



Woven Stars Farm
Ghent, NY
Lizzie Galeucia & Emerson
Martin
Business loan 2018 and
Technical assistance 2019

Farm and Loan History

It was a classic tale of sheep meets goat: Lizzie had sheep, Emerson had goats, and now their small ruminants graze together happily on 45 acres at Woven Stars Farm in Ghent, NY. Lizzie Galeucia and Emerson Martin were former college acquaintances on separate farming journeys when their paths crossed again in Ghent, NY, in 2016.

Lizzie, originally from Hopkinton, MA, and Emerson, who grew up in Sheffield, MA, both studied agriculture in school and each dreamed of running their own operations one day. After graduation, Lizzie happened to move to Ghent to do a livestock apprenticeship at Kinderhook Farm and found Emerson working nearby, for another local farmer.

By 2017, they decided to join forces to start their own farm, and they faced the usual challenges—they needed money and they needed land. To solve the money problem, they both held part-time jobs off the farm for their first year of operation.

Finding land fell into place easily: Emerson had a relationship with a landowner in Ghent who was interested in having farmers work his land. The owner built a barn, and Lizzie and Emerson built the additional necessary infrastructure for their animals. At that time, they needed housing, fencing, and grazing land for 200 laying hens, 500 broilers, 20 sheep and 24 goats, along with all their lambs and kids, born one month before the move — quite a logistical challenge!

Lizzie and Emerson added mushrooms to their offerings after identifying a promising opportunity via their market research. In 2017, they grew mushrooms on a small scale, outdoors in a 5' x 15' greenhouse, and in their first two years, they produced them in a barn fitted out to produce favorable growing conditions.

Farm Snapshot

Lizzie and Emerson raise lambs, goats, cows, pigs, and chickens, to produce meat, eggs, and honey, on 150 acres, 45 of which are grazeable. They sell their products at two farmers markets, provide product for 60 CSA shares, sell eggs and chicken to three wholesale outlets, and offer whole animals for special events.

Innovation

Lizzie and Emerson believe the farm is a living organism comprising soil, animals, plants, fungi, forest, and people. They write, “Just as stars, dust, and matter are woven together in the universe, the farm weaves together a variety of elements and enterprises to be sustainable and successful.” Their farm’s name is an ode to the cosmos and its influence on nature and farming.

By the 2019 season, Woven Stars Farm's livestock population more than doubled. Through 2018 and 2019, Lizzie and Emerson developed their market, selling meat, eggs, and mushrooms at two farmers markets, to seven restaurants and grocery stores, and through a local CSA supplying around 40 families.

Getting in the Door

As they steadily put their farm plans in motion, one of Lizzie and Emerson's biggest challenges in establishing their farm operation was financing. They knew that the return on their investment into their land, animals, and infrastructure was going to be slow; yet they needed money both to live on and to put into the business. In 2018, after hearing about The Carrot Project through word-of-mouth from farmer friends, Lizzie and Emerson received a loan from The Carrot Project to assist them in expanding their mushroom barn and outfitting it with the appropriate equipment to provide optimal growing and storing conditions. Lizzie says the business loan provided by the Carrot Project **"gave us the confidence and means to take the leap from farming as a hobby to making farming our full-time jobs."**

When Lizzie and Emerson started growing mushrooms in their small greenhouse, they saw immediately that they sold very well; however, they couldn't produce a steady supply in the outdoor venue. The mushroom barn allowed them to increase their production dramatically. They'd also created a niche for themselves in the market, as no one else was selling organically grown mushrooms in individual cardboard packages, with attractively designed labels. Other local mushrooms were sold in bulk, which led to damaged product, or in styrofoam packages.

With the injection of cash from their Carrot Project loan, Lizzie and Emerson were able to quickly scale up their mushroom production in time for the 2018 marketing season. They produced enough to supply all of their marketing outlets and their product was very well received. The mushroom sales also helped introduce and establish Woven Stars' other products in their new marketing venues, some of which were already crowded with local product — especially helpful in establishing wholesale accounts for their egg sales.

Lizzie and Emerson continue to receive technical assistance from The Carrot Project. They are working with a business advisor over the course of two years to get their financial tracking systems established and running smoothly. With the diversity of Woven Stars' enterprises, it is important for them to have a clear picture of which parts of their operation are more and less profitable. Their operation is dynamic: Lizzie and Emerson are faced daily with decisions to make about its future. Vetting new opportunities and ideas with an eye on the bottom line is their strategy for long-term success.

On the Horizon

Lizzie and Emerson want to acquire, and eventually own, more land, so that they can expand production, graze their animals on a rotation that is best for the long-term health of the soil, and implement a silvopasture system on their land — a model in which trees, forage plants, and livestock are intentionally and intensively managed together as an integrated system. They would love to operate a farm store on their own property, where all their products can be sold under one roof.

For now, however, they will stay where they are and are exploring how to reorganize their enterprises to maximize efficiency and profitability. This means beefing up some products and scaling back on others.

They are adding turkeys and ducks in the 2020 season, and in addition, they'll increase their egg production — adding substantially to their layer and meat bird numbers, because these are profitable enterprises and don't require significant additional space for expansion.

Lizzie and Emerson will make some changes to how they are selling their products. They realized that for everything they produce at a smaller scale than eggs and meat birds, it is most profitable to sell directly to customers rather than wholesaling. This year, they'll cut back on wholesaling, retain their presence at farmers' markets, and expand their CSA by 30%. They'll sell only their eggs, meat birds, and the occasional whole animal via wholesale.

Meanwhile, a change for Emerson resulted in other changes on the farm: he took a job implementing silvopasture systems for other farmers. With Emerson now on the farm only part-time, the two had to figure out how to streamline their operations. This means they will put mushrooms on the back burner for now. While mushroom production and sales went as well as they possibly could have, they'll be able to operate more efficiently with one fewer arena of production, one fewer location to manage, and be better able to focus on the scale-up of their promising meat and egg production. They also will hire their first employee to assist Lizzie in the day-to-day tasks.

Lizzie and Emerson's commitment to diversity on the farm is a long-term commitment to hard work across multiple fronts, simultaneously. This is a challenge they welcome because, as Lizzie says, **"Diversity is a great strength for us. Not only is it important for soil, animal and farm health, but in the beginning years it allows our business to be flexible and figure what products work for us."**