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**With farming, there is always something to learn, no matter how many years you're in it.”**

Megan Perry, Hazel Bough Farm  
Ashfield, Massachusetts

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THE  
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PROJECT

## CLIENT UPDATE

### Farm History

**Megan Perry knows a lot about perseverance.**

In college, as a non-traditional student, she majored in math — a discipline which she both loved and struggled with, a continual challenge that caused her major anxiety and yet which she couldn't quit. Now, tending sheep and chickens at her Hazel Bough Farm in Ashfield, MA, retailing her own botanicals, and raising one small person, Megan has plenty of opportunities to persevere through setbacks and blows. Last spring, just as the horror of the global coronavirus pandemic was starting to unfold, Megan lost one of her favorite ewes. “It was utterly horrible.” She remembers thinking, “I just don't know if I can keep doing this,” and came close to calling the whole thing off. But just like with math, **Megan could not and would not quit her farm.**

**Megan came to the east coast in her late twenties** to pursue a degree at Smith College. While living in Northampton, she met her future partner. They found a place to rent in Ashfield, MA, happy to raise their then almost three-year old in a place with a strong community. In 2018, Megan rented a 13-acre piece of land ten minutes from their house, of which eight acres are grazeable. It is here, and on an adjacent property, where Megan raises her flock of 17 Icelandic sheep and 13 chickens.

### Hazel Bough Farm

Ashfield, MA

Megan Perry

Training, 2018 & 2020

One-on-one business advising 2020-2021

### Farm Snapshot

Megan raises Icelandic sheep on 8 leased acres for lamb meat sold by half and whole animal and wool from raw to yarn. She makes wildcrafted salves and tinctures sold online.

### Innovation

Megan has created a low-impact farm designed to be managed by one person, incorporating silvo-pasture techniques and companion animals. “Sheep and chickens are a match made in heaven.” Megan has a strong commitment to building community and getting her products to underserved populations.

**Megan was a two-time participant in the Making It Happen financial management workshop** and worked one-on-one with The Carrot Project business advisor Brian Zweig. This work helped her in two immediate ways. Megan was able to streamline the process of acquiring her first loan from the USDA Farm Service Agency. Then, in the spring of 2020, when the pandemic jeopardized Megan's off-farm income, she had her data at the ready to apply for a local emergency grant that provided funds to feed her animals throughout the winter.

### **Overview of Outcomes: Building A Vision, Building Efficiencies**

**Megan says she grew up “farm life adjacent,” in a small, rural town in Oregon. She's** had a lifelong interest in systems and a love for the outdoors and is driven by a strong impulse to make a living from and build community on the land where she lives. This vision includes her other love — math. Megan tutors a handful of students between 10 and 19 years old.

Megan's farming practices are low-impact and raises animals that need little infrastructure. **“Sheep,” she says, “really just need to get out of the wind when they're wet.”** She has moveable fencing and creates rain and wind shelters from wood pallets which can be taken down or relocated easily.

**Megan stewards and improves her land through silvo-pasturing**—the intensive integration of trees, forage plants, and grazing. This method, she notes, along with carbon sequestration, comes from traditional ecological knowledge, despite being buzz words today.

**Megan sells a line of salves and tinctures made from herbs grown in her garden** or ethically wildcrafted, along with lamb sold by the half and whole animal, and wool offered in all stages from raw and unprocessed to spun yarn. Her biggest sales channel is her Etsy store—but she plans to channel all sales through her website soon for greater efficiency. Megan shares her eggs with her neighbors and donates some to the Shelburne Falls community refrigerator. She keeps chickens primarily because sheep and chickens “are a match made in heaven—the sheep line up to get their noses pecked by the chickens,” and the chickens feel safe and protected, living among the sheep. For fall of 2021, Megan plans to add a direct sales channel to customers in Holyoke and Springfield, in communities currently underserved by farmers' markets.

**Megan uses her work with The Carrot Project to help define the farm's future.** She participated in the Making It Happen (MIH) training in 2018 and 2020. The first time, she was producing her line of botanical products but not yet raising animals. The course helped her frame her goals for year one, and “gave her a solid sense of how to think about farming as a small business.” Right away, Megan applied her new knowledge and successfully received her first loan from the Farm Service Agency. When she returned to MIH after a year of selling her products and owning sheep, the training helped her review her first year in light of her goals, and to set new projections. Later, with Brian Zweig, she rigorously examined the profitability of each of the farms' potential

enterprises. Megan reflected that although she'd always been focused on efficiency of time, this analysis helped her solidify the connection between efficiency of time and money.

### **On the Horizon**

**The pandemic poses a myriad of questions and uncertainties;** however, in the short term, Megan will increase the number of animals breeding to 13 for this season (up from seven in her first season), which she knows will bring challenges. She knows that having more nursing ewes with lambs will be more work. To meet this efficiency challenge, Megan purchased a large water tank which will cut down on time spent hauling water. She adds that with more breeding ewes, she won't know each one as well, and this, too, will make the process less calculable.

**Looking further on the horizon, Megan laughs, "The dream used to be 'have a bunch of sheep,' and that would be it."** Today, the dream is a bit more nuanced. Currently, the farm generates enough income to cover its loans and buy hay, but not yet enough to provide a living. Initially, Megan planned to scale up the farming to the point where she would not need to have an off-farm job. But as she has been building the production systems and sales channels of a young business, as well as the ever-changing landscape of raising a young family, she is exploring various formulas to find the right time-money equation for future seasons. Megan loves teaching, and an off-farm job in education might bridge the income gap more efficiently.

**The need for flexibility and a willingness to persist,** along with embracing accountability and community, are the underpinnings of Megan's farming philosophy. She thinks often of what her college math advisor said: "no one really gets good at math; we just get used to it." Likewise, says Megan, "**with farming, there is always something to learn, no matter how many years you're in it.**"