



Goatastic Acres

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By Kelly Kupiec

There's a little something on our farm for everyone in my family. I raise goats and love to fantasize that I'm a "real farm wife."

You know, a wife that can milk a cow with one hand tied behind her back and washes sheets on an old washboard in the backyard while the lids on the last batch of canned tomatoes rattle on the stovetop.

Just because I grew up in the heart of Chicago and I don't have a lick of real farm common sense doesn't mean I'm not a farm girl through and through.

I have the necessary flock of laying hens (my girls), my own barn and a lot of imagination.

Truth be told, we are a large hobby farm. Over the years we've raised three children on this farm and now, with more time on our hands, my husband, John, and I concentrate on wildlife conservation.

We actually have "real" jobs, but if you define a job as something that gives you pleasure and satisfaction, then hobby farming is our real job.

We began with a dream, a house with 15 acres of land and a "bun in the oven!"

Over the past 20 years, we've grown from a small hobby farm to a big one with a few hundred acres. Our main crops are soybeans, wheat and corn. I have a small egg business on the side and the children used to deliver eggs to our neighbors using our four wheeler. They've grown up, but still laugh about my threatening looks when they'd play with the egg money in the old Mason jar in the kitchen—that was for special treats!

Most of our equipment has been purchased used at farm auctions. Each spring and fall there are several of these "come one, come all" auctions in our area. I love to go to them to see what they are giving away and especially to marvel at the human sea of brown caps bobbing up and down at the auctioneer until the bullhorn screams out, "Sold!"

What I most love about farming are the people we've met along the way. Grand Blanc, Mich., is an up-and-coming city and our land is the exception. Until we began sowing and harvesting crops, we never knew about the rural roots planted here--the old timers and pioneering families within our community.

I believe we've connected with the most genuine people on the face of the planet. They certainly are the most patient! We've asked every farmer we've met along the way some of the dumbest questions ever asked. Sure, we'd get a look, but they never outright laughed at us (at least while we were still there.) If Bill Engvall was with us, he'd have said, "Here's your sign."

When we began, we didn't know anything about what to do, when to do it or how to set the equipment up or even what equipment we really needed. All we had was desire and a dream. We had to ask about everything. What we didn't expect was the acceptance we received. Farmers stopped working at their farms, came over and helped us all day. Fellow goat breeders are the same way. We are forever grateful and try our best to carry on the tradition and refrain from saying to any visitors, "Here's your sign."

My husband, John, has hand planted more than 40,000 trees on our farm. He's in love with his land and he knows every corner of every field. In the early evenings, year-round, he puts on his blaze-orange cap, straps on his binoculars and calls for our two German Shorthaired Pointers.

He's ready for action when he walks out our back door and scours his woods looking for animal signs and the unfortunate trespasser. The woods are loaded with creatures big and small that we enjoy ... like the lone fox we see darting through the shadows, the coyotes who call to one another in the crisp, night air or the white-tailed deer who rob apples from our orchard.



John was named Conservationist of the Year in our county in 1999 for his land management skills. He has acreage dedicated to Pheasants Forever habitat and fields enrolled in Conservation Reserve Programs. Our USDA farm extension office has been a great source of information about conservation opportunities.

Our farm is always changing. Brown fields turn green and back to brown again as the seasons roll past. New interests bring more adventures. Warmer weather in the springtime gives us new baby goats to love, fences to repair, fields to plant, and a lot of oil to change.

Things quiet down during the summer. We measure, fertilize, spray and compare our crops' growth to the next guy's. No one wants to grow a "dirty crop"—one that's chock full of weeds. There's a lot of good-natured competition between neighbors, and knowing winks or nods flash back and forth.

Cooler fall nights show off a big, harvest-orange moon that gives way to heavy, foggy mornings—especially by the lake. Our woods begin to burn blaze-orange, canary-yellow and ruby red. Grey and black squirrels get busy cracking and storing hickory nuts and acorns. The deer lose their reddish summer coats and bundle up in winter grays and browns.

There's no rest for any farm in October and November. We work as soon as the dew is burned off of the fields in the mid-morning until long past sundown. Sometimes we work in between raindrops or snowflakes.

I've been raising Nigerian Dwarf goats for three years and all sorts of chickens for 10 years. Both make me happy. I love to pull up the driveway and see chickens on the front porch or heading for the hills. I toss all my kitchen scraps out into the side yard just so I can yell out, "Here, chick, chick, chick," in my seasoned farmwife calling voice, and see yellow, white, black and burgundy fluff balls half-run and half-fly across the yard to my feet.

The goats are just plain sweethearts. We built a play yard for them so they can "walk the plank," play king of the hill, and climb over and through a six-foot tall tractor tire. Nothing gets them moving, though, like the sound of grain pouring into a metal pail.

We work hard every day to enjoy what we have, share it with others and breed a few excellent quality animals. Having a hobby farm has enriched our lives in every way.

Kelly Kupiec's Reader Resumé first appeared in the Jan/Feb 2008 issue of Hobby Farms. She'll receive a gift from Mahindra for submitting her Reader Resumé.