

Agriculture, Education, Clinics and Camp

WOMEN IN AG



LYNDA FARRELL

Caroline Owens grew up in the Connecticut suburbs with a passion for animals. Bartering her way into horse ownership by trading her labor for free boarding at a local farm, she became active in FFA, enrolled in Vo-Ag and set her sights on teaching Vo-Ag.

Owens attended Cornell University, earned a bachelor's degree in animal science/agricultural education and taught Vo-Ag until a job with the Federal Milk Market Order led her to earn an MBA in marketing from Boston University.

Marketing and public relations were "fun," but as time passed, Owens found herself missing direct involvement in agriculture, looking for more purpose and missing her core identity — agriculture.

Caroline and David Owens had married in 1990, owned a 13-acre New Hampshire farm and were pasture-raising livestock for their family. Neighbors developed an appetite for the same quality of food and thinking back Owens said, "I can see that we were part of the humble beginnings of the local food movement. We home-schooled

our children, which led to offering educational programs on the farm. I was back to teaching; but on the farm instead of the classroom."

By 2007, the family was ready for a larger farm in a less densely populated state.

"Factoring in climate and topography, Pennsylvania became our focus. There also seemed to be a broad network of support for sustainable farming and direct-marketing to consumers. The presence of PASA (Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture) was a strong factor in our decision."

The Owens settled in Sunbury, Pa., on 112 acres of rolling pastures and began what Owens describes as, "a partnership, divided among interests and skills.

"I focus on raising grass-fed Coopworth and Katahdin sheep, pastured Tamworth hogs, horses, fencing and educational programs. Dave is in charge of the pastured chickens, honeybees, pick-your-own flower and herbs, small fruit and orchards, watering systems, facilities maintenance," she said.

"You may have read about our lambing slumber parties, (Lancaster Farming, March 12), build-your-own farm tours, lambing clinic, pastured pork day and adopt-a-sheep; sheared fleece included.

"The next sheep camp for adults is May 14 and open for registration on our website. This is a very hands-on workshop in raising sheep, for new and prospective sheep owners," she said.

Owens' input on ensuring a robust future for Pennsylvania farming naturally starts with "getting young people involved. Ex-

pose them to opportunities in farming at a young age."

Daughter Melissa personifies this philosophy; just ask her about her grand champion Coopworth ewe, Abby.

Owens also believes in support of programs that match enthusiastic workers with farmers who need help, facilitation of access to land and a need to encourage farming by customizing regulations that otherwise burden small producers and work against the goal of ensuring future farmers.

"I will say, it's easier to farm here than in New Hampshire," she said. "There is more infrastructure — auctions, butchers, feed and farm supply stores, equipment dealers, veterinarians, farriers and other farm-related services."

The Owens do not currently use crop insurance, however Owens Farm will be playing host to a PASA workshop on Sept. 8, "Sheep: Nutrition, Handling & Health." Registration is through PASA. We will talk about how the USDA's Risk Management Agency Pasture Program works for hay land, and this is a great opportunity to meet Caroline Owens.

Owens Farm is at 2611 Mile Post Road between Sunbury and Danville, Pa. Call 570-286-5309 or go to the website www.owensfarm.com.

Lynda Farrell is an independent agricultural and environmental consultant at lkfarrell@verizon.net. "Women in Agriculture" is made possible by a grant from the PDA & USDA Risk Management Agency.