

MOUNTAIN PEAKS

THE TANGIBLE MAGIC OF GREEN MOUNTAIN GIRLS FARM

BY COREY BURDICK

Green Mountain Girls Farm is not a landscape you drive idly by on a Sunday afternoon, admiring cows and hay bales. The magic of being on a farm like this is challenging to depict without experiencing it firsthand—and so many do exactly that. In fact, in the 4½ years since Mari Omland and Laura Olsen purchased the property, it has quickly become a cornerstone of the Northfield community.

“People still want to have a meaningful experience with the land and the foodscape. The inspiration they get back is so gratifying,” Mari said. “People will visit for one reason, but end up becoming hooked on the farm lifestyle.”



When Rutland native Mari Omland and UVM graduate Laura Olsen returned to Vermont via Washington, DC, in 2007, they planned to match their interests in land conservation with their desire to create an ambience that would foster community involvement.

“We made a mid-career shift into agriculture, each bringing with us 15 years of experience managing small to large nonprofits and the skills and talents we developed along the way.” Passion for community engagement, local food and sustainably raised food comprise the staples of their relational farming model and people in the surrounding area have wholeheartedly embraced the concept. Mari said she was warmed by how quickly and thoroughly they were folded into the community.

“People see the potential of farms,” she said. The evidence lies in the remarkable response to their CSA free choice omnivore share (they also offer a Farm Stand Share, where you commit to at least \$100 per month in purchases of your choice and get a 10% discount off retail prices) and their farm stay program.

Their CSA model is unique in that once an individual signs up, every member of the household must be included and you are a member for life. One can choose meat, eggs, milk, vegetables,

Photos courtesy of Green Mountain Girls Farm

What makes their farm concept a “home run” is that it’s such a jump from that “throwaway culture.”

herbs and flowers—how much and what you want each week. You also get access to the farm: pond swims, picnics, trails and visits with the animals. Food is provided all year, including some prepared foods as well as frozen, canned and stored summer produce for the winter months.

“There are an endless number of differences that come with this food,” Laura said. “It comes from an atmosphere that’s rich in care. This is a necessity on a small-scale, sustainable farm. We need more care in how food is being raised, how the animals live. We experience the joy of watching a pig digging in the pasture and witness how the sound of the turkeys changes when we move them into pasture. We call it the ‘happy turkey noise’—they jump and leap in a different way.”

Since most of their sales are direct—either through local farmers markets or their own farm store—people have an opportunity to slow down, pick up their shares, talk to fellow members, exchange recipes or visit their favorite animal.

“It’s in those moments you get to a richness,” Mari said. “This is exactly what Laura and I wanted to do: to create and invite meetings, stories, memories, connections.”

“The focus for us isn’t only on the land and the livestock but with the community,” she reflected. “What we’re focusing on ... water, schools, neighbors and the value of those relationships. It goes beyond making the farm profitable. It has much more significance.”

Truly, for these women, it is the stories and vignettes they have an opportunity to witness on their farm that stand out in their minds and contribute to what makes it so special. Recently, a 60th birthday celebration took place during which three generations of a family came together to learn about the farm. The elder members of the family, who may no longer have access to farms and have had trouble conveying their importance to the younger generation, were afforded the opportunity to share the land’s meaning and depth.

Laura and Mari relish these moments. Laura recalled looking up at one of their community picnic events last year to see people unpacking their lawn chairs while their children investigated the frogs in the pond nearby. For her, these stories showcase “the cultural context of the food movement” at work.

“So much intimacy is possible even in 2–3 hours on the farm. It’s easy to fold people into that, through holding chicks or touching a goat’s horns. There is a chance to harness that intimacy,” Laura said. Individuals can create their own farm experiences as well. One husband custom-designed a surprise experience for his wife’s birthday at the farm, since she loves goats. They had the opportunity to milk the goats, add that milk to their coffee and tag along with Laura and Mari as they toured the farm and helped with daily tasks.

What makes their farm concept a “home run” is that it’s such a jump from that “throwaway culture.”

“People bring back their glass jars and boxes to reuse and bring compost from the previous week. People can really unplug if they want to,” Mari said. “They can walk up the road and tour a sugar shack. It’s a meaningful kind of place; there’s a cycle to it. It is so opposite from the hectic pace and such a big step for people to take, but when they do, they find it to be quite compatible with their lifestyles.” 🍂

SCHEDULED EVENTS AT GREEN MOUNTAIN GIRLS FARM

For late fall 2012

Bring Home the Harvest

Saturday–Sunday, November 17–18

Enjoy a customized farm tour and pick up your farm-fresh turkey and all the fixings for your feast.

Farm Supper and Music in the Barn

Friday evening, November 30

Scrag Mountain Music artistic directors Mary Bonhag and Evan Premo are connecting Vermont audiences to classical music in a powerful way by presenting innovative, interactive and affordable performances of world-class chamber music. Dinner at 5pm and concert at 7pm. Reservations required, contact farmers@eatstayfarm.com for details. ScragMountainMusic.org

Floating Bridge Food and Farms Holiday Market

Early December:

Choose your Christmas tree at L. H. Stowell & Son then stop by our Holiday Shop for the rest of your holiday gift needs. Beautiful farm products and handmade gifts from wreaths and ornaments to candles, honey and caramel will be available as well as Vermont farm-fresh meat and vegetables for your holiday meals.

Contact Green Mountain Girls Farm at Eatstayfarm.com 802-505-9840

