

A Farm in Arkansas and How We Got Here

From Farm to Failure to Farm

Worst. Mistake. Ever.

How We Began Our Dance With The Devil

A farm in Arkansas. First of all, this is a story of our journey South. Secondly, it is a story of how we lost everything in Colorado to get here. Never get into bed with the federal government. The death knell on our 12.5 acres in Colorado was The Farm Service Agency loan that was supposed to save our farm. We had worked hard. Harder than we had ever worked in our life. We sold like our life depended on it because it did. It was not enough. We were on our own. Never mind that we asked, actually begged, for help. Lastly, the Loan Officer that was supposed to help us did not understand.

How could he?

We were not conventional meat producers feeding conventional livestock feed. First of all, we were raising livestock organically, grinding and mixing our own feed from organic, non-soy/non-corn ingredients with special recipes made just for us, and treating the animals holistically. No farrowing crates for the pigs. Piglets were raised in family groups and weaned naturally. Dairy cows were grass-fed and beef cows were grass-fed and finished. Calves were raised by their mothers. Chickens for both eggs and meat were allowed to free-range. Laying hens who were all heritage breeds living with heritage breed roosters and scratching in the grass and eating small seeds and bugs. Meat birds got fat and sassy on grass.

Heritage turkeys roosted on rooftops and made contented turkey sounds. They were our own personal security alarm.

And Then What Happened Was...

Everything came crashing down. It flooded. The ducks loved it. Everyone else...not so much. The laying stopped and nobody (me included) could figure out why healthy birds would stop laying and new pullets would not start laying. We lost a lot of meat birds to huddling during rain and severe thunderstorms. Whatever we did in preparation for severe weather did not help. The turkeys would not gain weight in sustained below-freezing temperatures.

We lost a calf to BVD when its' mother passed the disease to him in utero. That happened when a neighbor's Charlois bull broke down our fence and found our 1/2 mini, 1/2 mid-Jersey, Daisy, in heat. We lost three cows in a two-year timeframe, Lily was lost to an injury which was being treated with herbs and massage. She was making progress when she reinjured it when getting up. Daisy and Luna were lost to a mysterious illness that even the vet could not diagnose. They ran every test in the world. The dollars multiplied and we never got an answer but the vet got paid.

Finally, the nail in our proverbial coffin was when our USDA poultry processor closed down with no warning. We could no longer legally sell poultry at off-farm markets. As a result, we lost about 60% of our business. Thank goodness for the pigs!

The Death Throes

Needless to say, we could not pay back our operating loan. We did manage to stretch a one-year operating loan into two market seasons but it wasn't enough. It was time to renew our loan. Our loan officer said he would roll over our note into a new operating loan that would help us recover. Then he valued our livestock, grain, and other assets at commodity prices and

that killed us. According to the FSA, we did not have enough collateral to guarantee a new loan. So they called our loan...it was due immediately. The loan was guaranteed by our farm. This would be the end.

What Happened Next

We finished out the market season by selling every bit of product we had. Then we sold some stuff at deep discounts and began selling equipment and animals and fencing. It was depressing and my mind went to a very dark place. In other words, you begin to think your life is over and that you'll never recover.

But I had started over before, been a survivor before. I could do this. Therefore, we could put one foot in front of the other and climb out of this quicksand. The fog started lifting and I began to breathe. The worst part of feeling like this is you cannot make a decision, even a bad one. You just have to take one step at a time. Finally, I was able to start formulating a plan. However, the one thing I knew for sure is that I could not, would not live my life in an apartment in the city. I may not have been born to it but farming now ran in my veins. The FSA credited our account the appraised value of the house and we paid the rest with the sale of our things.

Onward and Southward

We packed everything left into a travel trailer, a cargo trailer, and our vehicles. We were determined to rebuild and to start a livestock farm in Arkansas and we would do just that. After everything we had been through it was nice to have an uneventful trip here. We pulled into seven acres in a holler in the Boston Mountains and set up camp. The very first thing we did was start a garden area of 75' x 75'. We got that garden cleared and planted with the help of a rented tractor and a box blade.

Then I fell when a step collapsed due to the manufacturer's

defect. I broke my left wrist and had to have surgery and metal bars to repair it. The whole summer...gone. Then 4 months of physical therapy. Then in January of 2017, Kevin fell down a stairwell and broke his right wrist, and shattered his left elbow. Consequentially he required surgery to repair it. Next, I would undergo surgery to repair my shoulder that was damaged by my original fall. Finally, I had carpal tunnel surgery on my right wrist which I had put off for a long time.

Building an Arkansas Farm ... Our Way

Starting with fully wooded acres and very little money we started carving out a small farm. We will be growing for the animals and ourselves in our garden space. Slowly we added animals. You will hear their stories in future blog posts. Finally, we had a farm in Arkansas without pesticides, without herbicides, without antibiotics. A farm that treats animals humanely and with respect. A farm that uses holistic methods for the soil and for the animals. Lastly, we thought we lost everything and instead, we found true North in the South ... in Arkansas.

On the move again...

In Mountainburg we thought we found our forever place but it wasn't meant to be. On a whim and a Craigslist ad, during a pandemic, we were headed to Norman, Arkansas which is even further South. We are starting over again in a tiny house and 9 acres. It is beautiful and scary. So much to do ... so little time.

Be sure to subscribe and follow us on Facebook to keep up-to-date on this adventure.

Read more about Our Commitment.