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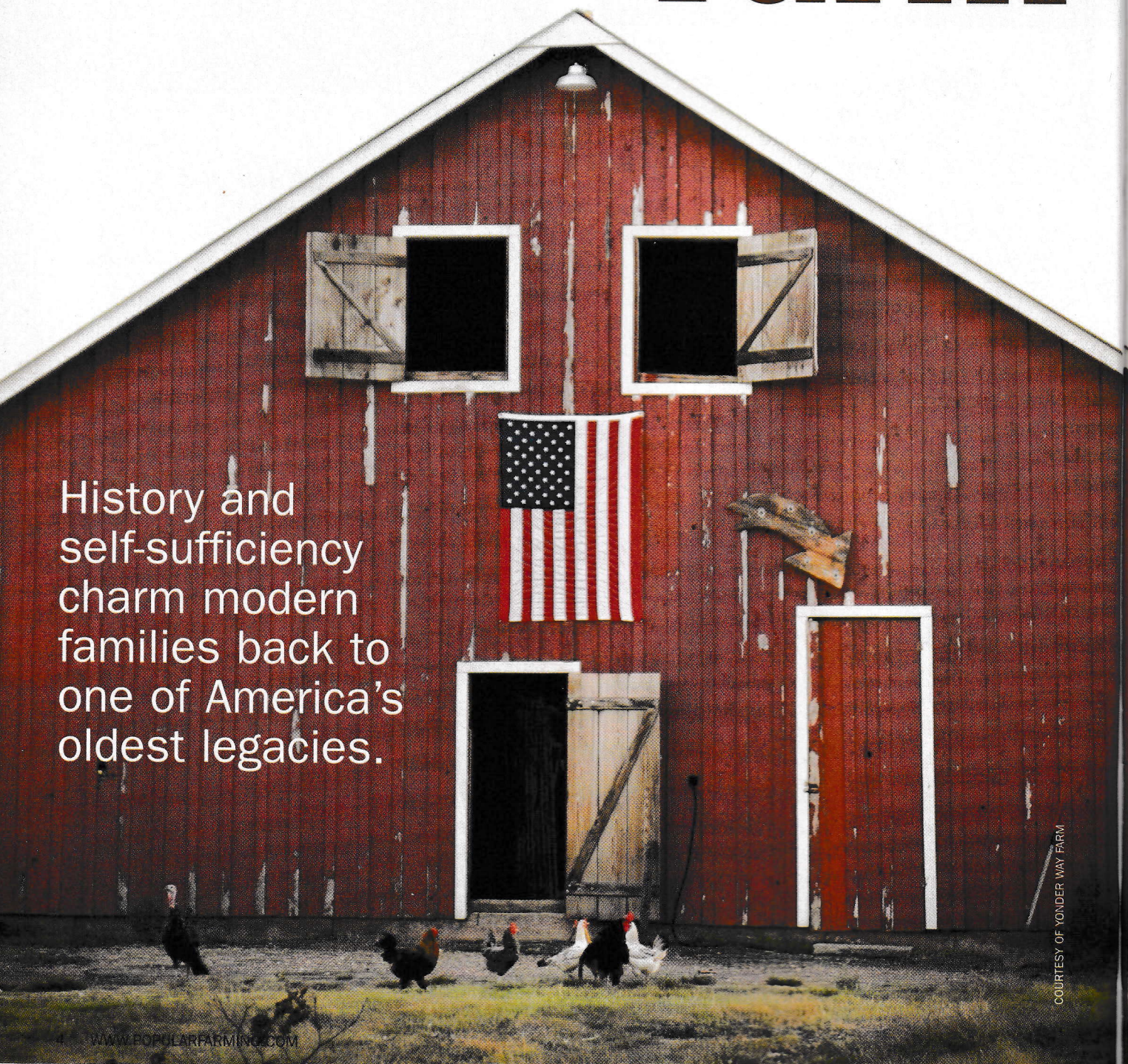


FROM THE EDITORS OF HOBBY FARMS® MAGAZINE

The Family Farm

BY JENNIFER BURCKE

History and self-sufficiency charm modern families back to one of America's oldest legacies.



COURTESY OF YONDER WAY FARM

the American family farm took its first breath more than 400 years ago. Since then, our mental image of the family farm and the farmer tending it has evolved. What began as the notion of an idyllic scene of the Pilgrims' bountiful harvest became Grant Wood's American Gothic before finally coming to rest on the reality of the modern-day farmer who greets us at the local farmers market.

When the first European settlers arrived in Jamestown, Va., in 1607, they planted their boots on the fertile soil that would become the United States. From the settlers' first moments on land, farming became the axis of the American way of life. Farming was necessary for survival.

The Jamestown settlers did not find immediate success with farming. They were ill-equipped and poorly suited for this new agrarian lifestyle. They were skilled metal refiners, glassblowers and perfumers by trade. There was not a single farmer among them. In 1608, John Smith sent an impassioned letter to The Virginia Company regarding the impending voyage of the second group of settlers. "I intreat you rather send but 30 carpenters, husbandmen, gardeners, fisher men ... than a thousand such as we have," he wrote.

Without farming experience, they were unable to produce enough food or store their harvest properly. A year after they landed, a ship named The Mary Margaret arrived with provisions, including three sows and a small flock of chickens. People hoped that livestock would help supplement the settlement's food supply.

The land those early settlers farmed became the Virginia Colony, then the state of Virginia in 1788. By that time, farming was no longer viewed as merely a task of necessity; it was a noble profession, fit for aristocrats and laborers alike. In 1794, during his second term as president, George Washington wrote, "I know of no pursuit in which more real and important services can be rendered to any country than by improving its agriculture, its breed of useful animals, and other branches of a husbandman's cares."



The author's great-grandfather, Earl Sweet, milks a Holstein dairy cow.

COURTESY OF JENNIFER BURCKE

Founding Fathers

Several of the Founding Fathers proudly labeled themselves as farmers. Their love and respect for agriculture gave it a measure of legitimacy. The first four U.S. presidents viewed the advancement of agriculture as a key component to America's success. In fact, Thomas Jefferson went so far as to profess that farmers rather than merchants should form the foundation of the elected body of Congress.

When these early farmers made discoveries, they shared their knowledge. Thomas Jefferson spent years developing an improved plow that he called the "mouldboard plow of least resistance," modeled on the versions he had observed in use in Europe.



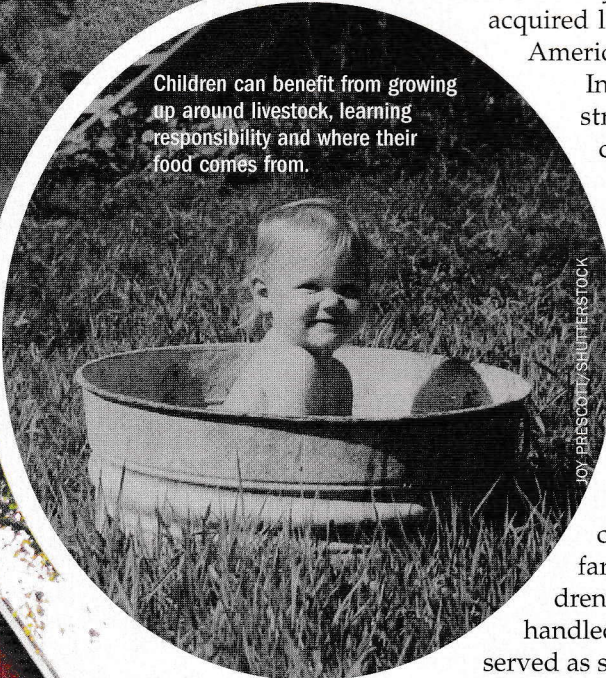
EVERETT COLLECTION/SHUTTERSTOCK

Chicken keeping is more than a hobby to those who do it; it's a way of life.

Jefferson chose not to patent his plow despite the fact that the French Society of Agriculture awarded him a gold medal for its design. Instead, he saw it as his gift to the craft of agriculture and willingly shared his innovation with the American farming community. In "Founding Gardeners," Andrea Wulf reveals Jefferson's assertion that protecting his improved plow with a patent would do "a great deal more harm than good."

Farming Grows with the Nation

In 1862, under the Homestead Act, the American government began providing land grants of 160 acres to more than 400,000 people. Through this program, thousands of Americans moved westward and capitalized on the opportunity to become family farmers on their newly acquired land. By 1910, the number of American farms had tripled.



Children can benefit from growing up around livestock, learning responsibility and where their food comes from.

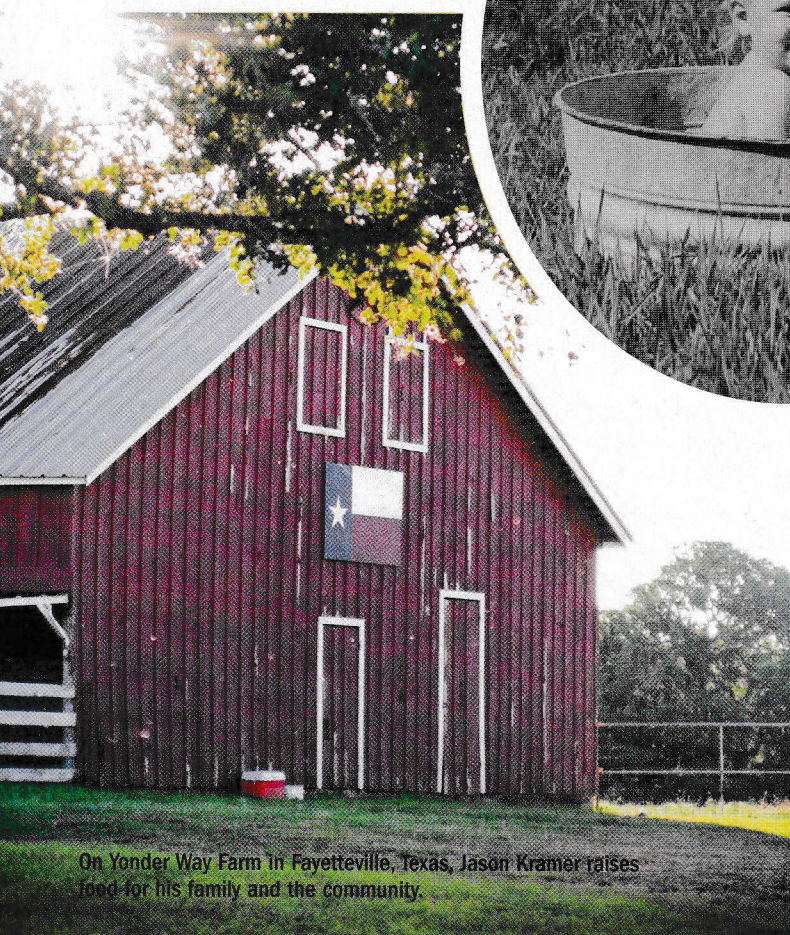
JOY-PRESCOIT/SHUTTERSTOCK

In 1929, The Great Depression struck a blow to the entire country, followed closely by the Dust Bowl. The dust storms and severe drought devastated the agricultural landscape from 1933 to 1940. In 1941, the rains finally returned to the plains, ending the Dust Bowl. By the end of that year, American soldiers left their farms to fight in World War II. Their families continued to work their farms, and women and children took over all of the duties handled by the farmers who now served as soldiers.

In 1943, the U.S. Congress approved funding for the Women's Land Army to recruit women to train to work on America's farms during the war. F.O. Blecha, secretary of the Kansas Farm Labor Commission, declared to The Wichita Eagle that "It's getting harder and harder to find men — we will have to accept the idea that women will supplant men in the Kansas fields."

Large-scale Farming Emerges

World War II ended in 1945, and the soldiers returned home to the U.S. Many of them chose to leave the farms they had grown up on to find work in factories and raise their family in cities and suburbs. As the number of Americans choosing farming as their lifelong profession declined, the demand for food increased along with the



COURTESY OF YONDER WAY FARM

On Yonder Way Farm in Fayetteville, Texas, Jason Kramer raises food for his family and the community.



Family-owned for more than 200 years, Pettengill Farm provides locally grown produce and poultry.

COURTESY OF PETTENGILL FARM

growing population. Large-scale industrial farms stepped up to meet the demand.

These new, larger farms moved away from the cornerstone ideals of the American family farm. Small farms utilized diversity to ensure the good health of their crops and livestock. Large-scale farms turned to mechanization and a singular focus with respect to both crops and livestock. The USDA designates 1945 as the beginning of an era in which the “revolution in agricultural technology brought greatly increased yields and more specialized, capital-intensive farms.”

In the decades that followed, large-scale farms continued to become more efficient at producing food. Over the same time, a growing number of Americans began to feel an increased desire in forming a more personal connection with their food supply. The United States Census of Agriculture data illustrates the shift that occurred toward the end of the 20th century, when more citizens chose to return to life on the farm.

Modern Operations

In Salisbury, Mass., Justin Webb and his family do both. At Pettengill Farm, they tend a farm that has been in the family since 1792. Pettengill’s customers have purchased plants from the farm for years. Webb hopes that these same customers soon will purchase pasture-raised poultry and swine from the farm year-round. He plans to expand the farm’s activities and transition from a seasonal entity to a more self-sufficient operation by using winter-growing strategies and expanding the number of pasture-raised chickens produced each year.

The Webbs have raised livestock at Pettengill Farm for three years. Justin plans to add a fully inspected on-site poultry processing facility. Achieving that goal will guarantee that the birds raised at Pettengill Farm can avoid a stressful trip to a processing facility.

Instead, the chickens and turkeys will spend their entire lives on the farm under the care of the

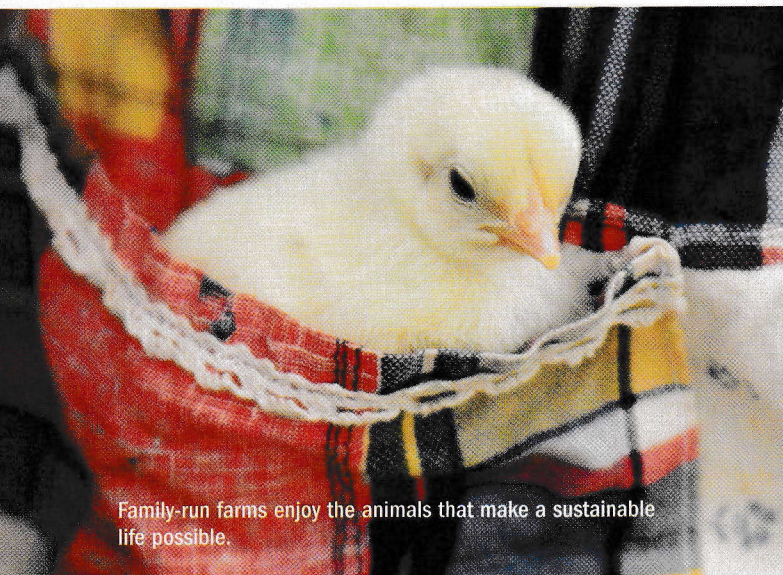
The USDA Census of Agriculture

The United States government has conducted a Census of Agriculture since 1840. Beginning in 1920, data for the Census of Agriculture is gathered every five years and provides information about American farms and farmers. The most recent data was collected in 2007. Data collected in 2012 will be released in 2013.

The total number of farms in the U.S. declined in the years following the end of the World War II until 1997. From 1997 through 2007, the number of U.S. farms with less than \$2,500 in annual gross sales increased. By 2007, the total number had returned to nearly the same level as was reported in the 1969 Census. — J.B.

family that raises them. This goal continues to inspire Webb as he hopes to have “the opportunity to be able to give the animal dignity and respect as a living, breathing creature.”

Two thousand miles away in Fayetteville, Texas, Jason Kramer raises grass-fed beef, pastured pork, pastured chicken and fresh eggs for local sale. Jason tends the family farm along with his wife and four daughters. Initially, the goal was to live a sustainable lifestyle and produce food for the family table.



Family-run farms enjoy the animals that make a sustainable life possible.

COURTESY OF YONDER WAY FARM

Today, the food raised at Yonder Way Farm is consumed by more than 200 families in the communities surrounding Houston. Kramer describes his philosophy as “community through food,” and he believes that Yonder Way Farm customers are eager to maintain a personal connection with the family farmer who raises their food. “People are realizing that the food they are eating has no connection to them other than the receipt they have from the grocery store,” he says. “They want more. They want food with a story behind it.”

Together, we all continue to write that story. By tending to our backyard flocks or purchasing food from a local family farm, we write a chapter each day. We might have traded Thomas Jefferson’s plow for a tractor, but we have not abandoned the desire to embrace the traditions of our agricultural past or the promise of its future. By holding our food supply firmly within our grasp and supporting the family farm, we can build a stronger and more secure American future together. PF

My Story

I didn’t spend my childhood on a farm. I grew up in the suburbs of Kansas City, Kan. Both of my parents grew up on farms, however, and shared their fond memories of a childhood spent close to the land that produced the food for their table.

As adults, they chose to leave life on the farm behind to make a white-collar living and raise their family. For most of my life, I had every intention of doing the same. I never imagined that I would feel a desire to return to life on a family farm.

With my husband and my newborn daughter in tow, three generations of my family made the decision to move 1,400 miles from Kansas to New Hampshire. In 2005, we purchased what was then an abandoned farm and began the difficult work of bringing it back to life. It’s no coincidence that it is located a mere 100 miles from the dairy farm that my great-grandparents proudly called home.

Each year, we work to produce more of our own food on our farm. We added our first heritage breed hens two years ago. Becoming a family of chicken keepers was such a positive experience that it gave us the courage to attempt what had seemed impossible: We became dairy farmers.

My great-grandfather kept Holstein dairy cows, but we chose to use Nigerian Dwarf dairy goats as the foundation of our family’s dairy. I begin my mornings much like he did: in the quiet solace of the barn listening to the rhythmic cadence of a stream of milk as it hits the pail.

With each egg we collect, every tomato that we harvest and each pail of milk that enters the farmhouse, we celebrate and honor the history and heritage of my ancestors. I am honored to call myself a fifth-generation New England family farmer. I take greater pride knowing that we are raising two children who hold the promise of continuing that tradition and proudly taking their place as the sixth generation. — J.B.

Jennifer Burcke is a writer and fifth-generation New England farmer who lives with three generations at 1840 Farm (www.1840farm.com) in New Hampshire.