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Bookkeeping does not come naturally to us, yet it is the thing we need to focus on most to make this farm a success.
Marleen van Gulick and Dan Carr
Beavertides Farm, Falls Village, CT”

THE **carrot**
PROJECT

CLIENT UPDATE

Farm History

Growing up in a small, rural town in the Netherlands, Marleen van Gulick couldn't see the stars at night through the light emitted by nearby industrial greenhouses producing tomatoes, peppers and flowers. Although she didn't have a great impression of growing food, an early avocation test predicted that she'd be a forester or a shepherd: "I was always a nature kid," says Marleen. Her studies and later, her work for United Nations in counter-terrorism, would take Marleen all over the world before she settled into her farm dream.

Marleen now raises sheep and goats, tends bees, and offers farming classes with her now husband, Dan Carr, and their two young sons, at Beavertides Farm in Falls Village, CT. Dan, a Colorado native, served in the Peace Corps' agriculture program in Malawi, and was the Beekeeper and Assistant Livestock Manager at Stone Barns Center for Agriculture in Tarrytown, NY, "One of our biggest desires for the farm is for it to become a place where we can grow community," says Marleen. "In fact, this is THE reason Dan farms."

After several seasons of building a customer base and establishing the production side of their farm, Marleen recognized a need to shift her focus to setting up a financial tracking system. She and Dan needed to be able to see which parts of their operation were most profitable, and to have better information on which to base their decisions. She found Julia Shanks' "The Farmer's Edge" course online, and successfully applied to The Carrot Project for

Beavertides Farm Falls Village, CT

Marleen van Gulick & Dan Carr
Training Participant, 2020

Farm Snapshot

Marleen and Dan raise sheep, goats, bees, and two boys on a leased 350-acre farm in Falls Village, CT. They sell meat boxes and honey online and at the farm.

Innovation

Marleen and Dan are passionate about engaging their community to spend time on the farm. They offer classes, including workshops for kids, and dream up other ways to share their land with customers and non-customers alike.

Their focus on small ruminants reflects the contours of their farm, which contains wetlands and moist pastures—less suitable for animals with larger body weight.

a small scholarship to help her pay for the course. Marleen participated in the course in the early spring of 2020.

Overview of Outcomes

Marleen has lived in Spain, Brazil, and Ghana, soaking up tidbits of traditional wisdom about food; but the experience that profoundly shifted her vision was studying and working in Italy. She lived in the Tuscany region. **“People everywhere were growing stuff,”** she says. She met the parents and grandparents of her friends, who taught her how to can and ferment, and other time-honored methods of working with food.

After Italy, Marleen moved to New York City, to work at the UN, and laughingly explains that living in the big city turned out to provide tremendous agricultural opportunities and skill-building. She gardened in her landlords’ backyard, learned about rooftop farms, woodworking, fermentation, and started two beehives. In the summer of 2014, she took a beekeeping class at the Brooklyn Grange, where she met Dan, and a year later, they were on their way to starting their own farm on land in Falls Village, on 350 acres of woods and wetlands including 80 acres of pasture. The land is owned by Dan’s brother’s wife and had been fallow for a year.



As of this season, Dan and Marleen are both working full time at Beavertides, but for the first six years, Dan was also the full time manager at a nearby pasture raised livestock farm. Marleen was the primary farmer at Beavertides and managed many of the chores with their two sons, now ages 5 and 2, in tow.

After a “soft start” in 2015 (mostly clean-up and set-up), Marleen and Dan established their apiary in 2016, raised chicken and ducks, and contracted with a local butcher to raise Ossabaw pigs. For a few seasons, they custom grazed 30-50 steer for other farmers; **because their land is best suited for small-hooved ruminants, they’ve discontinued this practice for now.** They started a flock of goats—both for meat and to manage new pastures and overgrown ditches. Next, they added Katahdin sheep, a breed that does well with the climate and landscape.

Through 2020, Marleen and Dan sold around 70% of their product at NYC farmers’ markets and they also sold a small amount of their product wholesale. When COVID hit, the farmers pivoted to selling meat boxes online to be picked up in the fall at the farm or at the NYC market.

Marleen and Dan enjoyed the new focus on local sales, and for 2021, they’ve expanded the pivot into a permanent new program intended to build community around the farm—the Farm Folk Club. Customers who sign up to buy a meat box or take a class early in the season will have access to pasture walks, a Farm Folk potluck, and monthly live gatherings on social

media. This will facilitate the farm's local and NYC customers in connecting throughout the season with Marleen and Dan, as well as one another.

On the Horizon

In keeping with their goal of inviting the community to be a part of their farm, Marleen and Dan will expand their class offerings this season, teaching courses from animal husbandry to sustainable living, raising and harvesting pastured chicken, and beekeeping -- including beekeeping for kids. They'll offer some free events designed for family fun. **"We want to have a lively community around the farm, whether or not you're a customer,"** Marleen says.

Marleen hopes to ramp up to 150 ewes within the next three years, to meet market demand. They will consider adding beef cattle once the sheep and goat enterprises stabilize. Their hand-harvested honey has been a great seller, and Marleen believes they could double their production and still easily sell out.

But the big dream is to get the business to a place of profitability. She says she is determined to streamline and structure systems, so that they can run a business **"not dependent on privilege and luck of circumstance, but one that can stand on its own."** With Dan now full time at the farm, Marleen will be able to focus more on managing the business side of things, and plans to renew her work with The Carrot Project, to continue to hone her skills in bookkeeping and business planning.

Marleen's abiding vision for their farm is rooted in her childhood days when she couldn't see the stars—"In 10 years, I hope for us to be a farm with an established community of people who really feel part of it. I want to create the thing that I longed for when I didn't have access."