



Blue Ridge *Farm*

***Regenerative Farming
Wildlife Conservation
Market to Table Meals***



THE BIODIVERSITY ISSUE

Volume 3: 2023



Blue Ridge
Farm

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Letter from the Farmer

Each winter, I enjoy the opportunity to put together these annual issues of *Blue Ridge Farmer Magazine*. Though they are a labor of love to create, the process allows me to look back over our activities of the past year and reflect on all that we have accomplished. This year brought many firsts for us - our first forays into the local farmers market scene, construction of our first mobile chicken coop, our first YouTube mini-series, and our first polycarbonate year-round greenhouse. We dealt with our usual villains in the form of wireworms, gophers, voles, and the normal veggie-loving garden bugs, but we still managed to obtain an impressive harvest off of the farm. In our continued efforts to increase biodiversity on the property, we have been running an extensive starling eradication campaign, as well as putting up even more nesting boxes for native songbirds. This year, we saw an enormous increase in birdlife here, filling the land with an orchestra of song as well as having the added bonus of reducing the mosquitoes and black flies that plague us during the warmer months. As I always have to remind myself: baby steps. Big goals take time to accomplish, and it's easy to get lost in the weeds of never-ending projects.

We often joke that regenerative farming is "farming the hard way," but in the end it is the best, most worthwhile method to feed ourselves and our community. Taking the holistic approach to farming and thinking about our entire property from an ecosystem-wide scale of management is not an easy task to accomplish. It's time- and energy-consuming, as well as expensive, but to us it is the best method for creating a viable, long-term system of food production. More and more people are slowly seeing the appeal of regenerative agriculture - that humans can grow food while still being stewards of the land and its wildlife. It's a core concept and a call to action here at Blue Ridge Farm, and one I look forward to continuing to promote in the years to come.

- Jillian Garrett





This Page: "Bugsy" the vintage hay swather; Opposite Page, Top Image: Ryan Garrett releases beneficial ladybugs into the greenhouse; Bottom Image: Jillian Garrett picks a bouquet of flowers for the farmer's market

Regenerative Agriculture



Understanding the Hidden Costs of Eating



This Page: Heirloom tomatoes from the greenhouse; Inset: Wireworms are attracted to potato baits; Opposite Page, Top Image: A praying mantis patiently waits for a meal in the garden; Bottom Image: An example of soil blocking



We are frequently asked the question, “What is regenerative agriculture?”

Well, you can’t really talk about regenerative agriculture without also discussing organic agriculture, and in recent times, it’s practically impossible to discuss organic without taking into consideration its corporate appropriation and re-branding. That’s a long conversation that we’ll get into a bit later. For now, just keep in mind that regenerative agriculture provides a way to leave the land better than we found it, by focusing on soil improvement and biodiversity, and thus taking a far more holistic approach to the concept of farming. That core concept is a driving value in our daily lives here on the farm.

Regenerative agriculture does not yet have a government-backed certification agency. On the downside, this means that just about any farm can lay claim to the distinction without needing to follow the spirit of the practice. On the upside, we have seen how the “organic” label has been twisted from its original principles to mean something outside the perception of most consumers. It has become industrial. When you think about organic practices, you tend to think of food grown in a more biologically natural way, associated with the land and the soil of a small, diverse farm. We use the term *biologically natural* because “natural” is another word that has been bought and betrayed by big business. Most people would not consider spraying down a greenhouse with pesticides as a natural or organic practice, but if the “right” pesticides are used, they can absolutely have these labels. The idea that a hydroponic tomato factory can achieve “organic” status should illustrate how far we’ve strayed from the initial meaning of the term. It is for these reasons that we hope regenerative agriculture never ends up being a government certification, though a few smaller independent organizations are beginning to offer certifications on a farm-by-farm basis.

Because each farm is different, and each farmer must decide on the best methods to achieve a regenerative model, let’s talk a bit about what it means to us. Here at Blue Ridge Farm, our agricultural plan is best summarized in four key values: **Soil Health, Input Reduction, Biodiversity, and Outreach.**



SOIL HEALTH

Foremost in our goals here is to improve **soil health**. Healthy ecosystems require healthy soil - it is our most precious resource - and yet our society takes it for granted, to the point that we have sloughed off a great deal of that most precious resource down the Mississippi River and into the Gulf of Mexico.

On our farm, we make every effort to build up the health of our soil, utilizing a no-till method of agriculture with the aid of composts, cover crops, and mulches. We utilize the manure from our miniature donkeys, poultry, and llama, as well as plant and vegetable matter from the gardens, and create our own farm-made compost. We use this compost to amend the soils in our various outdoor gardens, raised beds, and greenhouses. We also utilize green cover crops in our high tunnel greenhouse and hay pastures to help improve the nutrients in the soil, as well as provide forage for livestock and local wildlife. To prevent wind erosion, we ensure that no bare soil is left uncovered, using old hay from our fields as mulch (and weed control), along with the occasional batch of hardwood chips milled from dead trees removed from our forest.

When we first purchased this property, the land had been heavily overgrazed and abused; the soils leached of nitrogen. To help combat this problem, we have constructed a mobile chicken coop with an open mesh bottom. We move this coop every other day across our pastures, allowing our small flock of laying hens to forage on the fresh grass and insects (grasshoppers being a particular favorite) while providing us with a ready source of manure to put nitrogen back into the land. By moving the coop every other day, we ensure that the chickens don't overgraze and over-fertilize any one area. In return, we have a happy flock of chickens and a ready supply of healthy, natural eggs.

These methods may not be as easy as tilling the land and buying synthetic fertilizer from Dow Chemical, but it's a long-term investment in the health of our land and our farm.





This Page: Flowers and vegetables from the greenhouse; Opposite Page, Top Image: Chickens & a mobile coop help fertilize our pastures; Bottom Left Image: Ryan Garrett haying the field; Bottom Right Image: The many uses of mulch in the greenhouse

INPUT REDUCTION

Our next value is **Input reduction**, which is a huge part of the regenerative model. Most farmers are familiar with the idea of waste-not-want-not, but this takes it a step further and creates more of a closed system of agriculture. Farms already produce green- and animal-based manures which can be readily turned into compost, so why buy synthetic fertilizers from somewhere else? The best fertilizer is already found on your farm. Here at Blue Ridge Farm, we utilize the manure from our miniature donkeys, poultry, and llama, as well as plant and vegetable matter from the gardens, and create our own farm-made compost. We use this compost to amend the soils in our various outdoor gardens, raised beds, and greenhouses. We also use drip irrigation and mulches to limit water consumption, take the additional steps of saving seeds wherever possible, and do our best to use renewable energy where we can.

This past spring, we completed building our polycarbonate greenhouse, which we use to germinate seeds and grow produce year-round. To reduce our reliance on propane heat, we filled the floor with a thick layer of river rock. This rock acts as a thermal regulator, storing heat from the daytime and slowly releasing it at night. This helps decrease our need to heat the greenhouse with propane. In addition, we filled multiple 55-gallon metal barrels with water and lined them in a row along our northern wall, thus creating our own solar batteries. In the Aladdin Valley, where frosts and freezes can happen any time of the year, these barrels work in much the same way as the river rock and help keep the greenhouse warm on those chilly nights.

Another example of input reduction on our farm can be found in how we propagate our plants. We use a system called soil blocking, which eliminates the need for plastic pots, and instead relies on growing plants in compressed blocks of soil. This has the added bonus of air pruning the plant roots, resulting in a healthier overall plant that is less likely to suffer transplant shock.



This Page, Center Image: Poultry provide nitrogen to improve the health of our hay fields; Bottom Left Image: Healthy soils translate into healthy plants, shown here with a bouquet of flowers from our greenhouse; Opposite Page, Top Image: An example of soil blocking for plant propagation; Bottom Image: Curious George the llama enjoys being fed carrots from the garden





This Page, Clockwise from Upper Left Image: A cedar waxwing sits on a fence post in the hay field; Ryan Garrett releases beneficial ladybugs in the greenhouse; An inquisitive young bobcat in our forest; "Charlie," one of many resident gopher snakes that help keep garden pests under control; Opposite Page, Top Image: A swallow perches on a fence post in the garden; Bottom Image: A butterfly puddling near the greenhouse

BIODIVERSITY

Biodiversity both in and on the land is key to a healthy environment, and we believe that it is key to a healthy farm. We make sure that our agriculture always makes room for - and even encourages - wildlife.

We avoid pesticides that would hit the insect populations en masse, instead favoring the approach of encouraging beneficial predators to be a part of the landscape. We release ladybugs, green lacewings, and praying mantids into the greenhouse and gardens, and cultivate special flowering plants that not only attract pollinators but predatory wasps as well. We have plans in the coming years to build owl boxes and hawk perches to help with the rodent pests around the farm.

When direct action is needed against a pest, we use manual kill methods to best limit collateral damage. For example: it would be much easier to simply poison the gophers that end up in our garden plots, but poisons have implications that can ripple across food webs - accidentally killing anything that either directly ingests the poison or else eats the dead gopher. We prefer manual kill methods to specifically target those problem animals, and avoiding poisons has the added bonus of maintaining healthy populations of predators that help us keep pest numbers in check.

We have been working hard to remove invasive species such as starlings, whose aggressive behavior wreaks havoc on local songbird populations. By eliminating starlings, we have watched the number and diversity of songbirds in our area explode, filling the landscape with color and music as well as feasting on the mosquitoes and black flies that plague us each summer. To further aid our songbird populations, we have put up dozens of nesting boxes, and it has been a joy to see them fill with swallows and bluebirds every spring.



Our commitment to biodiversity even applies to the biota within our soil. For example, to deal with the wireworm infestations that hit us hard every spring, we could easily rototill multiple times to destroy these pests (a practice that would be deemed acceptable under organic certification). However, doing so would also involve completely destroying the delicate ecosystems found within our soil. Keeping these complex foodwebs intact creates a healthier environment to grow crops in, and is one of the many reasons that we practice a no-till system of farming here. Instead, we have the endless task of locating wireworm infestations, baiting them with rotten potato slices, and manually extracting and killing every wireworm by hand. It is a disgusting and tedious process, but we choose to do it rather than destroy our soil.

Dealing with pests is an unfortunate but necessary part of farming, and it's deeply upsetting when someone tells us that veganism is the key to ending suffering on earth. Nothing is ever that simple, and there is always a hidden cost to eating - some of us are just a bit more familiar with the sordid details of the transaction. When you look at your plate, there is always a price that has been paid in blood, wildlife and habitat loss, and generally soil degradation. The cost can never be zero, but it can be reduced and offset through conscientious land management practices. Just because we keep the deer out of certain sections of our farm does not give us the right to direct them off the land entirely, nor to mess up their travel corridors with poorly thought-out fencing. We consider ourselves citizens and stewards of a complex biological system here, and we make our decisions based on what is best for the whole.



OUTREACH

This brings us to our last value: **Outreach**.

We got into farming because we saw an ever-expanding disconnection between people and their food. No society in human history has ever had such a distance between themselves and the origins of the ingredients on their plate. Here at Blue Ridge Farm, a closer connection to our food has made us behave in a less-wasteful, more conservation-minded way. While small-scale farming is not accessible to everyone, we can share our experiences and our insights, as well as our mindfully-grown produce. Farms are in a unique position of supporting the communities that support them. Our relationship shouldn't be encapsulated in a produce purchase at the cash register. We need to do better than that if we are ever going to reasonably improve our food systems.

This value-driven approach is the core of our long-term vision here at Blue Ridge Farm. We want this scrap of land to be richer for our time spent on it. We want our community to have access to ethically grown, nutritious, and - dare we say - affordable food. If a few other farms see this as a call to action and take the same sort of approach, we'll have done something that can truly be called *Regenerative Agriculture*. Building the world up should be the goal for all of us, and that starts with the soil under our feet.



Our CSA Options



Vegetables & Cut Flowers CSA

Our main season CSA will include weekly offerings of vegetables, herbs, and cut flower bouquets. The subscription will run from approximately June through September.



Canning CSA

This CSA is for the devoted home canner! It will include an offering of bulk tomatoes and peppers at the end of the summer season.



Garden Plants CSA

During the month of May, you will receive weekly offerings of vegetable, herb, and flower plant starts for your garden, timed to coincide with proper planting schedules.



Regenerative Hay

Perennial Grasses Grown Without Sprays or Tilling

Each year, on our 30-acres of pastures, we produce limited quantities of regeneratively grown grass hay. Our dry-farmed hay is a mix of perennial grasses with some clover, and we offer mainly small square bales. We do not till or spray our pastures, ensuring healthy, high-quality livestock hay and maintaining our commitment to better wildlife habitat.

To inquire about purchasing hay, please email us: info@blueridgefarmer.com





Soil Blocking

Reducing Waste Through Input Reduction

Input reduction is one of our four key values here on the farm, and one of the ways that we strive to follow that is by decreasing our reliance on plastics and other waste products. Instead, we utilize a method of plant propagation known as soil blocking, which essentially uses slightly compressed blocks of soil to grow seedlings in place of traditional plastic pots. The reasons for doing this are many, most notably that soil blocking creates a healthier plant (via “air pruning” of the roots) that is less prone to transplant shock, and it also helps to eliminate the sometimes single-use nature of plastic plant pots. It’s a win for the garden and the environment!

Soil Blocking Promotes Healthier Plants

Have you ever wondered why that big potted plant that you bought at the store never thrived in your garden? Were you curious as to why, when you finally dug up that dead plant, its roots were still in the original shape of the plastic pot?

The answer to these questions is that the poor plant was suffering from a condition known as “rootbound,” brought about by too much time spent having its roots constricted in a plant pot. Rootbound plants are a common occurrence, and one of the many reasons that we constantly remind customers that the size of a transplant doesn’t matter – it’s how healthy the roots are!

One of the many reasons that we turned to soil blocking as our method of plant propagation was because it is such a fantastic way of ensuring healthy plants. Soil blocking utilizes a process known as “air pruning,” which promotes a healthier root system than putting plants in a pot. In a soil block, air pruning occurs when the plant roots hit the outside air of the soil block edges and are effectively “burned” off, causing the plant to consistently produce new branching roots (thereby creating a very healthy root system).

In a traditional plastic pot, the plant roots are constricted and have nowhere to go, heading down to the bottom of the pot and swirling around indefinitely. This creates an unhealthy condition known as being “rootbound,” which can not only stunt a plant but also potentially kill it. After being put in the ground, a rootbound plant can continue to be stunted, unable to overcome its constricted root system, or take much longer to establish than a healthier air pruned plant. This is one of the many reasons we prefer to utilize soil blocking. The plants we offer for sale as well as the ones we grow on the farm are happier, healthier, and far more productive as a result!





Heirloom & Open-Pollinated (OP) Seeds

Here at Blue Ridge Farm, seed security matters and is part of the many ways we uphold our commitment to input reduction. That is one of the main reasons that we only raise heirloom and open-pollinated plant varieties, allowing us the option of saving seeds every year.

What is an heirloom?:

Heirloom plant varieties are those that have been around for a long time, often 50 years or more. They have been carefully stewarded by local gardeners in a select region and passed down from one generation to the next.

What is open-pollinated?:

Open-pollinated plants are those whose seeds can be saved each year and who will reproduce true-to-type. They are far more genetically diverse than hybridized (F1) seeds, as there are no restrictions on the flow of pollen between plants. This can cause a greater amount of variation within plant populations, which allows plants to slowly adapt to local growing conditions and climate year-to-year. As long as pollen is not shared between different varieties within the same species, then the seed produced will remain true-to-type year after year.

What is an F1/Hybrid?:

Hybridization is a controlled method of pollination in which the pollen of two different species or varieties is crossed by human intervention. Seeds saved from a hybridized (F1) plant will be genetically unstable, and the offspring will be less vigorous and will not reproduce true-to-type. Thus, using hybrid seeds means that you must purchase new seeds each year from a commercial source.





Our Vegetable Specialties

Appalachian Foodways in the North



We've always had a love of the Appalachian food culture, so it was both ironic and fitting that we purchased a property named Blue Ridge Farm in 2020. Unwilling to give up our love of growing fresh, fully ripe peppers and tomatoes (as well as okra and collards), we have worked hard to figure out creative and energy-efficient ways to continue to do so in the "frozen north."

One of the many goals here at Blue Ridge Farm is to offer heirloom and open-pollinated vegetables that are best suited for our short northern growing season. By selectively saving seeds from the healthiest and earliest plants in our garden, we will continue to improve upon our original seed stock and be able to offer plants that are ideally adapted here. So many times over the years, we have seen farmers offering vegetables for sale not because they are suited to that particular growing climate but because they are "popular" to sell. This results in a product that is unripe and underwhelming in flavor - the opposite of what an heirloom should be! Our two large commercial greenhouses and outdoor gardens allow us to grow vegetables nearly year-round. While we offer a wide selection of garden plants and produce, our main focus remains on hot peppers, tomatoes, collards, and cabbage.



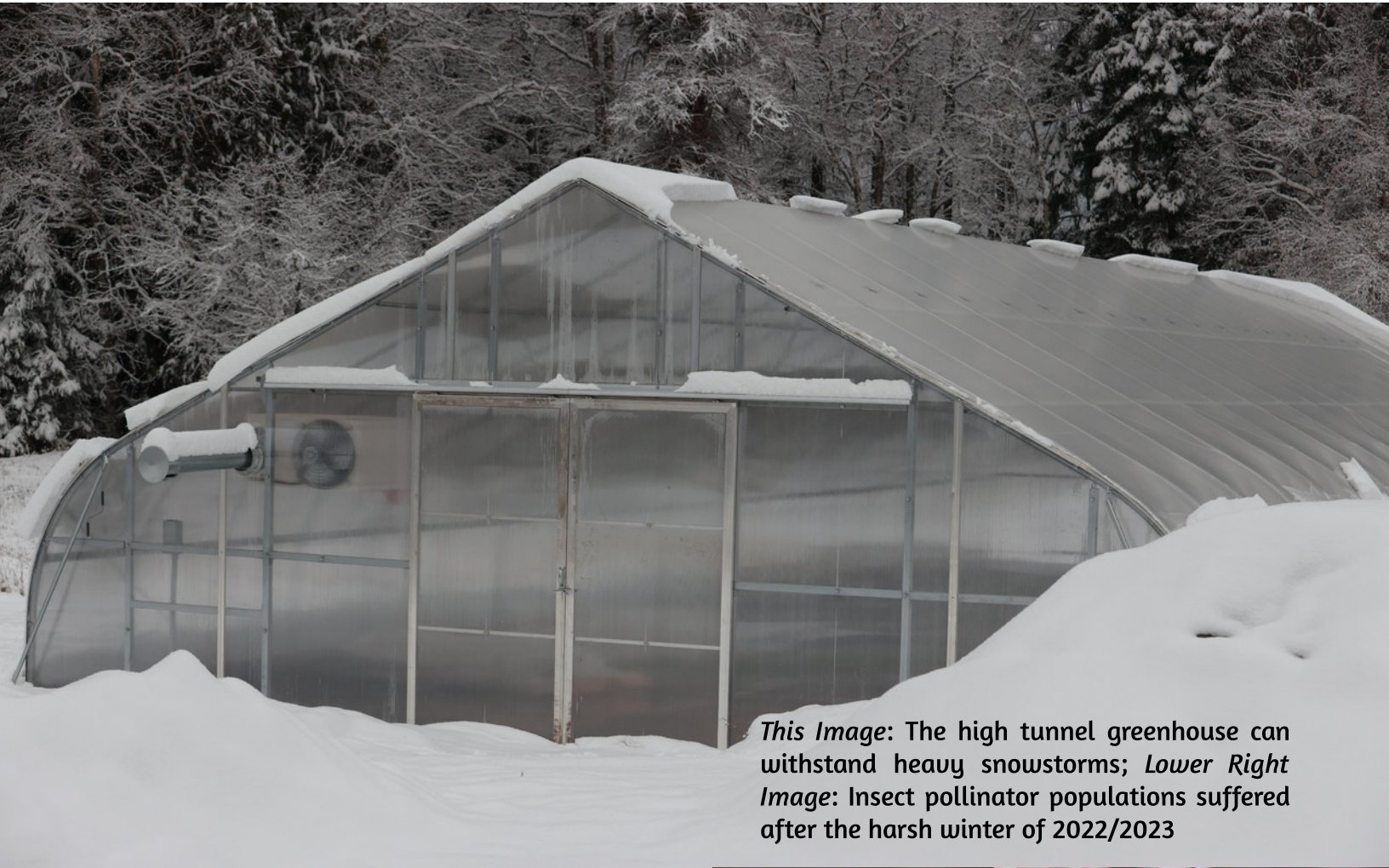
Peppers Are Our Passion

We specialize in open-pollinated tomatoes and peppers, with a special focus on heirloom hot peppers. If you are bored with the same old jalapeños and bell peppers, give one of our rare pepper varieties a try. From sweet pimientos to spicy cayennes and floral biquinhos, we have got you covered!





Gardening in Extremes

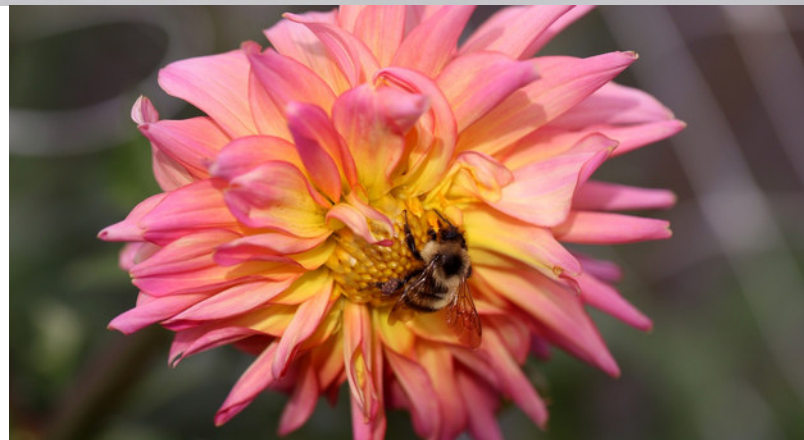


This Image: The high tunnel greenhouse can withstand heavy snowstorms; Lower Right Image: Insect pollinator populations suffered after the harsh winter of 2022/2023

After a winter that seemed to never end – snow was on the ground for nearly 6 months – the year 2023 ended up being exceptionally mild for our area of the Aladdin Valley.

Our 2023 growing season was a staggering 142 days long, with 118 of those days consisting of what we call “ideal growing temperatures,” meaning that the thermometer did not get above 90 degrees (the heat stress threshold for tomato plants).

The 2023 growing season was almost twice as long as the prior year, with the month of May averaging about 20 degrees warmer than May 2022. This meant that crops could go in the ground earlier without fear of hard freezes or needing additional cold protection.



Year	Last Frost	First Frost	Growing Season	Days over 90°	Ideal Growing Days
2021	6/11/2021	9/2/2021	83	43	40
2022	5/22/2022	9/9/2022	110	32	78
2023	4/30/2023	9/19/2023	142	24	118

Though it was an overall milder year, we did experience our coldest temperature on record during the 2022/2023 winter, with a low of -30 degrees F (no wind). Our high temperature for the year occurred on August 15th, 2023, and was a rather mild 102 degrees, though this unfortunately coincided with the worst of the Canadian wildfire smoke that was blowing into our region, making the heat much more unpleasant to deal with. The extremely hazardous levels of smoke required us to do daily farm tasks with MIRA gas masks on, but thankfully the wildfire smoke hit *after* hay season was finished and did not last a horribly long time.

Producing vegetable crops is always a challenge in extreme weather conditions, but our greenhouses help mitigate the worst of it: grow lights provide artificial sunlight for plants during times of thick wildfire smoke; circulation fans and roll-up sides move air and cool plants; various types of mulch retain moisture and can help keep the soil cooler (hay mulch) or hotter (black plastic mulch) depending on plant requirements.



This Image: The miniature donkeys explore the snowy pastures; *Upper Right Image:* The high tunnel's grow lights, circulation fans, and mulch protect crops in extreme weather; *Lower Right Image:* Ryan and Jillian Garrett wear MIRA safety masks during hazardous wildfire smoke





Market to Table Meals

This year was our first foray into the world of farmers markets, and we were truly excited to count ourselves amongst the list of vendors for the picturesque one in Chewelah. We believe in supporting our community, and as part of that, we created a YouTube video series called, "Market to Table Meals." In each episode, we utilized products from different vendors at the market - as well as produce from our own farm - and used them to create one exquisite meal. The goal was not only to highlight the immense bounty available at the market, but to inspire creativity in the kitchen with local, seasonal ingredients. You can watch episodes from this series on our YouTube Channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/@blueridgefarmerwa>







Episode 1:

Pasta with Spring Vegetables & Morels

On this episode, we created a riff on classic alfredo, utilizing springtime ingredients to really make the meal shine - Blue Ridge Farm asparagus and morel mushrooms, as well as some beautiful fennel fronds from Chateau Belliveau. We plated the meal up in one of Spirit of the Clay Studio's stunning handmade bowls.







Pasta with Spring
Vegetables & Morels





INGREDIENTS

For the Sauce

One bunch of fresh fennel, coarsely chopped
One cup of fresh morel mushrooms (or a half cup of dried and rehydrated ones)
One small bunch of asparagus stalks, tough ends removed, and the stalks thinly sliced (set aside tops for searing & garnish)
One garlic clove, peeled and thinly sliced
6 tbsp butter
4 tbsp flour
1½ cups whole milk or coconut milk

For the pasta

4 eggs
2 cups flour
A pinch of salt
2 tbsp dried thyme

Directions

To make the pasta: Pour the flour, thyme, and salt into a mixing bowl, and create a small well in the center of the flour mixture. Crack the eggs into this well and use a fork to swirl the eggs gently, slowly incorporating the flour into them. Once the dough forms, knead it until it becomes smooth but not sticky, then allow it to rest for at least an hour at room temperature. This helps the dough hydrate prior to rolling it out.

Sauté the morels in butter over medium heat until they start to soften a bit, then add the garlic. Cook this for 30 seconds before adding the flour, fennel, and thinly sliced asparagus stalks. Stir constantly until the flour begins to brown. At this point, add in the milk and reduce the heat to a simmer, stirring constantly to make sure that the flour incorporates. Simmer this until the sauce thickens enough to coat the back of a spoon.

Using a pasta press, roll the dough out and cut into long noodles. Bring a pot of water to a rolling boil and add the noodles to it. Cook for a minute or two, or until the noodles float back up to the surface. Drain and add the noodles into the simmering sauce and finish cooking them for another minute or two. This makes a world of difference when it comes to flavor.

Plate everything up with a few stalks of seared asparagus tops in a custom bowl.



Episode 2: Teriyaki Rice Bowl & Sushi Wraps

On this episode, we created our version of a teriyaki bowl and sushi rolls/wraps. These dishes utilized sustainably caught, in-season seafood from E-fish Co, as well as fresh vegetables from Front Porch Farm and Chateau Belliveau, and radishes and flowers from our own Blue Ridge Farm.





CHÂTEAU BELLIVEAU





Episode 3:

Rack of Mutton with Scalloped Potatoes

On this episode of Market to Table Meals, we utilized our own fava beans and a beautiful rack of mutton from fellow regenerative farm River's Edge Ranch. Paired with scalloped Kennebec potatoes from Olsen Farms (located just down the road from us) and a lovely gouda cheese from Clover Mountain Dairy, this meal was a delicious way to incorporate fresh, local ingredients.







Farmstead Recipes

Ultimate Baked Beans

Baked beans are one of those ubiquitous autumn dishes, but that doesn't mean that they have to be boring. This recipe is a riff off of the one out of Kirsten & Mandy Dixon's fantastic *Living Within the Wild* cookbook. Our version presents a fun twist on their classic, this time utilizing fermented vegetables and lean game meats for a more complex flavor profile. It's a celebration of fall and a meal that will put a smile on the face of everyone at the table.

INGREDIENTS

2 cups dried organic white beans (choose a meaty variety such as Great Northern)
2 bay leaves
½ tsp dried thyme
1 lb. lean red stew meat, cut into 1" cubes (we recommend using bison or venison)
1 clove fermented garlic*
1 pint chopped and fermented collard greens, drained (we used a recipe from Hank Shaw, substituting collard leaves for his mustard greens)
2 stalks fermented celery, chopped*
4 small tomatoes, chopped
1 cup homemade adobo sauce
2 fermented hot red peppers, stems removed*
½ cup brown sugar
½ cup molasses
¼ cup Worcestershire sauce
¼ cup apple cider vinegar

*These vegetables were fermented together using a recipe out of Olia Hercules' *Summer Kitchens* cookbook

DIRECTIONS

Soak the beans in water overnight. In the morning, drain the beans and place them in a large cast iron casserole or dutch oven pot. Add the bay leaves and enough water to cover the beans by 2 inches. Bring the liquid to a rolling boil, skim off any foam, then turn off the heat and set the beans aside to cool for about an hour.

Preheat the oven to 275 degrees. Drain off roughly half of the liquid from the beans and discard the bay leaves. Add the cubed stew meat, making sure that there is still enough liquid remaining to prevent the meat from drying out. Put the lid on the pot and place it in the oven to gently cook for 2-3 hours.

Take the pot out of the oven. Puree the fermented garlic and hot peppers together to make a paste. Add this to the beans, along with the remaining ingredients. Stir to make sure that everything is thoroughly mixed together. Place the lid on the pot and put it back into the oven to cook for another hour.

Remove the pot from the oven and allow everything to cool enough to handle. Serve the baked beans warm with a side of homemade cornbread or a crusty artisanal sourdough. Enjoy!







The Benefits of Habitat Management

Here at Blue Ridge Farm, our motto is “*Wildlife Conservation through Land Stewardship*,” and we do indeed practice what we preach. It’s a slow and complicated process to rebuild a landscape that has been abused by so much take and so little give, but we are absolutely committed to doing just that. Though we have only been here a short time, we have worked hard to create and maintain ideal wildlife habitat. As a result, we have observed animal populations begin to slowly increase as the land was restored back to them. Managing for wildlife habitat is a complex concept, and one that cannot be covered by a blanket set of landscape features. Instead, it involves an intricate understanding of different wildlife needs and the role their habitat plays within a balanced ecosystem: evergreen forests for bedding and thermal cover, pastures and parkland for foraging, shrubby understory for cover and nesting, and riparian areas that not only provide food and water but also cover and thermal regulation. Tying all this together is what creates ideal habitat for a balanced environment, because wildlife habitat is only as good as the sum of *all* of its parts.



One of the population increases we noticed this year was the local bobcat numbers (most likely also tied to the increase in resident snowshoe hares and cottontail rabbits). A pair of bobcats had been repeatedly showing up on our trail cameras, and my husband and I decided to do something about it. We were going to harvest bobcats, only this time we would be using a camera as opposed to a rifle. As bobcats have excellent vision, we dressed in earth tones and camouflage and began the difficult trek out to that area of our property. I say “difficult” because the snow was nearly thigh-deep, and we didn’t think to wear our snowshoes for this endeavor (a decision I quickly came to regret). It was a long, cold, slow trek of post-holing through the pasture, trying to move without falling over (and dropping an expensive camera in the snow) or sweating too badly. We finally made it to the area where we knew the bobcats were frequenting, and – lo and behold! – there they were, basking in the sun after a heavy snowstorm. We slowly crept forward, keeping vegetation between us and their line of sight, until I felt I was close enough to start taking pictures. I had only seen one bobcat at first, and was focusing on getting images of that animal, when I looked over and realized that I was being observed by a second, smaller bobcat. This animal (which turned out to be a subadult kitten of the female I was currently photographing) decided to satisfy its curiosity about me. It slowly began creeping its way over to me. I was surprised at first, not quite sure what its ultimate intentions were, and turned my camera to begin photographing it. The young bob kept coming closer and closer, seemingly unafraid. I do believe it would have crawled into my lap had I let it! When it came to about 20 feet, I decided to shoo it off by making some movement. It bolted back to momma, where they both nuzzled one another. I continued to photograph them for a while longer before finally deciding it was time to leave. Being stiff from a long and cold sit in the snow, my movements to back out were not as stealthy as I would have hoped, and I ended up spooking the pair. Momma bolted off into the trees and the kitten raced up a nearby tamarack. My husband and I continued to back out of the area quietly, knowing that, once we had left, the bobcats would return and be reunited to continue their day in the woods.

To learn more about this experience, visit our Youtube Channel to watch the full video:
<https://www.youtube.com/@blueridgefarmerwa>











The Photography of Blue Ridge Farm

Meet the Photographer

Jillian Garrett has been taking professional photos for more than a decade. Her writing and photography can be found in *Blue Ridge Farmer Magazine*, *Sports Afield*, *Northwest Sportsman*, & *Bear Hunting Magazine*. A staunch supporter of the outdoor lifestyle, she has recently begun photographing hunting trips.

For more details or to inquire about booking a photography session, please email info@blueridgefarmer.com



"We want this scrap of land to be richer for our time spent on it. We want our community to have access to ethically grown, nutritious, and - dare we say - affordable food. If a few other farms see this as a call to action and take the same sort of approach, we'll have done something that can truly be called *Regenerative Agriculture*. Building the world up should be the goal for all of us, and that starts with the soil under our feet. "



