gas-station stores are competitors. Many families want to do one-stop shopping. They don't have the time to drive out of their way to get milk and ice cream directly from the farmer. Our steadiest customers are price conscious people such as the Mennonites in the area.

Finding employees for an acceptable salary has really become a challenge. We hire high school and college students to help us. There are plenty of other things around the farm I'd rather do than address employee concerns.

What went right? And Why? How did you build on your success?

I enjoy the retail side. I like to meet my customers and see the satisfaction they get from eating a great, high-quality product.

We also have a good location. We're on a main road leading into Reading. When mining stopped in

the county up the road, the people there had to go to Reading for work and shopping, and we get most of our sales from this traffic.

The rule of thumb is that you need a dollar in gross income for every dollar in assets to be profitable. The dairy operation does that, as we sell about \$1 million in products every year. The mobile ice cream and milk store does more than three times its cost/value of \$4,000, so we push it as much as possible. Saturdays and Sundays are our busy days, and we use it to our advantage.

Are there any other insights you would like to share?

There is a considerable amount of work with this effort or any direct marketing enterprise. The quality of farm life and style offsets the hard work. We take two vacations every year to spend some time together. Not having an adequate amount of family time together is probably the most difficult thing to accept. This could only change if hired labor increased—which has its associated problems and issues.

Where do you plan to go from here?

We plan to keep this a family business. We're trying to minimize the labor requirement through automation and maintain a good environment for the cows. One person can now milk, feed, and graze cows each day. My wife did it this morning. Our only part-time help are in the bottling plant and staffing the mobile store. We hope to bring our children into the business as soon as they're old enough.

We've reduced purchased inputs by going to more rotational grazing. The heifers have always been on rotational grazing. Now, we've placed the cows on 65 acres of rotational pasture. We've installed four watering troughs and broken the large field into 2-acre paddocks. The grazing provides half of the daily feed requirement, and the other half is concentrate feed.

Because we're in the Delaware Bay watershed, we're environmentally conscious. We used NRCS

technical assistance and cost sharing to install buffers and waterers, which will be completed next year. We used to water the heifers on the creek, but now we have two watering troughs, and we restored the buffer area with cost share.

What would be the most important advice you would give other farmers considering an alternative enterprise?

1. Have a high-quality product.
2. Be prepared to work hard and long hours with direct marketing.
3. Maintain a good environment for the livestock.
4. Don't get too large.
5. Minimize labor requirements.
6. Build only as fast as income allows—pay as you go.

How did you handle the liability concern?

We purchased insurance from a local ag company called Old Guard—a \$500,000 farm policy and a \$2 million umbrella. This was required when we expanded to USDA farmers' market in Washington, D.C. We had no problem getting insurance.

Do you mind sharing your promotional ideas?

We had a very successful promotion in which we joined with a trucking company, a nursing home, and a furniture store and gave away free ice cream to everyone who purchased a ticket to get into a car race. On an ongoing basis, we advertise in two local weekly papers and on radio. Our strategy is to

advertise very frequently for 3 weeks and then stop for 2 months. This seems to work best for us.

We no longer use specials. We price our milk at \$1.99 a gallon, compared to store prices of \$2.40 to \$2.75. Our ice cream and other products are competitively priced.

What do you dislike and like the most?

I dislike the lack of time to spend with the family. Both my wife and I are very busy. I like working with the cattle and the people I meet while selling ice cream and milk.

Would you start this alternative enterprise today after learning what you know about direct marketing dairy products?

Yes!

What groups or organizations have you joined?

Along with some other young farmers, I have joined our city planning commission. Our presence helps ensure that farmers' concerns get heard and that our county retains its rural character.

Are you willing to share your information?

Yes!

Do you want additional information? For more success stories and other information, see the website:

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/RESS/altenterprise>

The U.S. Department of Agriculture prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, room 326W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Natural
Resources
Conservation Service

Resource Economics
and Social Sciences
Division

July 2001

Alternative Farm Enterprises – Agritourism Success Stories

Greenhouse Bedding Plants, Welded Sculptures, Wetland Restoration, Hunting and Beef Cattle

Interview with Jeff and Lisa Weber, 11577 157th Avenue,
Bloomer, Wisconsin 54724, Tel. 715-568-2569

What is the history of your farm and farming experience?

We live in Chippewa County, Wisconsin, with our children, April, Adam, and Andy. We purchased our 200-acre dairy/woodland farm in 1979 and rented another 100 acres for corn and small grain production. We milked 35–45 cows and sold Grade A milk until 1996, when I had spinal surgery after a farm accident. We replaced the dairy herd with 35 beef cattle, while I pursued my hobby of welding art, and Lisa started to work off the farm to offset the loss of income from the dairy cows and to provide health insurance benefits.

Describe the alternative enterprises in which you are presently engaged.

I have three different enterprises other than the beef cows. (1) I have long enjoyed welding as a hobby. I would take old machinery parts and rearrange them into horse heads, sheep, cows, dinosaurs, birds, flowers, etc. After my surgery, I began to focus on welding art as a source of income. After an article appeared in the local paper in April 2001, I received calls for two pieces I had made and shipped the product to very happy customers. (2) In 2000, I began operating a greenhouse to produce bedding plants—annuals, vegetables, and perennials. (3) I am also restoring 40 acres of wetlands, using the Wetlands Reserve Program, with plans to open it to hunting for the disabled.

What made you decide to go into the present alternative enterprises?

After my surgery, AgrAbility of Wisconsin worked with me to care for my dairy herd. This program, an Easter Seals and University of Wisconsin Extension partnership program, assists injured farmers. I took job evaluation tests and found out that I was best suited for what I was doing: Working outdoors and being my own manager. I enjoyed growing plants and came up with the idea of purchasing a greenhouse. There are several greenhouses in our area.

How did you make the transition?

My welding art has not been progressing as fast as I would like, because I ran out of parts. Most of my art was based on hay rake wheels and other used farm equipment. So, I transitioned into using new metal, purchased a circular framer, and made the same art but with new metal. In my earlier years, I had gone to a technical school and learned a little about welding. The arc welder and wire feed welding with argon gas produce very fine welded work. I even autograph each piece. Welding has mostly been a self-taught process.

I purchased a greenhouse and its entire fixtures, stocks, and supplies for a very good price in 1999. I found out I lacked a lot of knowledge, so AgrAbility of Wisconsin paid for my Garden Masters schooling, which was much better than purchasing automated equipment to keep me in dairy.

In the spring of 2000, I put in my bedding plants and began the greenhouse enterprise. I had everything I needed, so no additional purchases were necessary. When it came time to sell, I ran ads in the paper and put up signs.

What is your decisionmaking process

I don't have a formal decisionmaking process. I do only what I have money for because I will not mortgage my farm. I have found that starting small and building is the best way. You learn from your customers, neighbors, and friends. I know I want to continue to grow my horticulture and welding art businesses. I am going to develop the wetlands preserve. As time permits, I will promote these enterprises after I have set aside family time. I need to move forward slowly because I don't know what the next day brings as a result of my spinal surgery.

How do you go about business planning and goal setting?

My business plan is informal and evolving. For example, people drove past my place to buy bedding plants and other horticultural crops at greenhouses on both sides of me. I just said, 'I can get some of that business,' so I changed my signage to attract more people.

My first year was very successful because I had paid for my first greenhouse, so I purchased a second one in 2000. I also planted pumpkins and sold them to a major greenhouse marketer about 20 miles from me. In 2001, I needed backup for bedding plants if my sales exceeded my supply. I found this source and purchased plants as I needed them. I keep my costs to a minimum with no hired labor and use basic production systems. I did the welding art as a hobby, and now, I am finding out people are waiting for this type of product. I will search out the markets and determine the best place to market my art. I don't have a lot of time for travel, as my beef cows take daily care.

How did you acquire information.

I started by going to a formal class of Garden Masters given by the Extension Service. In fact, I

ended up teaching a couple of classes. I gained a tremendous amount of knowledge from all of the participants. This course really helped build up my confidence in greenhouse operation. I read many magazines and talked to a friend with greenhouses to develop a network. I went to seminars, distributors' meetings, and buying shows, seeking information and a network. I would go and ask them some very detailed management questions. They were very generous with their information. This is what rural America is all about—helping each other. I became a close friend with one of the local greenhouse owners, who is a mentor to me. I gave him straw because he was so generous with his information. Now, we partner in starting and raising plants. I will raise one kind and he another, and we purchase from each other.

How did you market your products?

This is the most difficult area to carry out. I placed ads in papers and found them essentially useless. Road signs and word of mouth are the best. I deliver personal service and relationships. Many of my customers are elderly, so I go the extra mile to help them. I will bring plants out to the car for them to make their choices, and I make special walkways for them. I am going to expand my plant variety and enlarge the price signs so the seniors can readily read them. One greenhouse is handicap accessible. People like to bargain and so do I, so I give quantity discounts, bargain for prices, and give away free plants to kids. If I have extra or slow-moving varieties, I give them to adults. I place the sun-loving plants in one area and shade-loving plants in another area of the greenhouse. Customers have really commented on this helpful feature. I have purchased colorful posters of the bedding plants I sell so the customers can see how they look when grown. This has helped sell many plants in 2001. I sell quality products. Last week, I would not sell some plants because they had white flies on them. My goal is to make people feel good, build my return customer base, make money, and sell my plants.

How do you price your products?

I visit neighboring greenhouses and set my price at or a little below theirs. I also gave away free plants, which draws a number of visitors.

What went wrong? How did you correct the situation?

I did not check out all the requirements for signage. I found out that I needed state and county approval. It was time consuming to obtain approval from landowners to put up signs on their property. Also, the state and county required fees, and I had to lease the space on the privately owned land. Now, I have agreements in place with the appropriate governments and landowners for 2002 and beyond.

I was not prepared for all the questions my customers would ask me about flowers and vegetables. Some of them have no idea as what to buy. I have done more reading and learned from those who are knowledgeable gardeners. I search out answers to questions I cannot answer.

What went right? How did you build on your success?

Several things went right for me. The road signs worked great to pull the people off the road and shop at my greenhouses. My personal service, and one-on-one discussions, and pricing have grown my business through word of mouth. I price according to what people will bargain for, and I give quantity discounts and free plants.

I work with other greenhouse operators to exchange information and products. For example, I market all my pumpkins to a large greenhouse operator. Last year, he saw my pumpkins and paid me more than we had agreed upon. Now, I grow his varieties, and we are both happier. I help people plan their perennial and annual gardens—one time I drew out the customer's garden in the gravel and placed the perennial plants in the appropriate locations. She was very appreciative. I started small and my business is growing with me in control. I now have ten tomato varieties, six peppers, two cucumbers, two squash, a dozen herbs, and about 75 perennials.

My welding art is just waiting for my attention to promote the business.

What would you have done differently?

I would have planned further ahead in developing the signage. My prices and plant labels need to be in front of the customer. Each plant needs a label and a price. Everything about the plants and prices needs to be more visible. I have found that end-of-season shoppers get upset when all the plants are not top quality. I need to impress upon my customers that you need to shop early to get the best quality.

Where do you plan to go from here?

I am going to expand my welding art during the winter by marketing more vigorously. I am going to make one-of-a-kind decorative plant holders to accommodate the plants I sell. I am going to use one greenhouse for perennials and one for annual flowers, and I will construct a small plastic hoop house for the vegetable bedding plants. I have set aside one-third of my shop for starting annuals and perennials. I am going to expand outside the greenhouse by growing perennials, shrubs, and trees by buying small bare-root plants for about \$1.60, pot the plants, and then 2 years later sell them for \$7-15.00. I am also increasing my pumpkins to 2,000 plants. I want to reduce my cattle numbers and switch over to marketing grass-fed beef, as whole-cow hamburger, to my customers. The plant holders and grass-fed beef will attract a new group of consumers.

I am going to investigate the possibility of turning the top of the barn into an antique consignment store. This would lengthen my business season and open up other opportunities. I am going to expand my hot water heating system that now heats my house, shop, and greenhouses to the top of the barn. I burn wood from all sources. (I call it recycle wood that other people throw away.) I am going to make the wetlands handicap accessible by building a couple of platforms with ready access for waterfowl hunting.

What would be the most important advice you would give other farmers considering an alternative enterprise?

1. Keep your place clean and neat.
2. Make sure your premises are safe.

3. Research every step of production, marketing, signage, etc.
4. Make sure your new enterprise is what you want to do.
5. If you sell to people, you have to like working with people, the good and the not so good.
6. You have to be willing to be open seven days a week for 12 hours a day during the selling season.

How did you handle the liability concern?

I am a small producer and thus, my farm insurance is adequate. I have a Farm Insurance Liability Plan.

What do you dislike the most and like the most?

It is the people. I like sharing information, helping others, making deals with people, learning from others, and working with people of all ages. I dislike people who do not understand the business and then make derogatory statements because they are not informed.

Would you start this alternative enterprise business today after learning what is involved?

Yes, but I would have started sooner. I would have invested some of my money into the greenhouses rather than farm equipment. It would have been a wiser use of my money.

What groups/organizations/activities have you joined or become involved in because of the alternative enterprises?

I joined the Master Gardeners Program. We meet several times a year in a workshop format to learn

The U.S. Department of Agriculture prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, room 326W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

and share about greenhouse production and gardening.

What conservation and education activities do you have?

I have been involved in conservation and resource restoration for years. I have built ponds over the years with assistance from Fish and Wildlife Services, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service. I am now working with NRCS and DNR to restore 40 acres of wetlands for hunting for neighbors, friends, and myself. I also have a barnyard diversion, grass waterways, and contour strips on the land. My education effort is sharing knowledge with my customers on a one-on-one basis. I am planning to work with children in the area of art as others are working with gardening.

What do your customers like the most about your product?

My customers like it when they know I planted the seeds and I grew the plants, and now I am selling the plants. Some people cannot believe I do all of it. My customers also like my special assistance such as landscape advice and variety selection. They also like my unique welded art.

Do you want additional information? For more success stories and other information, see the website:

www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/RESS/altenterprise



Alternative Farm Enterprises – Agritourism Success Stories

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Natural
Resources
Conservation Service

Resource Economics
and Social Sciences
Division

November 2001

Cherry Tree Farms—Grass-Fed Beef, Goats, Sheep, Chickens, and Honey

Interview with Doyle Freeman, 478 Juniper Road,
Cherry Tree, PA 15724, 814-743-6589,
ctfarms@helicon.net

What is the history of your farm and farming experience?

I grew up in South Dakota and spent summers on my uncle's cash grain and beef farm. It was great fun and a wonderful learning experience. The farming seed was planted in my blood, and I wanted to be a full-time farmer ever since. I went on to complete a degree in computer science at Pennsylvania State University and ended up being a building trade construction engineer foreman in Pennsylvania. However, I took every opportunity to satisfy my need to farm by living in a rural area and helping local farmers. A beekeeping friend asked me to help him manage his hives in 1990, and he became my mentor. This was the push I needed to rent a farm and become a part-time farmer with several enterprises—beekeeping, beef, and goats.

What are your present alternative enterprises?

I rent 350 acres and own 87 acres, mostly pasture and hayland. I sell hay and manage 70 head of beef, 35 meat goat/kid pairs, 160 ewe/lamb pairs, 200 grass-fed meat chickens, some hogs, and 37 beehives on three different farms. I practice rotational grazing for the livestock, managing for maximum forage output with minimum inputs. I keep all the animals together and move them from one field to another as pasture conditions dictate. Honey is my primary enterprise.

How did you make the transition?

In 1996, I rented 54 acres and started my animal enterprises in addition to the bees. In 1998, the construction company downsized, which left me without a job, so I started farming full time and added sheep to the enterprises. But the farm I was renting was sold for development, so I began the long search for an affordable farm. I looked at 181 farms before I found one that was affordable and would pencil out a profit for me. This 87-acre farm had had no care or management for 28 years. The buildings and land were in poor condition, but it was all I could afford. I enjoy the animals, the outdoors and working for myself. A farm is a great place to raise my son. Life is getting better every day as my son and I improve the farmstead buildings, update our equipment, and improve the productive capacity of the farm. We are slowly making it *our* farm through these improvements. We are covering our costs with enough left over for family expenses.

What is your decisionmaking process?

I discuss my business decisions with my son. He has a vested interest in these decisions if he decides to take over later. I make my changes based upon changes and growth in the marketplace for my products. One needs to move slowly in developing a direct marketing enterprise. You cannot afford to make a costly mistake in a "learn as you go" business. We address production and marketing problem areas from the perspective of time and dollars. I minimize my expenses by operating with

old farm equipment ranging from a 1928 John Deere #5 mower to my newest piece of equipment, a 1965 Oliver tractor. These will be replaced as profits permit us to do so. My decision criteria are that each enterprise and the farm as a whole have to show a positive cash flow or I don't do it. I keep a record of every single expense so I can determine if an enterprise is profitable.

Do you have a business plan?

I do not have a formal business plan. My livestock production plan is to maintain a debt-free breeding herd. I want to keep improving the herd by buying replacements, especially the males to improve the beef, goat, and sheep herds. This is done on an "afford as you go" basis. I want to improve my haying operation so we have enough wagons for a complete day of haying.

How did you acquire information?

I subscribed to the Lancaster Farming Journal, helped my neighbors, attended conferences, read association newsletters, and networked. These are still my major sources of information.

How do you market your product?

Today, I market my products through the Penn's Corner Farmers' Alliance and to my friends, neighbors, and other local customers who hear about my products. I do not advertise. All publicity is word of mouth. The products have that special pasture-fed taste and are low in fat. It is what the public is looking for. The product sells itself. When I first farmed and worked full time, all my products were sold at the auction barns. Now, I never use this method of sale.

How do you price your products?

For the meat products, I check the local supermarket retail prices. Then, I work backward using percentages and other information to determine the price for hanging carcasses. Then, I check these prices against those of area purveyors. I also keep detailed records of my costs of production by enterprise. I use this cost information to determine the price that is profitable for me. My

local beef customers buy a quarter or half which is priced about five percent above the local purveyor price. I also sell by the cut. I charge about three percent more for my retail cuts than the local grocery store. I sell mainly frozen ground beef and pot roasts, as the restaurants take all the top quality cuts. I sell my sheep, lamb, and hogs in a similar manner. My chickens sell for about \$2.75 per pound, and I can't produce enough of them.

For honey, I charge the restaurant \$1.80 per 12-oz. bear squeeze bottle, and the farmer's market price is \$2.00. The package/label cost is 10 cents per bottle. I do not sell honey at the wholesale price of 43 cents per 12-oz. bottle, because that does not cover my cost of production.

What went wrong? How did you correct the situation?

The beehives at my new farm in Cherry Tree had a parasitic mite problem that I did not have at the rented farm. This is plaguing the whole bee industry today. I began analyzing the differences in my production practices at the old and new farms. I took each step of the production process and broke it apart, and that is when I discovered that the herb spearmint was not growing on the new farm. I planted the spearmint, which drastically reduced the mite population. I also dispersed the beehives to minimize the impact of a bear attack on honey production.

My bull gored me in 2000, which made it impossible for me to work for about three months. This placed an enormous responsibility on my 11-year-old son. However, he became very adept at driving the tractor and operating other farm equipment. This experience resulted in him participating in the 2001 statewide 4-H tractor driving competition where he placed third as a 12-year old among 18-year old competitors. This responsibility has also taught him how important it is to manage your livestock and poultry in a sound and environmentally friendly way.

What went right? And why? How did you build on your success?

The pastures were weedy at the new farm. I wanted to operate a grass-based livestock operation with minimal input, so I began mowing the weeds. The grass soon recovered and the red clover reseeded itself. Today, I have a very nice mix of grasses and red clover including some orchard grass. I fenced my pastures into permanent paddocks for rotational grazing as well as fencing the livestock out of the creeks to control erosion and limit livestock access for drinking water purposes. I knew this rotational grazing would work because I grazed six horses, 16 sheep, and four beef cows on 8.5 acres at my first farm with this practice. It surprised all the neighbors.

What would you have done differently?

There is really no glaring point that appears. I am very happy with the quality of life that comes from living on the farm. It would have been difficult to continue the stressed life of a construction foreman. It is very difficult to measure success, there are so many monetary, nonmonetary, and social factors to weigh. I am very satisfied!

Where do you plan to go from here?

I plan to grow this farm with my son. I think we will top out at about 60 beehives, 200 ewe/lamb pairs, 100 beef, 50 goat/kid pairs, and 200 chickens per cycle.

What would be the most important advice you would give other farmers considering an alternative enterprise?

1. Consistently deliver quality products on schedule.
2. Marketing through a group is superior to doing it as an individual.
3. Marketing directly to the consumer increases your share of the consumer dollar because today's farmer receives only about 20 percent of the retail dollar through the current marketing system.
4. Know your costs. Keep track of your inventory and accounting costs by enterprise.

5. Chefs appreciate suggestions and ideas, but don't tell them how to do their job. Listen to them and produce the goods the way they use them.

How did you handle the liability concern?

I have a \$1-million-per-occurrence policy and a \$2.5 million umbrella policy. I purchased it from my local agent for about \$375 a year.

What kind of promotion material do you use?

Except for business cards, I don't have material other than what I do for the Alliance. The Alliance publishes a quarterly newsletter for its customers, members, and friends. I prepare a list of products and prices each week and e-mail them to chefs. I use these for my customers who come to the farm, but the farmers' market prices are slightly higher.

What do you dislike the most and like the most?

I dislike the frustration of an expected sale not occurring. Also, it is difficult working with some farmers because they need to be in charge of everything they are involved in and want every decision cleared with them, like some of the Alliance marketing decisions. On the other hand, I like working with people, working together and forming an organization. I like helping other farmers and myself increase our income through different marketing opportunities. I dislike big business trying to undercut and drive us from the marketplace using tactics such as selling lettuce-mix at \$2.50 per pound when the general market and we were selling at \$7.50 per pound in January.

Would you start this alternative enterprise business today after learning what is involved?

Yes, this lifestyle is much less stressful.

What groups/organizations/activities have you joined or become involved in because of the alternative enterprises?

I belong to and am active in local and state beekeeping associations, I am a member of the Pennsylvania Association of Sustainable Agriculture, and I am a board member of the

Northeast Federation of Family Cooperatives, and I participate in the "Farm Link" program.

What conservation and education activities do you have?

I use several conservation practices on my farm. I use rotational grazing and other best management grazing practices to eliminate the use of commercial fertilizers and pesticides; I am becoming an Organic Crop Improvement Association certified organic grower; I fence my livestock out of the stream and provide controlled stream access for drinking; and I have established a cattail bed down stream so water quality is improved before leaving my property. Water quality is a concern of all county residents because of the numerous abandoned mines we have in the area. I have been working with the Natural Resources Conservation Service on improving

The U.S. Department of Agriculture prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, room 326W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

stream crossings. My education activities range from writing articles for national beekeeping magazines; speaking to agricultural, non-agricultural, and children groups; to testifying on the National Organic Standards hearings.

What do your customers like the most about your products or enterprises?

The most frequent comments I hear are that our products are fresh, good, and tasty; that we use no hormones or pesticides; and that our products provide nontherapeutic antibodies.

Would it be ok for people to contact you? Yes

Do you want additional information? For more success stories and other information, go to www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/RESS/altenterprise



Alternative Farm Enterprises – Agritourism Success Stories

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Natural
Resources
Conservation Service

Resource Economics
and Social Sciences
Division

November 2001

Penn's Corner Farmers' Alliance—Farmer to Chef, Food Stores, Food Bank Marketing

Interview with Doyle Freeman, Manager, 478 Juniper
road, Cherry Tree, PA 15724, 814-743-6589,
ctfarms@helicon.net

How did the Alliance get started?

The Alliance officially started as a marketing group in 1999. All of the members had been selling direct at farmers' markets; to neighbors, friends, and restaurants; and through Community Supported Agriculture. Here's the background:

In 1997, the Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture (PASA) surveyed farmers around Pittsburgh to see if they wanted to be listed in a publication promoting their products. PASA also surveyed Pittsburgh-area chefs to see what local products they wanted to purchase.

A number of us attended a December 1998 PASA meeting on developing a "Regional Market House." This was a good long-range project, but we needed something *now!* On the way home, two other farmers and I hatched this idea of a marketing alliance. During the next month, Pam Bryan, Ron Gargas, and I wrote a concept letter about the alliance and requested feedback from interested farmers listed in the PASA directory.

In early 1999, PASA held meetings on several of their projects. We presented the idea of a marketing alliance that would sell to Pittsburgh chefs. A total of 125 farmers attended these meetings, but we found that farmers could not separate out all the different PASA projects and the marketing alliance. We recommend that only one project or concept be presented at information meetings to minimize confusion.

Eight farmers decided to participate in the Alliance. We had growing pains, but nothing we could not solve. We operate as a group of farmers working together to sell our products.

PASA helped us get underway. They found meeting places and publicized meetings. They

wanted to make sure we grew our products in a nature-friendly way, provided guidance as we formed the Alliance, and helped us obtain a USDA Rural Business Enterprise Grant for our truck.

How has the Alliance grown or changed?

The first year our volume was low because we were very busy developing demand and an ordering and delivery system. The chefs wanted only one account and a single delivery person. We started with eight farmers rotating the delivery responsibility. That did not work very well because our deliveries were not always on time and we didn't always put the food where the chefs wanted it. We now have one delivery person, and I am the backup. Chefs have two demanding business traits: (1) You must be dependable. (2) There are no excuses. Their attitude is that farmers are not very dependable because if the crop is not ready they don't show up!

Farmers pay 15 percent of their gross sales to support our delivery truck, driver, and office/accounting costs. The Alliance has three pickup locations in the nine-county Pittsburgh area. Thus, our farmers spend only about 20 minutes driving and 15 minutes unloading their product.

Our growth has been satisfying. We grew from four chefs in 1999, to six in 2000, to 17 in 2001. We also deliver to a regional food bank and three natural foods stores. Between 1999 and 2000, we grew 500 percent to a sales volume of \$88,000 and increased to about \$142,000 in 2001.

We started out with eight farmers and reached 11 farmers in 2000—six farmers have left the Alliance and nine have joined—with over 200 products. We do not market everything each

grower produces, and we grow “custom products” for chefs. We now deliver to our Pittsburgh customers on Mondays and Thursdays.

We grew from a seasonal to a year-round marketing alliance with the addition of nine new greenhouses in 2000 and year-round meat supplies. Three factors helped us decide to make this transition: (1) The chefs said, “You aren’t going away this fall, are you?” (2) It is very difficult for marketing managers to go to a chef in the spring and say, “Hi! Here I am again.” (3) Two farmers joined the Alliance who grew products during the field-grown off-season— mushrooms and hydroponic tomatoes.

Members of the Alliance are looking at becoming a cooperative. I have attended the Cooperative Business Leadership Institute for a couple of years. The structure of the cooperative, the board of directors’ responsibilities, and the allegiance of members to the cooperative make a tighter organization. Also, I am a board member of the Northeast Federation of Family Farm Cooperatives, which are cooperatives with under \$10 million in annual sales. There is a very strong support group for newly formed cooperatives.

The Alliance is struggling to pay off its debts: Organizational costs and capital investments (the truck). We need more business volume to cover the cost of operation. The first quarter is our slow season, and the Alliance operates at a loss. The individual farmer is not affected. The high-volume summer months help us recover the annual operating cost, but we are not building much of a reserve to cover unexpected costs.

What kind of insurance do you have?

I carry the insurance for the Alliance since all sales are transacted in my name. I have a \$1 million umbrella for each occurrence and \$2.5 million total

coverage. I purchase my insurance from my local agent at a cost of about \$375 a year.

How does the Alliance market its products?

We do it several ways:

- PASA provided mailing seed money.
- Individual producers who develop a new market for the Alliance do not pay the overhead charge on a product that they market to a new customer during the first year.
- I set up appointments to visit three new customers each month. Another board member or I visit the potential customer with lots of samples and service information.
- We proceed along a measured growth rate so there are no surprises that we cannot handle.
- We have promoted our Alliance and its members on the local PBS television channel.
- We team up with other promotional activities such as the West Pennsylvania Food Systems Council, a local wine tasting organization, and the American Heart Association.
- The Alliance publishes a quarterly newsletter for its customers, members, and friends. I prepare a list of products and prices each week and e-mail or fax them to the chefs. The chefs phone, fax, or e-mail their orders to me, and I consolidate the list. I tell the farmers how much to bring to the pickup point. The chefs appreciate this form of operation because they need to contact only one person for all the locally grown products and pay only one invoice.

Would it be ok for people to contact you? Yes

Do you want additional information? For more success stories and other information, go to www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/RESS/altenterprise

The U.S. Department of Agriculture prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, room 326W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Do you mind sharing your promotional material?

I spend about 5-7 percent of the gross sales on marketing. About 95 percent of marketing is by word of mouth, and 5 percent by formal advertising. For the weddings, I work with the wedding and bridal coordinators. I have a mailing list of church groups and organizations. I have been working with corporations. I contact the human resources or promotion people and then go and make a laptop presentation that is very snappy and convincing. I spent \$25,000 to develop the brochure. I ask my customers to make sure they are getting what they want. I do some media and print advertising. I direct mail on an occasional basis.

What do you dislike the most and like the most?

I like the ability to build something that goes beyond you. The people who work for you, the customers. I love the vision of the business. There are several issues I dislike—learning how to borrow money, construction of facilities, the financial and regulatory aspects. Regulatory aspects are the single biggest issue for me because there are warring factions among state, county, and local governments. Sometimes, I just ask the state or county inspectors what the objectives are in achieving compliance, then I do the thinking and take the actions necessary to comply rather than have someone else try to tell me how to run my business. Everyone has to be flexible.

Would you start this alternative enterprise business today after learning what is involved?

I would be doing exactly what I'm doing today!

What groups/organizations/activities have you joined or become involved in because of the alternative enterprises?

I am involved in several organizations and have been officers in most of them—the local Chamber of Commerce, Farm Bureau, YMCA, Heart Association, Farmland Preservation, Farm Marketing Groups, and Tourism Council. It is very important to be members of these groups so they understand that farming is a business and that the groups promote farming.

What conservation and education activities do you have?

I speak to the groups that come to the farm, especially the schoolchildren. I talk about farming, people's connection to the land, and the preservation of farmland. I have a theater system set up in the bank-barn—which I have turned into a conference hall—to do small plays. I am currently co-authoring a play called "The Harvest," which is about American agriculture. I am going to extend this education program nonprofit foundation that we are currently organizing. I plan to teach conservation as part of the education program. We do not have any special wildlife habitat planting. No pesticides are used around the public assembly and activity areas.

Are you willing to share your information?

Yes!

Do you want additional information? For more success stories and other information, see the website:

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/RESSaltenterprise>

The U.S. Department of Agriculture prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (braille, large print, audiotope, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, room 326W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

NATURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION

W

etlands are an integral part of the agricultural landscape in the Northern Plains. The "prairie potholes" that dot fields across much of this semi-arid region play a big role in recharging groundwater and preventing flooding. They also provide rich habitat for wildlife, particularly migratory waterfowl.

To many farmers, however, wetlands remain a nuisance. It's tough to maneuver large tillage, planting and harvesting equipment around their perimeters.

Adjacent cropping areas are slow to dry out in spring, often delaying planting. Venture too close, too early and the soggy soil can mire a big tractor up to its axles in mud.

Fortunately, an interdisciplinary SARE-funded study is showing that what's good for the wetlands and the birds also can be good for a farmer's bottom line.

"Some people think that farm profitability and environmental concerns are always at odds," says Diane

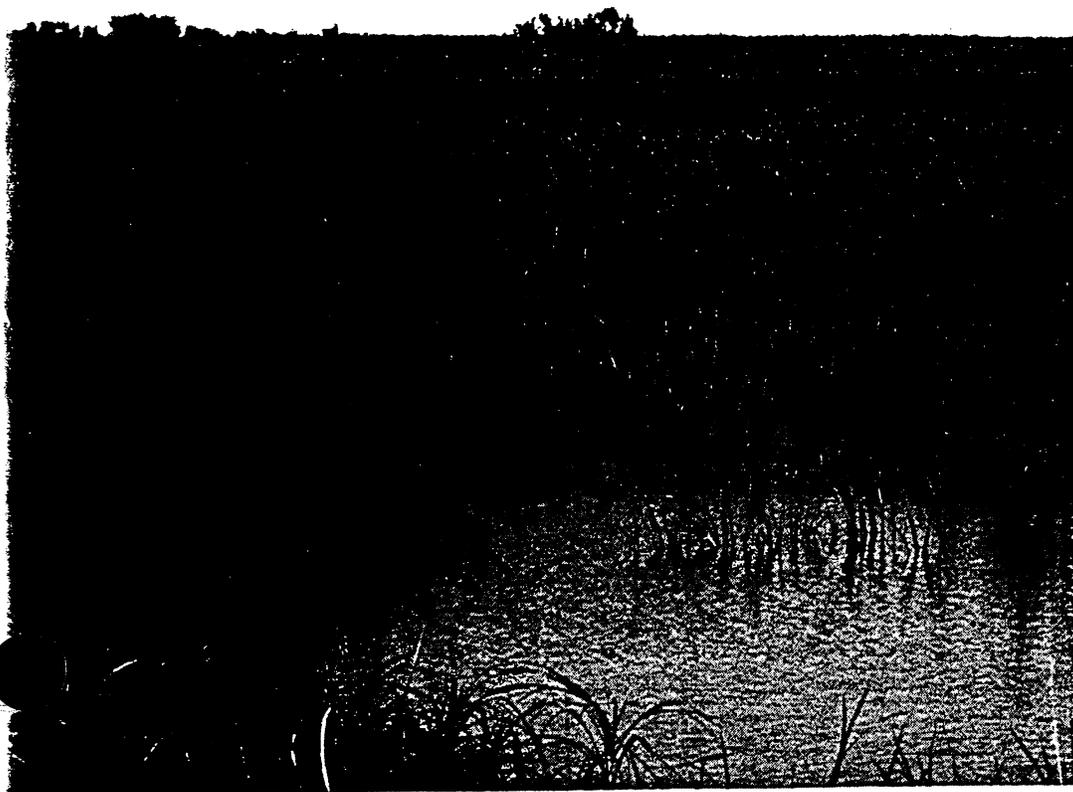
Rickerl, an agroecologist at South Dakota State University. "But in this case, they don't compete. They complement each other."

Rickerl headed up a study team that included agronomists, economists, wildlife experts, soil microbiologists and others who exhaustively analyzed the wetlands and farm management on three cooperating farms: a typical conventional farm, a farm in transition to no-till farming practices and an organic farm.

The species richness of waterfowl breeding pairs was greatest in wetlands on the organic farm, researchers found, with 78 bird species present on the organic farm compared to 57 in the conventional system. Wetland plant species also were more diverse.

"All in all, you can see what a wonderful pocket of diversity wetlands are," says Rickerl, who credits South Dakota for retaining about 65 percent of its original wetlands, when other agricul-

CREATIVE FARMERS SEED A MIX OF FORAGES AROUND WETLANDS, ALLOWING FOR BIRD NESTING IN THE SPRING AND LATE-SUMMER GRAZING FOR LIVESTOCK. PHOTO BY DIANE RICKERL.



ALL THREE FARMS WERE LOSING MONEY ON LAND CROPPED WITHIN 75 FEET OF WETLANDS.

tural states in the Midwest have dropped to less than 5 percent.

The nature of the wetlands themselves and the surrounding landscape probably had more effect on wildlife than the farming practices, Rickerl suspects. But the organic farm also benefits wildlife because of the greater diversity of crops that are found in fields adjacent to the wetlands.

Maintaining small fields of different crops in a patchwork pattern on his 1,200 acres preserves diversity for Charlie Johnson, an organic farmer near Madison, S.D., whose operation served as the project's organic test farm. A third of his land is in forages Johnson rotates with small grains, corn and soybeans. In many fields, rye cover crops protect soil that would otherwise be vulnerable to erosion over the snowy winters, and prairie potholes dot the landscape.

The study's economic analyses found that the organic farm is the most profitable of the three systems if the premium prices received by Johnson for his grain and beef are included. If the premiums are ignored, the organic system is the least profitable.

More importantly, it turns out that all three farms were losing money on land cropped within 75 feet of wetlands.

"Attempting to raise crops close to wetlands can be futile," Johnson says. "Rather than investing in a crop there year after year and watching it fail more often than not, a better alternative is to plant permanent vegetation."

Johnson did just that, seeding a forage mix of switchgrass, brome grass and alfalfa around some of his wetlands. "We leave the spring growth for nesting habitat. Then we graze it or hay it later in summer when our other pastures have dried up," he says. "The wild hay makes excellent feed for our young beef stock."

Not only are those permanent wetland buffers more profitable for Johnson and good for wildlife, but the study team also found them to be effective nutrient filters. Forage vegetation trapped half of the nitrogen and phosphorus that would otherwise have ended up in the wetland, their study found.

"We usually think of wetlands as being the buffer that filters out the nutrients," Rickerl says. "But now we're seeing they're even more efficient if we buffer the

buffer with permanent vegetation."

The study team also found that the smaller wetlands ducks prefer are better at filtering nutrients out of water. "That's important because it is the small wetlands that cause so much controversy in the Prairie Pothole Region," Rickerl says, referring to the reluctance of many to leave small pockets of wetland around which they need to drive their heavy equipment.

Where wetlands are farmed through, the soils can become so overloaded with phosphorus that the nutrient can move into groundwater, or flow out of the wetland to contaminate other surface waters, the team speculates. That situation is very unusual for phosphorus, which normally is bound tightly in the soil, Rickerl says.

"What's the effect?" she asks. "No one knows. But the point is that farmers are wasting money by adding phosphorus fertilizer to these areas that their crops can't retrieve."

Wetlands play an important role in storing water and replenishing both soil moisture and groundwater. Forty percent of the water entering wetlands either remained there or moved into the soil

or groundwater, researchers found.

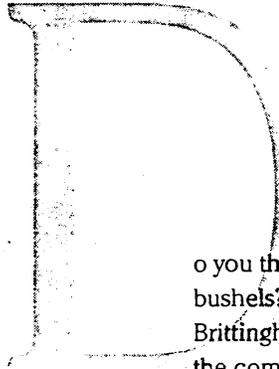
Water budgets from the study also showed that 60 percent of the water entering wetlands is runoff from surrounding fields, which has a tremendous potential to be contaminated with nutrients and other ag chemicals.

"That points out the tremendous role wetlands play in the water cycle," Rickerl says. "That's water that we should be using to recharge the soil and groundwater. Without the wetlands we'd be sending it down the river to cause flooding elsewhere."

Rickerl is continuing her efforts with educational programs to help farmers understand that wetlands and profits can go hand-in-hand. "Regardless of the wildlife benefits, our surveys show most farmers still want to drain wetlands," she observes. "We're trying to show that by managing wetlands properly, money and nutrients can stay on the farm."

Johnson already knows that from experience. "Sometimes we forget why the wetlands are there," he says. "With the forage borders, they can be good for wildlife, good for flood control and produce good feed for livestock. You can't ask for much more than that." —*Craig Cramer*

NATURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION



Do you think we're hitting 200 bushels?" shouted Norman Brittingham over the din of the combine as he maneuvered through one of the strips we had marked in his corn field.

I was riding shotgun with a map of the fertilizer treatments we were testing in a cover crop research project on his Maryland farm. We were measuring corn yields to find out if Brittingham's use of cover crops as a non-synthetic fertilizer was an adequate substitute.

one of the biggest suspected bay pollutants: nitrogen from crop/livestock farms. He was trying to determine whether Bay-area farmers could reduce their fertilizer use—thereby further lessening their impact on the watershed. My role, as a Ph.D. candidate at the university, was to assist Decker in designing, coordinating and analyzing studies throughout the state.

Brittingham volunteered to test the amount of nitrogen fertilizer we could replace by growing a winter

ter peas and hairy vetch "fix" nitrogen by transferring it from air to soil via nodules on their roots.

Mixing grasses and legumes proved a great option. Farmers could realize multiple benefits, including guarding against erosion, preventing nitrogen leaching, adding low-cost nutrients for their crops and providing a water-conserving mulch that helped to increase yields during Maryland's typical hot, dry summers.

"Extensive research and farm demonstrations have shown that a winter cover crop of hairy vetch can fix most—and sometimes all—of the nitrogen required for maximum corn yields," Decker says. "The cover crop mulch conserves moisture, increasing yield by helping the corn use the nitrogen more effectively."

Most of the corn strips in Brittingham's irrigated field yielded 150 to 170 bushels per acre, whether we had applied low or high rates of synthetic fertilizer. That meant hairy vetch supplied most of the nitrogen needed by the corn crop. Brittingham could save on his fertilizer bills, and by applying the right amounts, would not send any extra nitrogen to pollute the bay.

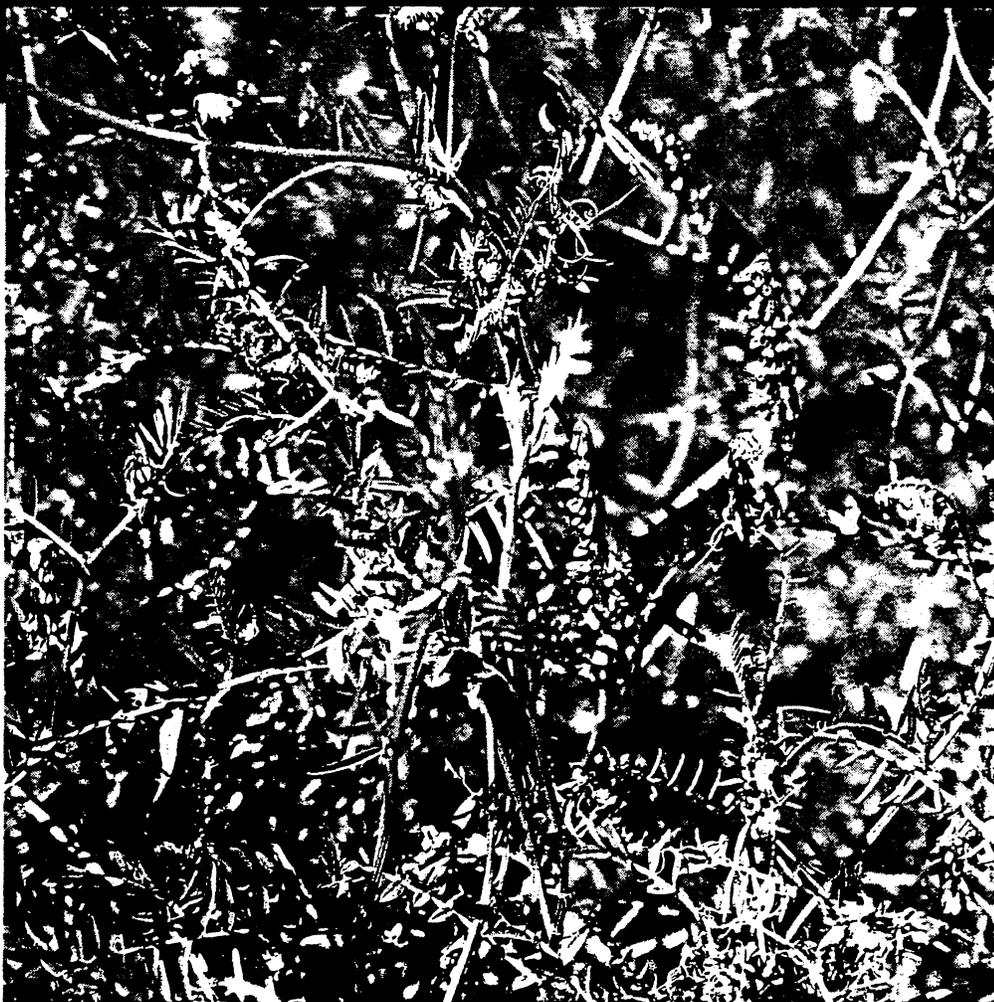
EXTENSIVE RESEARCH AND FARM DEMONSTRATIONS HAVE SHOWN THAT A WINTER COVER CROP OF HAIRY VETCH CAN FIX MOST — AND SOMETIMES ALL — OF THE NITROGEN.

Brittingham was one of 10 farmers who collaborated with University of Maryland researchers in a SARE-funded project studying cover crops as a tool to reduce nitrogen pollution in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. The bay, an estuary of national significance, had become a cause celebre among politicians, environmentalists and area residents looking to restore the once-productive fishery.

Morris Decker, a University of Maryland researcher, sought a possible remedy for

cover crop of hairy vetch just before planting corn. By adding different amounts of fertilizer to the corn, we determined how much of the purchased nitrogen could be replaced by growing the vetch, a legume that "fixes" nitrogen without sacrificing crop yields.

Grass cover crops like rye, wheat and barley take up excess nitrogen in the fall and winter, preventing it from leaching and ending up in the bay. Legume cover crops such as crimson clover, win-



WAITING UNTIL HAIRY VETCH FLOWERS TO INCORPORATE IT INTO THE SOIL MAXIMIZES THE AMOUNT OF NITROGEN THE LEGUME WILL SUPPLY FOR THE NEXT CROP. PHOTO BY ANDY CLARK.

Other cooperating grain or crop/livestock farmers in Maryland planted rye, wheat, barley, crimson clover, winter peas, hairy vetch or mixtures of grasses and legumes. Cover crops protect and improve the soil during a time when no other crop normally would be grown, such as during the winter in the Northeast.

"A vetch/rye cover crop mixture provides more benefits than either one alone," Decker says. "When residual fall soil nitrogen is high, rye will dominate the mixture, but when soil nitrogen is low, vetch will dominate, fixing more nitrogen. This provides producers an excellent management tool."

We had tested those cover crops in very small

plots on university research farms and needed to validate our findings in the field. Cooperators used different rates of nitrogen fertilizer to help us tease out more information about how the cover crops affected nitrogen dynamics on a farm scale. Decker also took the opportunity to demonstrate to farmers the value of using cover crops in their operations.

The farmers helped us confirm it usually was best to wait until late April to kill the cover crops, especially legumes or legume/grass mixtures, in preparation for the cash crop. This allowed the legume to fix more nitrogen, and resulted in more cover crop mulch and better moisture conserva-

tion. Many farmers like to plant their corn at about this time, so we hoped to show them that corn yields often were better if they waited the extra week or two to realize the full benefit of the cover crop.

On the bay's western shore in Frederick County, Joe Hottel took the fertilizer test one step further. He dedicated more than 90 acres of his diversified crop/livestock farm to test three- to-10-acre strips of cover crops, different fertilizer rates and applications of sewage sludge.

Cover crops could play a role in managing the nutrients contained in the sludge—taking up excess nitrogen in the fall and releasing it back the following year

for the corn.

"I like what cover crops do for my soil," Hottel says. "They keep the soil from eroding, which I really like when we get heavy rains. This farm was full of erosion gullies when I took it over. They're all gone now."

By season's end, Hottel's yields ranged from 130 to 160 bushels per acre, comparable to his usual take. Moreover, the combination of cover crops and sludge reduced his fertilizer bill by about \$30 per acre. He also saved about \$20 per acre in tillage costs and \$10 per acre in lime costs.

Hottel was on board. Now he puts all of his 1,600 acres in cover crops and uses sludge where he can on his corn-soybean rotation.

"I grow cover crops on as much land as I can every year," he says. "When you have something that works, you don't change. And, if you don't take care of your ground, it's not going to take care of you." —*Andy Clark*

NATURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION

ones Creek whips through John Briscoe's cotton field like a garter snake. During a rainstorm, water moves in sheets down the sloping field toward the bank, taking Briscoe's soil with it.

"Every year, two or three new ditches washed out too deep to cross with a picker," recalls Briscoe, who raises

'dozer to fill it in and put a levee around it."

In 1995, he had only two choices to comply with Mississippi's erosion control rules: He could build terraces or convert to no-till farming. He opted to build a terrace. While it did slow the wash of topsoil from below the terrace, a year later

race to slow water flow and trap sediment.

In part thanks to SARE research headed by Seth Dabney, vegetative barriers—or grass hedges—have been added to the Natural Resources Conservation Service Field Office Technical Guide for Mississippi as an approved erosion control practice. Grass hedges also are eligible for cost share through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

An NRCS district conservationist recommended that Briscoe talk to Dabney about trying a hedge in his field. The researcher and the farmer walked the field together and reviewed the options.

Though he was skeptical about the effectiveness of a hedge, Briscoe opted to plant one rather than use more precious topsoil to build another terrace. It was a purely financial decision. At \$6 a pound for switchgrass seed, Briscoe could sow a 10-foot hedge across his field for about \$100. The terrace would have cost about \$2 per foot, or \$4,000 to cross the 50-acre field.

After evaluating the hedge for two seasons, Briscoe is convinced he made the right choice. A 10-



RESEARCHER SETH DABNEY GESTURES TOWARD A \$100 GRASS HEDGE THAT CONTROLS EROSION; CONSTRUCTING A TERRACE COSTS \$4,000. PHOTO BY GWEN ROLAND.

cotton, soybeans, corn and beef cattle on a third-generation family farm in north Mississippi. "One year we had an absolute gulley washer that left a hole big enough to put a house in. We had to use a

ditches began forming above the structure.

This time Briscoe had a third choice for conservation compliance: He could plant an inexpensive vegetative barrier above the ter-

**IN PART THANKS TO SARE RESEARCH,
VEGETATIVE BARRIERS — OR GRASS
HEDGES — HAVE BEEN ADDED TO THE NRCS'**

**TECHNICAL GUIDE FOR MISSISSIPPI AS AN
APPROVED EROSION CONTROL PRACTICE.**

foot swath of blue-green switchgrass waves across the sloping cotton field like a Mohawk haircut. At ground level, the space between thousands of reed-like stems is clogged with soil trapped on its way to the creek. But most telling of all, no new gashes are splitting the hillside.

"Not only is it working, but it takes up less space than terracing," says Briscoe, sweeping his arm over rows of cotton blossoms jostling against the hedge. At 50 feet wide, the terrace takes up about two and a half acres of his field. At only 10 feet wide, the hedge takes up about one-fifth that space.

Mowing once or twice a season is the only maintenance required once the hedge is well established, says Dabney, who has been researching vegetative barriers for nearly a decade. "During the first season there may be washouts in the hedge at the points of highest water flow," he says.

Such washouts can be fixed in a few minutes with a shovel. A terrace, on the other hand, needs regular maintenance often requiring earth-moving equipment.

Although many plants may make up a hedge, the

ideal hedge grassplant is cold hardy with thick, woody stems and dense, erect growth. Dabney's research shows that Alamo switchgrass has those characteristics, so that's what is specified in the Mississippi standards. Switchgrass also has the advantage of being a native plant that doesn't invade the cash crop.

"It's not invasive because it is kind of a slow starter," says Dabney. "Crabgrass and other annuals can choke it out if given a chance, but John established an effective barrier the first season. By the second season, it is solidly established."

Farmers should not assume vegetative barriers can replace terraces in all situations, Dabney cautions, since there are areas of concentrated water flow where vegetation couldn't withstand the force. "Hedges can slow down runoff waters and trap sediment," he says. "They may even enhance infiltration, but they will not completely intercept and cut off runoff waters. As field sizes increase, hedges reach a limit where other technology is

needed to handle the accumulated runoff."

The official acceptance of vegetative barriers doesn't mean the research is over. Far from it, says Dabney. Among other things the research team is looking into the pest management characteristics of the hedges. An Arkansas researcher determined hedges attract big-eyed bugs and other beneficial insects.

"It may turn out that there are enough benefits to work hedges into an IPM program," Dabney says.

The search for better varieties of switchgrass continues. Project cooperator Joel Douglas of the Jamie Whitten NRCS Plant Materials Center has been breeding switchgrass from wild collections since 1993. He hopes to develop a shorter switchgrass that would require less mowing, saving farmers time and money.

Douglas' research plots have reduced a slope at the Whitten Center from 7-percent grade to 5-percent grade in just four growing seasons. "All we did was plant them and leave them

alone," he says. "In addition to the soil buildup and leveling, we also have improved filtration when it rains."

Even though vegetative barriers have been used for thousands of years in other countries, Mississippi is the first U.S. jurisdiction to officially recognize their effectiveness. The inclusion of vegetative barriers in Mississippi's interim standards also marks the first time a SARE project has directly influenced state agricultural policy.

Dabney, who is based at the ARS National Sedimentation Lab at Oxford, is now working with a committee revising the National Interim Practice Standard for grass hedges.

As for Briscoe, seeing how the hedges hold soil in place is encouraging him to consider additional changes on the family farm.

"In my lifetime I've seen ditches get bigger. That may be the result of so much timber being cut in the area — or it could be from our farming practices."

Briscoe, whose neighbor no-tills 2,500 acres of cotton, now is considering incorporating the practice. "The savings in just labor is enough to make you take it seriously," he says. — *Gwen Roland*

NATURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION

**IN JUST THE
SECOND YEAR AS
WETLANDS, A
FORMER FARM
IN PRODUCTION
FOR 40 YEARS
SPROUTED DIVERSE
FLORA JUST
MONTHS AFTER
FLOODING.**

In a 39,000-acre national wildlife refuge that borders the California-Oregon state line, agricultural and wildlife habitat protection interests have maintained an uneasy relationship since the 1960s.

In 1964, the Kuchel Act set up the Tulelake National Wildlife Refuge to help preserve one of the nation's premier nesting sites for waterfowl, with a twist: It mandated that "optimum consideration" be given to agricultural enterprises in the area. Since then, farmers have leased land in the refuge to grow potatoes, small grains, alfalfa, onions and sugar beets.

The farmers are following in the footsteps of their parents and grandparents, who migrated to the fertile valley in and around the present-day refuge in the late 1800s. But their farms bordering and within the Tulelake Refuge, while yielding about three times more per acre than in less fertile areas, are part of a stop on the Pacific flyway that attracts 1 million waterfowl each year.

While such competing interests usually come to a head, a compromise of sorts has worked in the Tulelake Refuge since the Kuchel Act.

That act recognizes the incredible soil fertility and importance of agriculture to the local economy as well as the vital source of food farming provides to the waterfowl. The complementary relationship worked for years until scientists discovered the wetlands were declining.

As opposing forces debate the future of the Tulelake Refuge, a group of researchers, refuge staff and farmers have devised a system to rejuvenate the wetlands while perpetuating agriculture. A key player in that work, SARE-funded researcher Carol Shennan, has helped set up a system that rotates wetlands and farming to rejuvenate the marsh and offer prime soil to participating farmers.

"The wetlands are no longer good habitat for birds," says Shennan, an agroecologist at the University of California-Santa Cruz. Studies have shown agricultural runoff is a not a major factor in that decline. Most of the refuge, governed by an old flood control plan that ended the alternating ebb and flow of water that occurs in a natural wetlands system, is stagnant.

"We have a very mature unproductive marsh where few

new plants germinate because of stabilized water depths, and there is little habitat diversity," Shennan says. "Under rotational management, we can use agriculture as a disturbance to break the cycle and restore young stages of marsh development."

The project creates rotational land uses—wetlands or farms—that switch every three years. Farmland is flooded to create wetlands of differing water levels, while unproductive wetlands are drained to create farmland on soil untouched by a plow for decades, at least. The system promises more diverse wetlands and fertile farm soil that needs few, if any, amendments.

The complicated system already has brought results. In just the second year, a former farm in active production for 40 years sprouted diverse flora, with tules, bullrushes and cattails growing just months after flooding.

"It's been really astounding," says Dave Mauser, a wildlife biologist at the refuge. "In little marshes we've created, we're getting wetland vegetation the first year out of farming. It's a quick transition, and the bird use has really followed suit."

For farmers who lease land in the refuge, the project



offers an unparalleled opportunity to reduce their use of purchased fertilizers and pesticides. The virgin soil hosts few, if any, soil-borne pathogens like nematodes.

Sid Staunton, who grows potatoes, small grains and onions on 1,500 acres both adjacent to and on refuge-leased land, hopes to secure a lease on the converted wetlands. He anticipates a big savings in input costs such as nematocides, which can run \$250 an acre.

"We'd have a disease-free soil that's really rich in nutrients, so we wouldn't need to put in huge inputs," says Staunton, who serves on Shennan's 10-member farm advisory committee. "It's a good way to use a natural system to clean up some of the soil-borne problems

that build up over time."

Rotating the two land uses for the mutual benefit of farming and wildlife habitat perfectly meets the intent of the Kuchel Act, Mauser says. The legislation creating the farm lease program provided surplus ag crops for birds while keeping them from the high-value rice crop in California's Central Valley.

Farmers leasing refuge land are used to bird pilfering, Staunton says. Most of that occurs on grain stubble because the birds migrate in fall after harvest or in spring before planting.

Shennan also is working with farmers to increase their use of cover crops to provide habitat for nesting birds, reduce soil loss through wind erosion, suppress weeds and improve

GEESE RETURN TO TULELAKE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE'S REJUVENATED WETLANDS NEXT TO FARMS THAT PROVIDE A VITAL WATERFOWL FOOD SOURCE. PHOTO BY CAROL SHENNAN.

soil organic matter. It's especially challenging in the basin because of a 4,200-foot elevation that can bring severe frosts year round.

The project also establishes the long-term transition of farmland into what Shennan hopes will become a productive, mature marsh. Using computer modeling, she will study different rotation scenarios on a refuge-wide scale.

"We want to set up a framework to judge impacts of each potential rotation design on water quality, habitat diversity and economics," she says. "It involves looking at the system from multiple perspectives so we can use it as a tool with farmers, environ-

mental groups, hunting groups and refuge managers to quantify benefits and tradeoffs. There's a tremendous amount at stake."

Some farmers remain skeptical about the future of farming in the Tulelake Refuge. Staunton, on the other hand, is optimistic the new system will lower costs for farmers while improving wetland and wildlife values.

"It's a real on-the-ground solution, and, for the amount of money invested, the dividends are incredible," he says. "This thing could solve this area's resource conflicts quickly, and we can continue to have good food value from this area." — *Valerie Berton*

The *New* American Farmer

Profiles of Agricultural Innovation

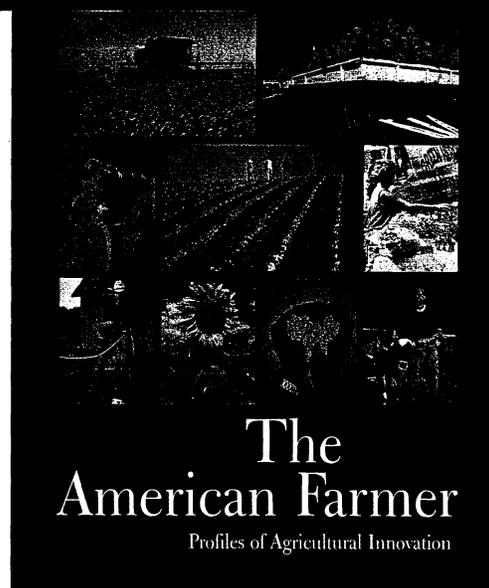
The New American Farmer is a collection of in-depth interviews with farmers and ranchers across America. The book's diverse profiles detail the effects of farming practices on profitability, quality of life, rural communities and the environment. By publicizing their stories, SARE demonstrates that sustainable farms and ranches are no longer few and far between. Instead, they are viable throughout American agriculture.

There's something in the collection for everyone. From a banana producer in Hawaii to a potato farmer in Maine — and almost every state and commodity in between — the producers featured in *The New American Farmer* are meeting their financial, stewardship and community goals.

Order the 160-page *The New American Farmer* book (\$10), contact (802) 656-0484; sanpubs@uvm.edu

The New American Farmer on CD-ROM offers many options for learning — or teaching others — about dozens of farming and ranching systems that provide profitable alternatives and a satisfying way of life. Search the CD by subject, state or farmer name to find and download profiles of interest, then combine them with information about your institution or programs.

Point others to the resource on the web at www.sare.org/newfarmer, where you will find links to other profiles and case studies.



"Today I spend about the same on fertilizer as I did before I cut back. But now that fertilizer covers 600 acres instead of 300."

— Rich Bennett
Napoleon, Ohio, grain producer

"We have increased our sales by 100 percent in the past 10 years... To be operating in what we think of as a sustainable way, we're not depleting soil. We're building up the resources, which is very important to us."

— Jim Crawford
Hustontown, Pa., vegetable producer

"Our basic herd health is excellent. Our vet feels that our pasture management is the most important factor."

— Peggy Sechrist
Fredericksburg, Texas, cattle rancher

"We're trying to focus on understanding the whole system and having a rotation that provides weed and pest management and quality crop production."

— Bob Quinn
Big Sandy, Mont., wheat producer

Please send me *The New American Farmer* _____ book(s) (\$10 each) _____ CD-ROM(s) (\$5 each)

Make checks payable to Sustainable Agriculture Publications and send with this ordering coupon to:
Sustainable Agriculture Publications, 210 Hills Building, University of Vermont, Burlington, VT 05405-0082

Deliver books to:

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY, STATE, ZIP: _____

PHONE: _____

To pay by credit card, call (802) 656-0484.

Please allow 3 to 5 weeks for delivery.

The New American Farmer was published by the Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education (SARE) program, part of USDA's Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service. SARE is a national grants program that seeks to advance farming systems that are more profitable, environmentally sound and good for communities. For more information, visit www.sare.org



The New American Farmer

Table of Contents

NAF Table of Contents

About this resource

The New American Farmer is a collection of in-depth interviews with farmers and ranchers across America published by USDA's Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program and its national outreach arm, the Sustainable Agriculture Network (SAN).

How to use this resource

Foreword

Profiles by Region

North Central Region

Molly & Ted Bartlett, Hiram, Ohio
Rich Bennett, Napoleon, Ohio
Richard DeWilde & Linda Halley, Viroqua, Wisconsin
Mary Doerr, Kenyon, Minnesota
Diana & Gary Endicott, Bronson, Kansas
Carmen Fernholz, Madison, Minnesota
Bob Finken, Douglas, North Dakota
Greg & Lei Gunthorp, LaGrange, Indiana
Charles Johnson, Madison, South Dakota
Tom Larson, Saint Edward, Nebraska
Don & Anita Nelson, Wisconsin Dells, Wisconsin
Dan & Jan Shepherd, Chiftonhill, Missouri
Dick & Sharon Thompson, Boone, Iowa
Bob Wackernagel, Montague, Michigan

Northeast Region

Jim & Moie Crawford, Hustontown, Pennsylvania
Dorman & Fogler Families, Exeter, Maine
Steve & Cheri Groff, Holtwood, Pennsylvania
Jim & Adele Hayes, Warnerville, New York
Elizabeth Henderson, Newark, New York
Gordon & Marion Jones, Chichester, New Hampshire
David & Cynthia Major, Westminster West, Vermont
Allen Matthews, Scenery Hill, Pennsylvania
Alice & Brian McGowan, Montague Center, Massachusetts

Bob & Leda Muth, Williamstown, New Jersey
Bill Slagle, Bruceton Mills, West Virginia

Southern Region

Max Carter, Douglas, Georgia
Luke Green, Banks, Alabama
Alvin & Shirley Harris, Millington, Tennessee
Alex & Betsy Hitt, Graham, North Carolina
Jackie Judice, Franklin, Louisiana
Terry & LaRhea Pepper, O'Donnell, Texas
Richard & Peggy Sechrist, Fredericksburg, Texas
Rosa Shareef, Sumrall, Mississippi
Chuck & Mary Smith, New Castle, Kentucky
Lynn Steward, Arcadia, Florida
Tom Trantham, Pelzer, South Carolina

Western Region

Frank Bohman, Morgan, Utah
Arnott & Kathleen Duncan, Goodyear, Arizona
Mark Frasier, Woodrow, Colorado
Richard Ha, Hilo, Hawaii
Michael & Marie Heath, Buhl, Idaho
Hopeton Farms, Snelling, California
Lon Inaba, Wapato, Washington
Karl Kupers, Harrington, Washington
Bob Quinn, Big Sandy, Montana
Lonnie Roybal, Costilla, New Mexico
Ed and Wynette Sills, Pleasant Grove, California
Larry Thompson, Boring, Oregon

Other Profiles

Top of Page





The New American Farmer

Online Farmer/Rancher Profiles

NAF Table of Contents

The New American Farmer is a collection of in-depth interviews with farmers and ranchers across America published by USDA's Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program and its national outreach arm, the Sustainable Agriculture Network (SAN).

This page contains links to stories about sustainable farmers and ranchers across the United States, and also points to a few international profiles. Browse profiles by category: SARE, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), other sustainable agriculture programs & organizations, and international stories.

Do you know of other case studies that could be included here? Please contact us (san@nal.usda.gov).

SARE

Ten Years of SARE ([html](#))

The book features 40 SARE projects, one from each of the four SARE regions, in the following ten topic areas: crop production, animal production, natural resource protection, marketing, community development, education, pest management, horticulture, professional development, integrated farm/ranch system projects.

SARE Highlights ([html](#))

Farmers are profiled in many SAN publications, including

- Steel in the Field: A Farmer's Guide to Weed Management Tools
- Managing Cover Crops Profitably, 2nd Edition
- The Real Dirt: Farmers Tell About Organic and Low-Input Practices in the Northeast
- A Whole-Farm Approach to Managing Pests
- Marketing Strategies for Farmers and Ranchers
- Diversify Crops to Boost Profits and Stewardship
- Exploring Sustainability in Agriculture

Western SARE Profiles from 2000 Conference 25 profiles ([html](#))

North Central SARE -- Field Notes include featured farms (9). ([pdf](#) and [html](#)).

- Diversification (Tom Larson)
- Alternative Marketing (Bossard Farm)
- Kevin Smyth (Striking it Rich B Farmer Finds "Gold" in French Drain System)
- Farmer Networks
- Kansas ranchers Diana and Gary Endicot
- Nebraska farmer David Bosle (pastured poultry, co-op style)
- Composting (several farmers)
- Swine Production (Nolan and Susan Jungclaus, Tom Frantzen, others)
- Cover Crops

NE SARE ([html](#))

- [Organic hops](#)
- [Niche marketing high-quality meats](#)
- [Elk farming](#)

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

NRCS Mid-Atlantic Interdisciplinary Resource Team

Two 8-page fact sheets ([pdf](#)) on sustainable. Each has a 4-page feature of a mid-Atlantic farm:

- *Polyface Farm*. Joel and Theresa Salatin, with the help of their two children, Daniel and Rachel, display a level of sustainable management and organic farming that few farmers achieve.
- *Cedar Meadow Farm*. Cedar Meadow Farm is a crop and vegetable operation. Products include corn, soybeans, hay, and annual vegetables including tomatoes, pumpkins, sweet corn, broccoli and peppers.

NRCS Watershed Science Institute, Lincoln, NE

Sustainable Agriculture Case Studies ([pdf](#))

- John and Vicki Swift own *Mother Goose Farms*, a 5-acre coffee orchard in South Kona, Hawaii.
- *Ray Eck* grows organic almonds in the San Joaquin Valley.
- *Lamar Black* has been managing a 2,300 acre farm in Jenkins

and Burke Counties in east central Georgia since 1982.

- *Ed and Dorothy Kalin* operate a 150-unit cow/calf operation on a 1,160 acre farm in Pawnee County, NE.

Making the Transition to Sustainable Agriculture (Technical Note 2)

- *Bob Ekre* has been farming in western North Dakota for nearly 50 years.
- *Ken Staten* has been growing vegetables on 4 acres of family-owned farmland in Wakulla County, Florida, just south of Tallahassee for about 7 years.
- Brothers *Terry and Robert (Bobby) Weigel* farm 2,240 acres of land along the border of Emmons and Logan Counties, North Dakota.
- *Dosi Alvarez* is a third generation farmer. He and his wife Norma manage an 850-acre organic farm in the Mesilla Valley, New Mexico, on land his grandfather cleared.

Other Sustainable Agriculture Programs & Organizations

SAREP

Are Case Studies Useful? by Ann Drescher Mayse, SAREP

Case studies-descriptions of real-life businesses and the challenges that they face-are often used by business schools to teach students practical, holistic problem-solving skills. The same approach may be useful in learning how to apply sustainable agriculture's environmental, economic and social principles to practical farming situations. But many of us (at UC) are more comfortable talking only about information that comes from experimental trials, rather than case studies and other information based on farmers' experiences.

Davis Farmer's Market (March, 2000) (html)

The Davis Farmer's Market is one of the most well-known and successful farmers markets in the state of California.

Whole Farm Cooperative (profiling 30 member farms in Central Minnesota)

The Food Alliance (html)

For all of you who want to meet the men and women who put food on our tables, check out our newly created farmer profiles for each Food Alliance-Approved farm in the Northwest.

Innovative Farmers of Ohio

Farm Feature Stories

Farming Without Chemicals in Ohio

Small Farms, Big Ideas ([html](#))

is a series of articles and photos featuring winners of Missouri Sustainable Agriculture Demonstration Awards.

Profitable Practices and Strategies for a New Generation The North Central Initiative for Small Farm Profitability

This booklet brings you stories of people making a difference in rural America. These people have endured record low prices and a rural economy mired just short of depression. They have seen their neighbors move away and their home town businesses boarded up. But they have not become victims of the times.

International Profiles

Centre for Environment and Society, SAFE-World Research

47 Portraits of Sustainable Agriculture Projects and Initiatives

Getting Started in Organic Farming ([html](#))

Environment Canada and Manitoba Agriculture

Eight Organic Farmers Share Experiences

[Top of Page](#)



**Case Study No. 1: Vicki and John Swift
(Mother Goose Farms)**



John Jeffredo, Soil Conservationist, opens the gate to Mother Goose Farms, Kona SWCD's Cooperator of the Year for 1995.

Site Description:

John and Vicki Swift own Mother Goose Farms, a 5-acre coffee orchard in South Kona, Hawaii. They own two additional acres of land where they live and raise a few pigs and process the coffee they grow. John also manages 77 acres of macadamia nut orchards for absentee owners. He has 50 breeding ewes, which he grazes under the macadamia nuts to control groundcover. Mother Goose Farms has been a certified organic coffee orchard since 1992. Requirements for organic certification vary by state, but in all cases, use of synthetic pesticides and inorganic nitrogen fertilizers is prohibited.

The farm is located at an elevation of approximately 2,000 ft above sea level. The climate in South Kona is very mild. Temperatures fluctuate little, but rainfall varies widely. Normal annual rainfall is 40 inches, but the past 3 years have been unusually dry with annual rainfall varying only from 13-21 inches. Acid rainfall is common due to the activity of nearby Kilauea Volcano. Except for the unpredictable rainfall, the climate in South Kona is ideally suited to coffee growing.

The farm lies on very young, shallow, rocky organic soils.

Location:

Honomalino, South Kona Soil and Water Conservation District, Hawaii

District Conservationist:

Steve Skipper
P.O. Box 636
Kealahou, HI 96750-0636
Tel (808) 322-2484
Fax (808) 322-3735

Farmed Acres:

7 (2 locations - see site description)

Enterprises:

Sheep, Pigs, Coffee

Sustainable Agriculture Issues:

**ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY &
ECOLOGICAL FUNCTION**

Erosion

Cultural Requirements for Coffee

Weed Pressures

Insect Pests

SOCIOECONOMIC VIABILITY

Volatile Markets; Uncertain Yields

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY AND ECOLOGICAL FUNCTION

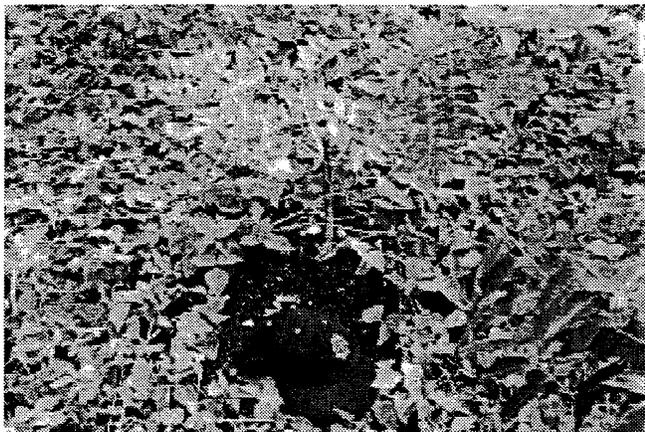
Erosion:

All of the soils on this part of Hawaii are shallow and sloping, making erosion control a major concern. However, erosion is extremely low on Mother Goose Farms, since the land is never tilled and remains in permanent cover crop throughout the year. The cover crop provides an added benefit of protecting the soil from baking, a concern with bare soils in Hawaii.

Coffee Cultural Requirements:

In many parts of the world coffee is planted in shade to protect it against drought, erosion and wind. In South Kona, where cloud cover is not as reliable as in the northern part of the island, additional protection may be helpful. With assistance from NRCS

District Conservationist, Steve Skipper, and the NRCS Plant Materials Center on Molokai, John and Vicki Swift have recently started an intercropping trial with the fast growing, leguminous tropical tree, *Gliricidia sepium*. They expect this tree to provide protection for the coffee, add nitrogen to the soil, and provide additional food for their geese (see **Weed Pressures** section). Tree cuttings and seeds were provided by the NRCS Plant Materials Center. If the trial plantings prove successful, John and Vicki plan to intercrop more of their orchard, perhaps experimenting with other tree species.



Gliricidia seedling planted for shade, forage and nitrogen mulch.

Weed Pressures:

Weeds are a serious problem for both coffee and macadamia nuts in Hawaii. Traditionally weeds are sprayed several times each year with herbicides. In 1989, the Swifts decided to try controlling the weeds in their coffee by non-chemical means (a necessary requirement for organic certification). Desmodium (*Desmodium* spp.), a trailing climbing perennial forage legume, immediately took over the orchard, and weed trimming soon became prohibitively expensive. The Swifts began experimenting with geese for weed control in 1991. First they fenced the orchard to keep out dogs and other potential predators. They bought 25 geese, which they raised on desmodium from four days of age. Once the feathers were developed (6-8 weeks), the Swifts moved the geese to the orchard. They immediately began eating the desmodium in the field and have been controlling its height to the point that it is now an acceptable nitrogen fixing cover crop. The Swifts currently have 60 geese that they move around in the

orchard weekly using portable electric poultry netting. The Swifts estimate they save \$5,000 annually on weed control, as well as the energy and time saved by letting the geese do the work.

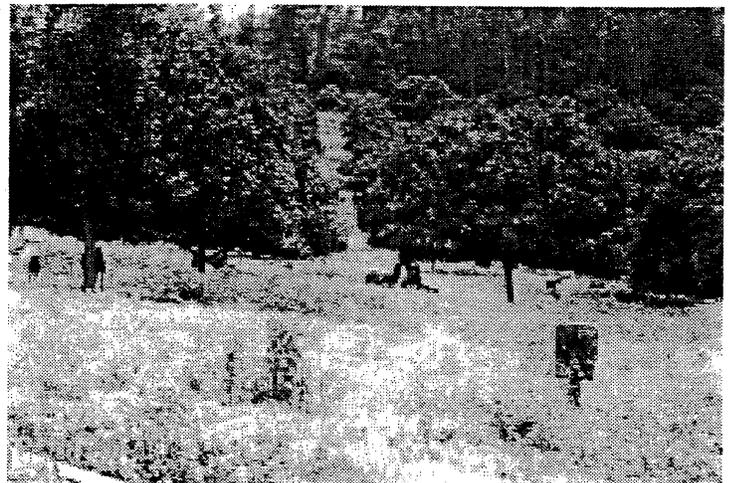
The use of sheep to maintain groundcover under macadamia nuts is a proven practice in Kona. However, John is using katahidn hair sheep, a breed not previously used for this purpose. These sheep were bred strictly for meat. They produce no wool, which has eliminated many of the typical problems associated with sheep in a warm climate. The katahidn sheep are maintaining the groundcover effectively.

Insect Pests:

The insect pests of greatest concern on Mother Goose Farms are ants and scale, which can lead to sooty mold, another pest of coffee. Ants have increased in the orchard since the irrigation system was installed. Still, Steve Skipper feels that the problem is not as severe as on many farms in the area, since the geese provide some insect as well as groundcover control. Some farms in the area have experienced problems with aphids and mites. These have not been a problem for John and Vicki. To control the scale on which the ants feed, the Swifts apply an ultra fine dormant oil.



Geese controlling groundcover.



Sheep controlling groundcover under macadamia trees.

SOCIOECONOMIC VIABILITY

When they started the coffee orchard 6 years ago, John and Vicki assumed it would take approximately 5 years to turn a profit. Coffee yields have increased steadily since they first began transplanting the trees, and costs for weed control have dropped dramatically. Last year was a profitable one and the Swifts anticipate even better profits in the future.

Uncertain Yields, Volatile Markets:

John and Vicki Swift have taken several steps to sustain their operations in the face of uncertain yields and volatile markets. First, their coffee farm is organically certified. They are able to capture a niche market that is less volatile than the open market. Second, they process their coffee in-house and market directly to local consumers for a competitive price, thereby avoiding middle costs associated with conventional markets and saving transportation and processing costs. To date, marketing of Mother Goose Farms coffee has been primarily by word of mouth; however, Vicki is exploring more aggressive marketing strategies (though still focusing on a local niche market) as coffee yields increase. Third, they have a somewhat diversified operation with both sheep and pigs that can offset losses when coffee yields are low. The sheep are sold directly to a local restaurant. As the herd grows, more aggressive marketing will be needed. Pigs are grown primarily for family consumption. Excess pigs are sold to neighbors. District Conservationist Steve Skipper thinks there may be a commercial market for the weed eating geese. To date, however, they are not consumed. Fourth, John works as a fireman outside the farm, providing additional cash flow.

Case Study No. 2: Ray Eck Farms

Site Description:

Ray Eck grows organic almonds in the San Joaquin Valley. The San Joaquin and Sacramento valleys comprise California's Central Valley, one of the most productive in the world, largely because of its mild climate, deep soils and available water resources. Ray has been farming in this valley for 25 years. His family grew almonds in the area before Ray began farming, so he has considerable experience with the crop.

The climate in Merced County is Mediterranean, with warm, dry summers and cool, moist winters. Average annual precipitation is approximately 12" and occurs almost entirely in the winter months. Frost is a concern here, especially in the spring when trees begin to flower.

The soils on Ray's farm are primarily Hilmar sands, 0-3% slopes. These are poorly or imperfectly drained, alluvial soils with a droughty surface layer but a generally high water table. Hilmar sands are primarily used for alfalfa and dairy production, but with proper management produce a reasonable almond crop, although the trees may be susceptible to fungal diseases and salt damage.

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY AND ECOLOGICAL FUNCTION

Soil and Climate Constraints:

Ray maintains a cover crop under the almonds, protecting the soil from both wind and water erosion. The buried pipe sprinkler irrigation system he has installed on the land he owns and some of the land he leases causes less erosion than flood irrigation. The cost of buried pipeline is possible under a long-term lease but is difficult to justify financially under a shorter term lease.

The soils on Ray's farm require irrigation in the summer but may be excessively wet in the spring. Moist conditions encourage fungal infections that can lead to significant yield reductions. Salinity is also a concern. Ray's sprinkler irrigation system allows more accurate control of the water each tree receives. Thus he can ensure enough water in the summer to prevent stress but not so much that it promotes fungal disease. By managing water use more carefully, Ray also reduces the potential for nitrate leaching and the probability of salinity problems, that can reduce yield and nut quality.

Location:

Merced County, CA

District Conservationist:

Malia Ortiz
Merced Field Office
2135 Wardrobe Ave., Suite C
Merced, CA 95340
Telephone: (209)723-3714
FAX: (209) 725-2964

Acres Farmed:

120 (50 owned, 70 leased)

Crops:

Almonds (5 varieties)

Sustainable Agriculture Issues:

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY &
ECOLOGICAL FUNCTION
Soil and Climate Constraints
Nutrient Cycling
Pest Management
SOCIOECONOMIC VIABILITY
Volatile Markets; Uncertain Yields
Social Acceptance

Because the soils on this farm are sandy, fertility should be a concern, but Ray has noted that soil fertility is improving over time. Organic matter has accumulated on the soil surface since a permanent cover crop has been maintained. There has been a dramatic change in surface soil color, and the soil structure has changed over time from massive to granular. Even the cover crop is looking healthier.



Soil structure of Ray Eck's orchard with organic matter (dark material) overlying sand (light material).

As with most almond growers, Ray uses irrigation to reduce the potential for frost damage when the temperature drops below freezing.

Cultural Requirements for Almonds:

Almonds must be cross pollinated by honey bees each year. It is a common practice to rent bees during flowering to ensure pollination. Ray has a standing rental agreement with a local beekeeper to ensure that bees will be available when they are needed.

Almonds are relatively short-lived trees. They begin producing nuts after 4 years, reach peak production in 12 years, then begin to lose vigor and need to be replaced after approximately 25 years. Almond wood is generally not used in furniture making, though it makes excellent firewood. Ray thinks the best use for his old trees is to recycle them in the soil. He is experimenting with using a brush chipper or turning the trees into sawdust so they can be reincorporated into this agricultural ecosystem.

Nutrient Cycling:

Ray fertilizes with composted dairy manure and dried poultry manure from nearby animal operations. Supplemental micronutrients are foliar applied according to foliar tissue test recommendations. These tests indicate both macro and micronutrient requirements as well as leaf chloride concentration, a potential indicator of salinity in almonds.

Ray maintains a cover crop, consisting largely of annual legumes (vetches and clovers), under his almonds. It serves a variety of functions, including erosion control, pest management, moisture retention,

and nutrient cycling. The vetches and clovers also enhance the nitrogen status of the soil. Ray applies manure to benefit the cover crop and the soil microorganisms as well as the almonds. He estimates the water and nutrients provided to the cover crop this year will be returned to his almonds in the following year in the form of soil organic carbon and recycled nutrients.

Pest Control (Insects and Rodents):

Ray admits he has a distinct pest control advantage over many other almond producers in that his orchard is located near the edge of the almond production area. The immediate neighbors do not grow almonds, so serious almond pests are less likely to invade and “take over” in his area. He is surrounded by a diverse set of crops, including alfalfa, corn and oats. These crops harbor different kinds of insects, helping keep the insect population in balance, a key to Ray’s pest management strategy.



Traditional orchard without cover crop.

Ray believes that in addition to monitoring insect pest levels to determine when control measures will be needed, farmers should cultivate and monitor beneficial insect and animal habitat and they will keep insect pests in check. Ray has a *Field of Dreams* philosophy: “build it and they will come.” The multi-species cover crop is primarily insect habitat. To help the process along he’s released some beneficial insects into the orchard, although eventually this may not be necessary. He is also working with NRCS on a relatively new program to strategically install insectary plants (plants that provide habitat for insects) around the orchard. To control rodents, Ray has installed owl boxes. However, the orchard is not pest-free. You have to live with *some* pests to make the system work, he says. The beneficial predators would not stay around if all the pests were gone.



Ray Eck’s orchard with annual legumes such as vetch and clover functioning as a cover crop to recycle nutrients and retain moisture.

Ray is participating in the BIOS (Biologically Integrated Orchard Systems) program. BIOS was started as a pilot program by the Community Alliance with Family Farmers Foundation (CAFF) in Merced County in 1993, in response to public pressure to reduce chemical use on farms near urban populations. The mission of BIOS is to "build a community of farmers, other agricultural professionals and public institutions, dedicated to the voluntary adoption of a whole systems approach to farm management that is flexible, maintains long term profitability, and relies on less chemical inputs." (Community Alliance with Family Farmers, 1996) Ray was asked to serve on the BIOS management team because of his experience in biological control. He organizes field days, helps develop management plans, and provides technical assistance to farmers who participate. The program has been so successful in Merced County that it is spreading to other parts of California. Farmers participating in BIOS are eligible for Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) cost sharing through NRCS.

Pest Control (Weeds):

According to Ray, organic farmers have no weeds, they have native vegetation. He admits that some kinds of vegetation are less desirable than others, but his cover crop controls these fairly well. He does not mind the extra water and nutrients needed to maintain the cover crop, since they are eventually recycled into the crop or the soil organic matter.

Pest Control (Fungal Disease):

Spring fungal diseases are the biggest threat to organic almonds. Ray uses copper and sulfur products to control fungi, but during wet springs these are not particularly effective. "The best control for fungal disease," says Ray, "is dry weather." Because of fungal disease his yields are often a bit lower than those of conventional neighbors.

SOCIOECONOMIC VIABILITY

Uncertain Yields; Volatile Markets:

Ray has cornered an international niche market for organic almonds, which helps stabilize his cash flow. While paying others to process the almonds, he retains possession until they are sold to an exporter who repackages for the European market. Ray admits that the restrictions placed by organic certification can sometimes reduce yields, but in the long term, the price differential between organic and conventional almonds more than compensates.

Social Acceptance:

Urban encroachment into farmlands is occurring throughout the United States but is especially apparent in California. People living near agricultural land often fear the use of agricultural chemicals, are disturbed by odors and noises, and are irritated by slow-moving farm machinery on the roads. Urban populations need to understand the constraints under which farmers operate. Conversely, farmers need to understand the concerns of the urban population. Some farmers have found that selling their products directly to local consumers through farmers markets or other means can help them understand where food comes from. It can also increase net farm income by eliminating the "middle". For Ray this is not a viable option, since the volume of almonds he produces is too great for the local market.

Case Study No. 3: Lamar Black



Lamar Black in a row of cotton crops he manages.

Site Description:

Lamar Black has been managing a 2,300 acre farm in Jenkins and Burke Counties in east central Georgia since 1982. The owner, while interested in the farming operations, relies on Lamar for management and marketing decisions.

The climate in this part of Georgia is generally warm and moist. Average annual precipitation is approximately 47" and is fairly evenly spaced throughout the year, although localized summer droughts may occur. Temperatures are generally quite warm, reaching 90° F or more throughout most of the summer. Winter frosts are common here. The average frost free period is 235-240 days. The relatively high rainfall and temperature throughout this part of Georgia have contributed to rapid soil formation.

The cropped portion of the farm is dominated by Dothan loamy sands 0-2% and 2-5% slopes. These are well drained upland soils that formed in marine sediments. They are strongly acid except where limed and contain at least 5% plinthite (a highly weathered hardpan soil layer) below approximately 43 inches. This results in moderate to moderately slow permeability in the subsoil. While they are low in natural fertility and organic matter, they tend to have good tilth, and are well suited to cropping. The farm also contains Grady and Fuquay soils, which are far less suited to field crops. The Grady soils are poorly drained and tend to pond water in the winter and spring, while the Fuquay soils are extremely well drained and have a very low water holding capacity (Paulk, 1986). These soils are wooded.

Location:

Jenkins and Burke Counties, GA

District Conservationist:

Rafael Salazar
 Burke County Office Park
 715 West Sixth Street
 Waynesboro, GA 30830
 Telephone: (706) 554-5183
 FAX: (706) 437-1516

Acres Farmed:

1000 acres arable cropland
 1140 acres natural woodland
 160 acres planted pine

Crops:

Cotton, Corn, Soybeans, Wheat,
 Peanuts, Grain, Sorghum

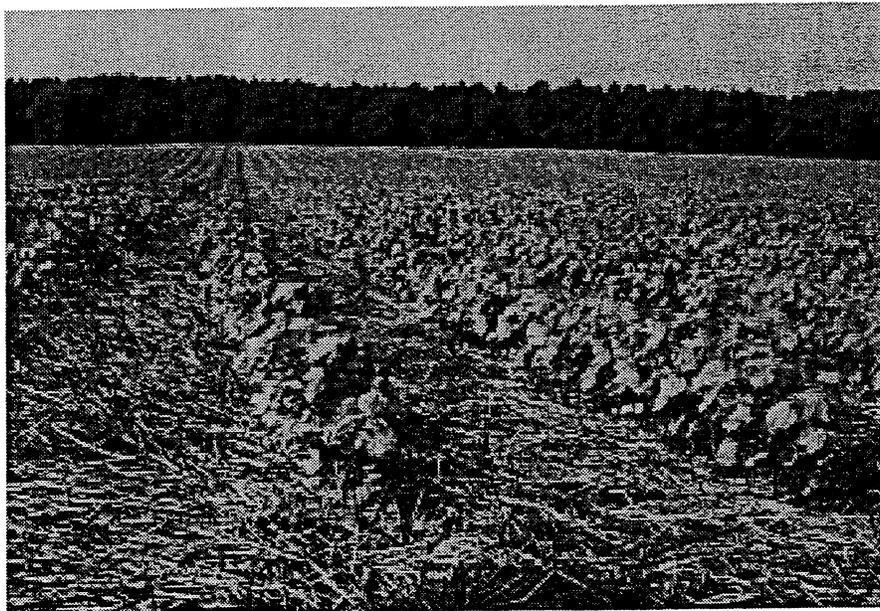
Sustainable Agriculture Issues:
 ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY &
 ECOLOGICAL FUNCTION

Erosion
 Soil and Climate Constraints
 Nutrient Cycling

Pest Pressures
 SOCIOECONOMIC VIABILITY
 Volatile Markets; Uncertain Yields

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY AND ECOLOGICAL FUNCTION

Lamar began practicing strip-till on a limited basis in 1977 as an erosion control measure for corn. Gradually he learned to use this system with other crops. Cotton was the last, and four years ago his conversion to strip-till was completed.



Cotton crops that have been strip-tilled to decrease erosion and increase infiltration.

Erosion:

A concern over wind and water erosion prompted Lamar to examine options for erosion control. His ultimate solution has been to minimize soil tillage. Using a system called strip-till on all fields. With this system all tillage occurs at the time of planting. Lamar uses a 180 horsepower tractor to pull the strip-till equipment, which consists of straight coulters followed by a subsoiler (required to break up the hardpan that forms under Dothan soils), and two fluted coulters per row. The strip-till system leaves the soil relatively undisturbed except for a narrow seed bed (10-12") through which the planter is pulled.

While Lamar began strip-till for erosion control, many other benefits from the system have been realized. The single pass operation has reduced the time needed to prepare a field for planting, so there is more planning time and thus better accuracy in determining the planting date. Strip-till requires far less fuel than multiple tillage operations, so the wear and tear on equipment has been significantly reduced. Lamar has also noticed that bobwhite quail have been increasing on his farm

though they are generally declining in the southeast as a whole. The increase may in part be due to conservation tillage. Finally, water infiltration in the irrigated fields seems to have dramatically improved since switching to strip-till.

A second technique Lamar employs to reduce erosion on the fields is a winter cover crop, common in this part of Georgia. Annual rye grass is typically used because it is fast growing and winter hardy. Lamar has also been experimenting with cahaba white vetch as a winter cover crop before cotton and has been very pleased with the initial results. The vetch

provides excellent cover and residue, adds nitrogen to the soil and helps alleviate the root knot nematode problem .

Climate Constraints:

Soils and climate are moderate constraints on the farm Lamar manages. While rainfall is generally adequate for most crops, it can be spotty,

especially in the summer. Soybeans and wheat are seldom seriously affected by this; however, corn yields may be severely reduced if a dry period occurs between pollination and the soft dough growth stage; and cotton yields may be improved by irrigation. Lamar has two 150-acre center pivot irrigation systems, which are used on corn and cotton. While an adequate irrigation water supply has never been a problem, Lamar is frugal with irrigation water. He monitors soil moisture in the corn fields with tensiometers and irrigates accordingly. For cotton he uses a watering schedule established by the Georgia Cooperative Extension Service and irrigates only when rainfall is inadequate to meet the needs established by the schedule. In a typical year, 2 acre-inches may be applied to the cotton and 4-5 acre-inches to the corn. In a dry year up to 14 acre-inches may be used on the same crops.



Wheat left in the fields acts as a mulch for the cotton, retaining moisture and reducing erosion.

Nutrient Cycling:

Lamar works to minimize nutrient losses. He fertilizes according to annual soil test recommendations, which indicate that the vetch cover crop supplies approximately 70 units of nitrogen per acre for the cotton that follows. Lamar applies a starter fertilizer of 10-34-0 with the corn and cotton seed at planting. Subsequent fertilizer applications are surface broadcast. Petiole samples are used to monitor the nitrogen and potassium status of the cotton through the growing season. If a deficiency is noted these nutrients are foliar applied. Lamar plans to begin performing foliar analysis on corn and soybeans also. Jenkins County is largely a row crop county, and animal manures are generally not available for applying to fields. Lamar relies on winter cover crops and conservation tillage to improve soil fertility, an approach that seems to be working.

Pest Control (Insects and fungi):

Lamar tries to minimize chemical inputs for pest control. He scouts soybeans regularly for pod feeders and worms that feed on foliage. Soybeans are not generally sprayed for these pests more than once during the growing season. A professional consultant scouts Lamar's cotton twice a week for boll worm and other cotton pests. Lamar plants bollguard cotton (cotton genetically altered for resistance to boll worm) on some fields, which has reduced the need to spray for boll worm.

Soil analysis performed by the University of Georgia Soils Laboratory indicates the organic matter content of the top 1/2 inch of soil in strip-till fields is 2.5-3%, compared with a typical content of 0.6% on conventionally tilled fields in this area.

Case Study 3: Lamar Black

Lamar is also working with Dr. Joe Lewis of the USDA Agricultural Research Service to develop a pest management system for cotton that uses cover crops to harbor beneficial insects. The first year of the experiment, Lamar reduced his pesticide application frequency from 5 to 2 times per year. Eventually he and Dr. Lewis hope to develop a system where no pesticides will be needed.

Insects are generally not a problem in corn or wheat, although the stink bug may be increasing in corn. Lamar plants Hessian fly resistant wheat. The warm moist climate of this part of Georgia encourages fungal growth, so Lamar often applies a fungicide to winter wheat at the boot stage. He also plants fungicide-treated corn and cotton seed.

Pest Control (Weeds):

Lamar applies herbicide to all crops, but no more than he did under conventional till and sometimes less. Cotton is slow to emerge after planting and is therefore the least able to compete with weeds. Lamar has been following the development of a technology called ultra narrow row cotton (<30" row spacing), to improve the cotton's ability to compete with weeds and reduce the need for herbicides. Lamar expects that once harvesting equipment becomes available he will be planting ultra narrow row cotton regularly.

SOCIOECONOMIC VIABILITY

Uncertain Yields, Volatile Markets:

Lamar sells cotton through a regional cotton cooperative, which has been highly successful in obtaining competitive pricing for its members. The price of peanuts is established under government programs and is rarely a question. Lamar markets the other crops directly. Grain sorghum is sold to neighboring hog farmers. Wheat, corn and soybeans are sold to local grain elevators. The price of these crops fluctuates significantly. Lamar uses experience and intuition to determine when to sell and when to store crops. He would prefer to leave these decisions to a cooperative; however, there are no grain cooperatives in this part of Georgia. The one advantage Lamar has over neighbors is that he grows several different crops each year. When the price of one is low, he may make up for the loss with one or more other crops. In addition to the annual crops, Lamar has planted 160 acres of pine for timber production with a goal of long-term, future income. Diversification to stabilize short and long-term income can be an important consideration in developing a sustainable system.

Case Study No. 4: Ed and Dorothy Kalin



Ed and Dorothy Kalin

Site Description:

Ed and Dorothy Kalin operate a 150-unit cow/calf operation on a 1,160 acre farm in Pawnee County, NE. The farm has been in Ed's family for three generations. He hopes to maintain and improve it for future generations. Ed and Dorothy work as a team, both actively participate in all aspects of the operation. They share common knowledge and goals, and work well together.

Pawnee County is located in the extreme southeastern part of Nebraska. The continental climate here is characterized by frequent and extreme weather changes. The average annual precipitation is 33.5 inches but may vary substantially from year to year. Most of the rainfall occurs in the spring and summer. Thunderstorms during this period are sometimes severe, and may be accompanied by local downpours, hail and damaging winds. Temperatures vary throughout the year. While the average late July temperature is 94° F, and the average late January temperature is 14° F, temperatures as high as 117° F and as low as -29° F have been recorded in the county.

Most of the farm is on moderately steep, clay and clay loam soils that formed on glacial material. These include soils of the Buchard and Pawnee series (Sautter, 1976). Water erosion is the principal hazard, and many of these soils are sufficiently eroded to warrant separate mapping units in the Pawnee County soil survey.

Location:

Pawnee County, NE

Resource Conservationist:

Don Ulrich
 USDA-NRCS
 988 11th St. Suite B
 Syracuse, NE 68446
 Telephone: (402) 269-3446

Acres Farmed:

1160 acres (680 owned, 480 rented)
 247 acres cropland
 913 acres grass and native hay

Crops:

Sorghum (Milo), Corn, Soybeans,
 Sorghum Silage, Alfalfa, Wheat

Primary Enterprise:

Cow/Calf production

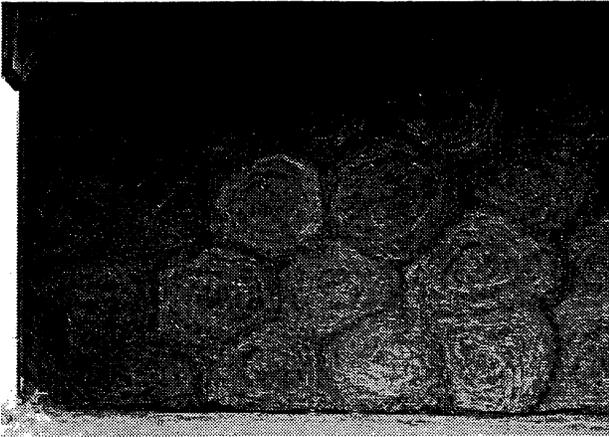
Sustainable Agriculture Issues:

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY &
 ECOLOGICAL FUNCTION
 Erosion
 Climate Constraints
 Nutrient Cycling
 Pest Pressures
 SOCIOECONOMIC VIABILITY
 Volatile Markets; Uncertain Yields
 Information

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY AND ECOLOGICAL FUNCTION

Erosion:

Erosion is one of the Kalins' primary concerns. Three quarters of the farm is in permanent grass and native hay. The farm's cropland contains 8-10 miles of terraces, and approximately 2 miles of waterways, of which a few thousand feet are tiled. Many of the terraces were installed in the 1930's by the Civilian Conservation Corps and by Ed's father. Ed is careful to maintain these terraces so they always function properly. Terraces installed in the 1930's, 1940's and 1950's were spaced at close intervals compared with modern terraces, which are designed to accommodate today's larger equipment. These closely spaced terraces are more effective at controlling erosion than modern terraces.



Most of the Kalins farm produces hay for the cattle operation.

The pasture land also contains about 12 ponds that trap both water and sediment. To reduce erosion and improve grazing efficiency, Ed is working with the NRCS to develop a rotational grazing system that will involve fencing of additional pastures and existing ponds, installation of several watering tanks, and construction of four new ponds. By fencing out the ponds and providing gravity flow livestock watering facilities, bank erosion is controlled. Water quality is also enhanced by keeping livestock out of the water system.

The Kalins farm on the contour. Not only does it help reduce erosion, it is easier than plowing up and down slope. According to Ed, in the old days, when horses pulled the plows, they wanted to go in a straight line and would just as soon go over a hill as around it. This made contour farming difficult. Today there is no excuse for not farming on the contour.

Climate Constraints:

The climate in this part of Nebraska can be severe, with subfreezing winter temperatures and wind chills as low as -50° F. Ed and Dorothy's farmstead and livestock wintering areas are well protected from harsh winter winds with a series of mature windbreaks and shelterbelts.

A major concern with any livestock operation is a reliable source of clean drinking water. Uneven rainfall and sub-freezing temperatures in the winter can sometimes make this difficult. By the year 2001 Ed and Dorothy plan to install 4 ponds in addition to the ones already on their property. These ponds will be used to water the livestock and provide fire protection for the farmstead. Water from these ponds flows by

gravity to a series of “energy free” watering facilities that use convection to prevent the livestock drinking water from freezing in the winter without the use of costly heating elements.

Calving on the farm currently occurs March through May; however, Ed and Dorothy have plans to switch their calving dates to late spring and early summer. By doing so they can take advantage of growing forage when the cows need the most nourishment (i.e., the last third of gestation). At the same time the young calves will not have to contend with the harsh Nebraska winter weather until they are several months old.

Nutrient Cycling:

Livestock manure is recycled on the fields. Ed and Dorothy have placed their feed barns at different locations on the farm so they can more easily spread manure on nearby fields. The rotational grazing system they are developing should also help cycle nutrients on their pastures.

Hay and silage are produced each year for winter feed. Silage is stored in bunker silos covered with plastic sheeting and weighted down with low quality hay. The hay keeps the plastic in place, reduces punctures, and sheds water more effectively than old tires, and other materials traditionally used to hold plastic in place over bunker silos. When no longer needed, the hay is recycled on cropland fields.



Bunker silo.

Pest Control (Insects):

Insects have not recently been a problem for Ed and Dorothy. Ten years ago the farm was plagued by chinch bugs and green bugs that grew in winter wheat and later attacked sorghum. To solve the problem they stopped planting wheat for several years. Today they use longer rotations that seldom include wheat, and the insects have been brought under control. Ed and Dorothy have noticed that ladybugs are increasing since they stopped using pesticides on the chinch bugs. Ed has a great respect for ladybugs as beneficial insects. He once harvested a “swarm” of hibernating ladybugs from under a pile of small hay bales, kept them in the farm cave over winter so they wouldn’t freeze, and spread them back on the field the following April as a pest control measure.

Pest Control (Weeds): The Kalins have traditionally relied on herbicides to control weed infestations in their crops, but they continue to look for ways to reduce the need for herbicides. They have extended the length of the crop rotations, alternating crops with different growth habits and rooting patterns. This year they will experiment with more narrow row spacing to allow for earlier canopy closure, which should help the crops compete with the weeds.

Ed has also learned that fertilizing native prairie hay in late spring gives competitive advantage to the less desirable grasses. He applies no more than 25-30 pounds per acre of available nitrogen to these fields after June 1.

Ed and Dorothy also work to minimize their cash flow requirements by reducing waste (reusing and recycling materials wherever practical) and making efficient use of their assets. Keeping capital costs under control is another way of protecting themselves against major price drops. For example, most of the Kalins' equipment was purchased used. Repair and maintenance is done in-house. Equipment is kept until it is completely worn out or no longer meets their needs.

SOCIOECONOMIC VIABILITY

Uncertain Yields, Volatile Markets:

Ed and Dorothy have been concerned but not threatened by the low beef prices that all cattle producers in the U.S. have been facing recently. In 1995 they were able to sell their stored corn and soybeans for a premium price, which helped offset the low price of livestock. Ed notes that when the price of beef is down the price of grain is usually up and vice versa. While Ed prefers to concentrate on the cow/calf production, he agrees it is good insurance to have grain crops for sale when the price of beef is low.

Ed and Dorothy also offset low beef prices by providing surrogate mothers for a breeder in Grand Island, NE. Once a year the breeder artificially implants a number of Ed and Dorothy's heifers with embryos of known lineage. When the calves are weaned they are sold back to the breeder at a premium price.

Ed and Dorothy have been implementing their own selective breeding program based on the "linear measuring method" since 1988. They now background calves that are 15% larger than the county average. While this does not entirely offset the low prices for beef, it helps.

Information:

Ed and Dorothy are always looking to improve their farming practices. They don't yet have access to the internet but expect that they will before too long. To get information about new, environmentally safer farming techniques, they attend trade shows, listen to radio programs, read books, take courses, work with NRCS, Cooperative Extension and other government agencies, and talk to their neighbors and other people who have implemented new ideas.

SARE 2000 Conference Proceedings

"Farming and Ranching for Profit, Stewardship & Community"



Sustainable Agriculture... Continuing to Grow

The listed producer profiles and scientific abstracts will be added to this site in stages, with more entries on a weekly basis. Visit the site regularly to read a variety of farmer and rancher stories, and overviews of scientific research on sustainable agriculture.

Table of Contents

Message from the Western Coordinating Committee on Sustainable Agriculture

Message from Sustainable Northwest

Message from The Food Alliance

THE SUSTAINABLE FARM

Profile of Larry Thompson, Thompson Farms, and Regional Chair of Western SARE's Administrative Council

Profile of Karla Chambers, Stahlbush Island Farms

- **The Long-term Sustainable Farming Systems Comparison Trial: Results from Ten Years of Research**

Profile of Ed Sills

Profile of Bruce Rominger

Steve Temple

Karen Klonsky

Howard Ferris

- **Biologically Integrated Farming Systems in California: Partnerships for Environmental Protection and Farm Profitability**

Carolee Bull

Joseph Grant

Randall Mutters

Gary Obenauf

- **Agroforestry: Multiple Uses of Trees in Agricultural Landscapes**

Garry Stephenson
Kim Wilkinson
Mike Dosskey

- **Water Conserving Systems**

Profile of Howard Wuertz
Clint Shock
Larry Schwankl

- **Alternative Crops and Systems for Dryland Production**

Gary Peterson
Diana Roberts
Jim Krall

- **Biologically Integrated Viticulture Production**

Jenny Broome
Steve McIntyre
Cliff Ohmart

SOIL

- **Payoffs from Improving Soil Quality: A Grower's Perspective**

Profile of Jim Durst
Profile of Dale Gies

- **Organic Matter: How to Conserve It**

Profile of Peter Kenagy
Richard Dick
Fred Magdoff

- **Experiences with No-till and Strip-till Production**

Profile of John Aeschliman
Profile of Steve Groff
John Luna
Jeff Mitchell

- **Invisible Allies: Lessons Learned about Soil Biology and Nutrient Cycling**

Louise Jackson
Howard Ferris
Bob Linderman

Managing Organic Sources of Nutrients

Mal Westcott
Patricia Millner
Dan Sullivan

DISEASE, PESTS AND WEEDS

- **Integrated Approaches to Weed Management**

Profile of Alec McErlich
Profile of Vicki Swift
Tim Prather

- **Biological Approaches to Disease Management**

Wesley Chun
Mark Mazzola
Krishna Subbarao

- **Enhancing Plant Resistance to Disease through Biological Inoculants and Farm Management Practices**

Sally Miller
Caroline Press
Geoff Zehnder

- **Biological Control of Insect Pests: Making it Work**

Ralph Berry
Mark Morris
Lynn Wunderlich

- **Biologically-based Pest Management Systems for Tree Crops**

Jay Brunner
Kent Daane
Sean Swezey

THE SUSTAINABLE RANCH

Profile of Doc and Connie Hatfield, Oregon Country Beef

- **Producing a Healthy Range**

Profile of Joe Morris
Ken Crane
Roy Roath

- **Innovations in Livestock Production Systems**

Profile of Duane Roecks
Profile of Dante Benedetti
Profile of Tom Larson

Holistic Management of Farm and Ranch Resources

Russ Camper and Chance Gowan
Don Nelson

- **Paid to Graze: Renting Livestock for Vegetation Management**

Profile of Terry Wheeler
Hudson Glimp
An Peischel

MARKETING IN A SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY

- **Strategies for Direct Marketing**

Profile of Diane Green
Larry Lev

- **Eco-labeling: Linking Customer Demand with Farm Stewardship and Social Values**

Deborah Kane
Michael Sligh
Theresa Steig

- **Getting off the Bulk Commodities Treadmill: What Buyers of Specialty Crops Expect, What Dryland Small Grain Farmers Can Provide**

Profile of Kay Heine
Profile of Cal Stengel
Profile of Bob Quinn
Profile of Richard Repp

- **Marketing Natural Meats**

Profile of Joel Salatin
Profile of David and Kay James

SUSTAINING AGRICULTURE

A Message from Glenda Humiston, Assistant to the Undersecretary of Agriculture

- **Public Policy and Funding Support for Sustainable Agriculture**

Margaret Krome
Mark Lipson
Pete Price

- **The Role of Non-profit Organizations in Sustaining Western Agriculture**

Profile of Jan Tusick
Karen Murphy
Bonnie Rice

- **To Plow or to Pave: Farmland Preservation in the West**

Profile of Jon Meikle
Profile of Bob Rose
Greg Kirkpatrick

- **Sustainable Community Food Systems**

Colette DePhelps
Gail Feenstra
Steven Garrett
Deb Lippoldt

- **Grant Writing for Farmers and Ranchers: Funding your On-farm Research Projects**

Margaret Krome

The work to create this publication was sponsored by the Western Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (Western SARE) program. Western SARE is an effort of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Since 1988 through federal fiscal 2000, the U.S. Congress has allocated more than \$114.6 million to the federal SARE effort; Western SARE has received \$26 million. The Western region includes Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, Wyoming and the Island Protectorates of American Samoa, Guam, Micronesia and the Northern Mariana Islands.

The Real Dirt: Farmers Tell about Organic and Low-Input Practices in the Northeast

1994; 2nd printing in 1998 - \$13.95

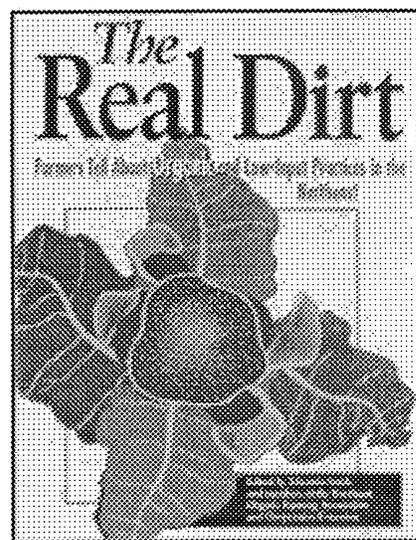
The *Real Dirt* provides a vivid snapshot of organic and sustainable farming in the Northeast in the 1990s. Based on interviews with more than 60 farmers in eight states, the book summarizes practical methods for ecological soil, pest, disease, crop, greenhouse and livestock management. It offers a farmer's-eye view of how to design rotations, select crops and survive economically in the face of an increasingly chemical dependent and industrialized agricultural system.

Prepared by the Northeast Organic and Sustainable Farmers Network – a collaborative group of farmers, farm organization representatives, northeastern Extension agents and university researchers – *The Real Dirt* responds to increased interest in sustainable and organic farming. Producers and Extension staff can turn to *The Real Dirt* for answers to questions about organic and sustainable agriculture.

Its 264 pages of readable, farm-tested experiences are even more accessible thanks to a comprehensive index, bibliography and eight appendices. The glossary, resource directory and lists of organizations and Cooperative Extension contacts for the Northeast region were all updated in 1998 for the second printing.

"What an amazing catalog of ingenious responses to variable conditions faced by farmers. It will encourage the creativity of aspiring and experienced farmers everywhere. With its plain, practical advice, the book can be used around the country and the world to help build a sustainable agricultural community."

– Sam Smith
Caretaker Farms
Williamstown, Mass.



How to Order

Pastured Poultry - Preface

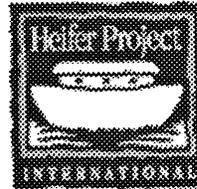
A Heifer Project International Case Study Booklet



**Appropriate
Technology Transfer
for Rural Areas**
PO Box 3657
Fayetteville, AR 72702

Phone: (800) 346-9140
FAX: *(501) 442-9842
www.attra.ncat.org

*new area code (479)
1/20/02



**Heifer Project
International**
1015 Louisiana Street
PO Box 8058
Little Rock, AR 72203
Phone: (800) 422-0474
E-mail: info@heifer.org
<http://www.heifer.org/>

An Ark for Today's World

The PDF version of this document is available at
<http://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/PDF/pasturedpoultry.pdf>
34 pages — 3,766 kb

Introduction

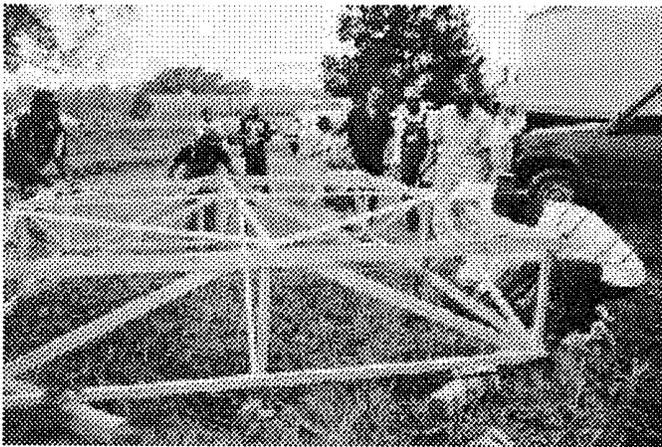
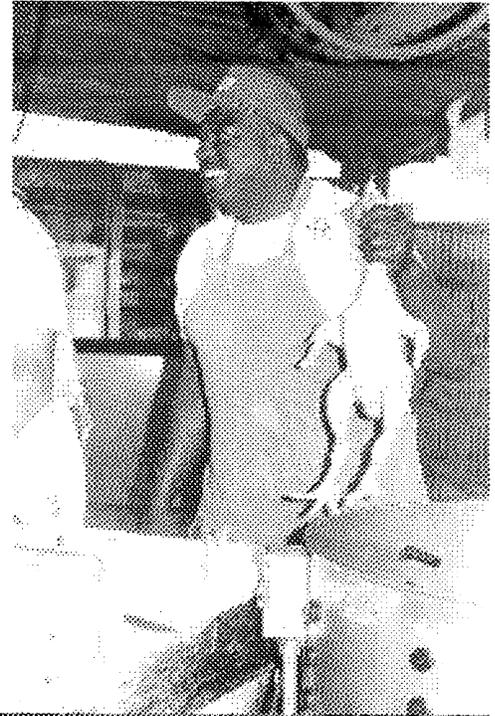
Featured Farmers

**Round-
Ups**

Appendices

This booklet was compiled by Anne Fanatico of the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT) as a guide and summary of the "Integrating Pastured Poultry into the Farming Systems of Limited Resource Farmers" project. The project was conducted from 1996-99 by NCAT and Heifer Project International (HPI). It was funded by Grant #LS96-79 from the USDA's Southern Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program.





An Ark for Today's World

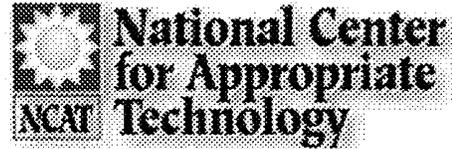
HPI is a private non-profit corporation dedicated to community development through sustainable livestock production.

The headquarters is located in Little Rock, AR.

NCAT is a nonprofit organization with offices at Butte, MT and Fayetteville, AR, which manages a host of public programs dealing with sustainable agriculture, along with energy conservation, low-income

energy and housing issues, and sustainable community development. NCAT's role through its projects is to improve the economic well-being and quality of life of urban and rural residents,

all the while working to improve the environment and conserve America's natural resources.



Foreward and Acknowledgments

This booklet summarizes the experiences of 35 Southern farm families who from 1996-1999 participated in a project titled "Integrating Pastured Poultry into the Farming Systems of Limited Resource Farmers."

We are thankful to many people who assisted in compiling this booklet. Especially helpful were the farmer grantees who took special care to keep close records of their enterprises and share that information for the benefit of potential producers.

The experience proved favorable for 27 of the project families who continue to raise range poultry for home-use and for sale to growing customer bases.

Other people, organizations and agencies who made special contributions to the project are the National Center for Agricultural Law Research and Information, Extension agents and staff of Tuskegee University, Southern University, Kentucky State University, South Carolina State University, Florida A&M University, and Fort Valley State University; members of the American Pastured Poultry Producers Association; and the Joel Salatin family of Swoope, VA.

We hope this booklet will prove useful as a decision-making guide for other farmers interested in adding diversity and improving profits in their own agricultural enterprises through pastured poultry production.

We thank those individuals who were so generous in sharing photographs and slides they snapped during field days, trainings and activities on their farms. Their work helps greatly to tell the pastured poultry story and appears throughout this booklet.

We are also very appreciative to the four farm families in the "Featured Farmers" chapter of this booklet. We thank them for sharing both the trials and the triumphs they experienced while learning the techniques of raising, processing, and marketing poultry on-farm as a way to supplement their income.

Introduction

Featured Farmers

Round-Ups

Appendices

The ATTRA Project is operated by the National Center for Appropriate Technology under a grant from the Rural Business - Cooperative Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture. These organizations do not recommend or endorse products, companies, or individuals. ATTRA is located in the Ozark Mountains on the University of Arkansas campus in Fayetteville, at PO Box 3657, Fayetteville, Arkansas, 72702. ATTRA staff prefer to receive requests for information about sustainable agriculture via the toll-free number 800-346-9140.



webmaster@attra.org

Small Farm Success Project

Available on www.smallfarmsuccess

A coalition of land grant universities, USDA, and nonprofit organizations in the Mid-Atlantic region is dedicated to helping small and emerging farmers improve their financial success. With funding from the USDA's IFAFS (Initiative for Future Agricultural Food Systems) program, the coalition developed an initiative entitled, The Small Farm Success Project, to help farmers:

1. effectively use consumer research and direct marketing techniques.
2. develop sustainable and profitable crop rotation strategies.
3. adopt financial strategies that enable farmers to remain viable.

The coalition includes Maryland Cooperative Extension, Future Harvest/CASA, Accokeek Foundation, Wallace Center for Agricultural and Environmental Policy at Winrock International, USDA Beltsville Agriculture Research Center, Farm to City, Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture, and Penn State Cooperative Extension. Contact information follows:

Maryland Cooperative Extension, University of Maryland

Jim Hanson	jhanson@arec.umd.edu
Dale Johnson	dj9@umail.umd.edu
Susan Schoenian	ss80@umail.umd.edu

Pennsylvania Cooperative Extension, Penn State University

John Berry	jwb15@psu.edu
------------	--

USDA-Beltsville Agricultural Research Center (BARC)

John Teasdale	teasdale@ba.ars.usda.gov
Mark Davis	davism@ba.ars.usda.gov
Leslie Gilbert	gilbertL@ba.ars.usda.gov

The **Accokeek Foundation** blends history, ecology and economics, educating people of all ages about responsible land management--past, present and future (Accokeek, Maryland).

Skip Kauffman	cskauffman@accokeek.org
Shane LaBrake	ecofarm@accokeek.org

Farm to City connects farmers in southeast Pennsylvania and New Jersey to markets in the Philadelphia area through farmers' markets, services to CSA farms, and its Winter Harvest Program (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania).

Bob Pierson

phillymarkets@aol.com

Founded in 1998, **Future Harvest- a Chesapeake Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture (Future Harvest-CASA)** is dedicated to supporting profitable and sustainable food and farming systems in the Chesapeake Bay region (Stevensville, Maryland).

Bruce Mertz

bm103@umail.umd.edu

Established in 1992, The **Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture (PASA)** promotes profitable farms which produce healthy food for all people while respecting the natural environment (Millheim, Pennsylvania).

Lamonte Garber

lgarber@paonline.com

Ruth Sullivan

ruth@pasafarming.org

The **Henry A. Wallace Center for Agricultural & Environmental Policy** at Winrock International uses its expertise in research, policy analysis, and development to foster sustainable and equitable agricultural and food systems. Winrock International is a nonprofit organization that works with people in the United States and around the world to increase economic opportunity, sustain natural resources, and protect the environment (Arlington, Virginia).

Lydia Oberholtzer

loberholtzer@winrock.org

Kate Clancy

kclancy@winrock.org

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Renewing the Countryside

INTRODUCTION	13
FARMING - CHAPTER ONE	15
Willow Lake Farm - Farming with New Eyes	16
Pastures A Plenty - Taking the Anxiety out of Farming	19
Round River Farm - Living Sustainably in the North Woods	22
New Immigrant Farm Program - The Changing Face of Agriculture	25
Peterson Family Farm - Farming with Family and Imagination	28
Scherping Family Farm - The Difference Grazing Makes	31
MARKETING - CHAPTER TWO	35
Whole Farm Cooperative - Eating, a Sacred Exercise	36
Dancing Winds Farm - Quality Begets Quality	39
Wang Uab's Asian Deli - Egg Rolls Made Fresh Each Saturday Morning	42
Java River - Coffee House Hopes to Stir Storefront Revolution	44
EarthRise Farm - Food with a Farmer's Face on It	46
Minnesota Certified Pork - Cooperative Formed by State's Hog Producers	48
PRODUCT INNOVATIONS - CHAPTER THREE	51
Badgersett Research Farm - Agriculture Gone Nuts	52
Wildrose Farm - Stitching Full Circle	55
Sno Pac Foods - Organic for Nearly Sixty Years	58
Pet Care Systems, Incorporated - The Difference is in the Wheat	61
MOM'S Dairy - Minnesota Organic Milk — Diversity within Diversity	64
HARVESTING NATURE - CHAPTER FOUR	67
Snowy Pines Reforestation - Multigenerational Wealth	68
Minnesota Wild - A Visit to Grandma's Kitchen	72
Richard Bresnahan Studio - Harvesting Nature Beautifully	75
Wildwood Rustic Furnishings - Unique Exports with Heart	78
White Earth Land Recovery Project - Putting it Back Together	81

CONSERVATION – CHAPTER FIVE	
Haubenschild Farm - Putting Waste to Work	85
Prairie Restorations, Incorporated - Minnesota Goes Native	86
Moorhead Public Service - Capturing the Wind	89
Rainy River Monitoring Program - Collaborating for a Fishable River	92
Kas Brothers - Planting a Twenty-five Year Crop	95
Lutsen Scientific & Natural Area - A "Whole Great Gift from God"	98
	100
TOURISM & CULTURE – CHAPTER SIX	
Moonstone Farm - Cared for and Welcoming	103
Mille Lacs Indian Museum - A Confluence of Old and New	104
Harvest Festival - Fresh Food and Family Fun	107
Rural American Arts Center - "That's Our New Theater"	110
Mississippi Headwaters Hostel - A Best Kept Secret	113
	116
COMMUNITY – CHAPTER SEVEN	
Centro Campesino - "Unidos" in Owatonna	121
Campbell Village - Many Hands Make Light Work	122
Angry Trout Café - Where It All Comes Together	125
Northeast Minnesota Sustainable Development Partnership	128
- Local Citizens and the University of Minnesota Working Together	131
Root River Market - Cooperation Rooted in Houston	134
LEARNING – CHAPTER EIGHT	
Harvest Moon Community Farm - Arts, Earth & Farming	137
BOLT Enterprises - Entrepreneurship — Sixty Gallons at a Time	138
Dream of Wild Health - Indigenous Varieties — Awakening to the 21st Century	141
Science and Math Summer Program - Some Things You Can't Learn in a Classroom	143
Youth Farm and Market Project - Fostering Strong Roots in Urban Agriculture	146
	149
AFTERWORD	153
PHOTO AND WRITING CREDITS	155
STORY CONTACT INFORMATION AND MAP	158