

Family Roots Farm raises produce, meats in southeastern ND

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Farm & Ranch Guide

CHRISTINE, N.D. – Jen Skoog, who owns Family Roots Farm in the southeastern region of the state, started a farm to be able to raise locally grown produce and meat on the same property that her husband, Ryan, grows corn and soybeans. She wanted to raise food not only for her family, but for her friends and her community to enjoy, as well.

The couple operates a generational family farm that is 1,500 acres. Jen uses 15 acres out of that, with 3.5 acres set aside for the garden produce and fruit, while another 7 acres is used to raise livestock.

“We are different farmers and we have our own farms, but we help each other out,” Jen said, adding they have recently finished corn and bean harvest. “I am what I call a homestead farmer – small scale, keep it simple, loving the land.”

The Skoogs farms in an area that is known for great land that receives good rainfall annually, on average.

“I live right on the Red River Valley, which is one of the most gorgeous places I have ever been and I have ever lived,” Jen said. “I would never give it up for the world.”

Recently, Jen was part of the Farm Dreams Workshop, which was an online workshop organized by the Foundation for Agricultural and Rural Resource Management and Sustainability (FARRMS), where she openly talked to other ‘farm dreamers’ about what it really took to start a farm operation. She has been part of the FARRMS family, saying the Farm Beginnings program helped her when she wanted to start her farm.

“I am an open book. I wish people were more honest with me when I first started farming,” she said.

Jen an accounting background, which has been helpful with farming budgets and business planning. But starting a farm, even for her, was difficult at times. Still, she never gave up until she succeeded.

“I used to work for a large company in Fargo, but in 2018, I quit my full-time, very nice corporate paying job, and started to farm,” she said. It was her dream to raise good, local food on her own farm, and that year was the year her dream began to come to fruition.

Jen operates an organic farm, which means she doesn’t use any chemicals, while Ryan farms conventionally and does use chemicals when he needs them.

They are separated enough that it is doable, and most of the big farm equipment that Ryan needs is kept at his mom’s farmstead, which is a few miles down the road.



Jen Skoog raises locally grown produce, eggs, fruit and meat on her farm in southeastern North Dakota.

“We don’t mix the two farms,” she said.

On her Family Roots Farm, Jen raises lambs, pigs, and chicken for meat, and has both duck and regular eggs.

She also grows seasonal vegetables, including colorful types of tomatoes, carrots, and fruits, like rhubarb. Jen likes diversity, which keeps her soil healthy, and she can use manure from the animals for fertilizer.

“I have about 3 acres of fruit and vegetables,” she said. “We also have honey – I have an apiary.”

In addition, she creates many value-added products, including jams, pickles, and sauerkraut. On the holidays, if she has time, Jen will bake some traditional “honoring-our-ancestors” type baked goods to sell, such as rosettes.

The value-added products help her have goods that continue throughout the year. She markets them through farmers’ markets and through some local Stop & Shop stores in smaller towns.

Jen has two high tunnels, but hasn’t constructed them yet. They will help her extend the season when they are built.

“Everything is out in the open and we just hope and pray there is no hail,” she said.

Jen said that when she was working in town, she was working 50 hours a week. Even her mental health improved when she started her own farm and was able to work outside in the fresh air.

“It was tough on me and the family (working in the city for long hours),” she said. “I like the flexibility (owning and operating her own farm) and being able to be

there for my kids.”

Finances in running a small farm are always tough, she told workshop participants.

“Costs are going to be way higher than you think they are. You are not going to bring in as much income as you think you are,” she said.

Marketing was a struggle for her, and Jen found it hard at the beginning to get her name in front of people. She lives a half-hour south of Fargo and the fact that people are now looking for locally grown products with the “local food movement,” helped her with demand for her goods.

“The local food movement has hit Fargo, and that has really helped,” she said.

“We love farming. That is why we farm. You are not always in farming to make money. You farm first and foremost because you love it. We did have a good year this year, but we don’t always,” she said.

Jen grew up on a conventional farm and had relatives who farmed.

“On our farm, my mom always had a big garden, so I was always around fresh produce,” she said. “At a young age, I learned how to grow food, so I thank my family for that.”

Before she started her farm, Jen always had a big garden so her kids would have fresh produce. But she knows not everyone has the space on their properties to be able to have a garden, and not everyone wants to garden, so she wanted to grow local, fresh produce, fruit and meat for them and the entire community.

“I wanted to share that with my family and friends,” Jen said. “Sure, I could sit in front of a computer screen all day, but when I daydreamed, that is not where my mind was. My mind was always outside, so I thought, ‘That is what I am going to do.’”

Jen has sold her products at the Red River Farmers’ Market and a couple of smaller farmers’ markets over the last three years. She has gotten local connections through selling at the market, including from other vendors and customers, as well. In addition, Jen sells to a couple of restaurants in Fargo.

One restaurant buys chicken eggs from her and the other buys both chicken and duck eggs from her.

She is still working out when to butcher to have meat ready when customers want it.

“I just spent four hours today chopping jalapenos. At least I will have them through the winter,” she said.

Jen is also a Pride of Dakota member, which helps her market some of her products. She has two more shows to participate in this fall in Bismarck and Fargo.

A few farmers, including Jen, started a locally grown products cooperative in Fargo this year. For those in the Fargo area interested, access the co-op by ordering online at www.redriverharvest.com.

“This spring, a handful of local producers and I created a brand new co-op,” she said. “Our co-op is a new, efficient, and sustainable way of strengthening our area’s local food economy year-round.”

On her Family Roots Farm Facebook page, Jen announced that the co-op marketplace was selling eggs, herbs, meats, honey, produce, pumpkins and other products.

Jen is treasurer of the cooperative. The president is Ross Lockhart, owner of Heart & Soil Farm; the vice president is Bjorn Solberg, owner of Hugh’s Gardens; the secretary is Michelle Brendemuhl, owner of Brendemuhl Produce; and the director is Quinn Renfandt, owner of Betty’s Acres.

According to the website, Red River Harvest Cooperative is a community of local producers committed to empowering a resilient local food economy by providing sustainably grown food options while practicing good stewardship of agricultural resources.

They build stronger ties within the community by championing family farm agriculture, providing farm-to-table products, and facilitating educational opportunities.

For those interested in the Farm Beginnings classes, see www.farrms.org/ dream. *