



A Footstep Ahead

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Stonington – On 15 acres off Stonington's Prentice Williams Road, Craig and Sheryl Floyd manage full-time jobs, two teenagers, and an entire barnyard. Taking it all in stride, the owners of Footsteps Farm consider this “beyond organic” farm more than a small enterprise: It's an important link in our local food supply and a fast-vanishing way of life.

“These dung beetles are doing their job,” said Craig, flipping over a cow pie to reveal the grubs' holes. The beetles are just one aspect of his ecologically responsible farm management.

Eschewing pesticides, herbicides, antibiotics and steroids, Craig practices rotational grazing on Footsteps Farm. A natural way to keep a farm healthy, different species take turns in the paddocks. Cows graze first, then sheep, poultry and swine. Each clears a portion of the undergrowth, eliminates pests, and manures and aerates the soil. Sometimes all of the animals and fowl are in one pasture simultaneously.

“Nature is a lot smarter than we are,” said Sheryl.

“Every living thing here,” Craig said, surveying his paddocks full of pigs, sheep, cattle, turkeys and chickens, “performs at least one function.” He, though, performs at least 10. The day starts at 5:30 a.m. with chores before work at the Mystic Post Office, and often farm work doesn't end before dark. The week ends with Sunday's farm market at the Denison Homestead. The Floyds juggle their time to be around for family and to give the animals the attention and respect they demand.

Humane treatment goes along with Footsteps' "beyond organic" approach to farming. "These animals will give their lives for us, so we give them the respect they deserve," Craig said. Cows, sheep and goats eat only grass or hay, supplemented with salt and mineral blocks and, occasionally, hand-mixed feed. They drink fresh water pumped from a well, not town water.

"I don't know what's in that town water," he said.

All the animals stay outside no matter the season.

Craig said the family farmed the surrounding 100 acres from 1792 to 1960 when many farms were edged out by corporate agriculture.

"Surprisingly, though there are still lots of local farms around here. It's just that they can't afford to advertise," he said.

It was a lucky break recently when Faith Middleton, who hosts National Public Radio's Food Schmooze, praised the pork from Footsteps Farm.

"And we sold out of pork for 2006," Craig said. Busy as he is, he won't pass up the opportunity to educate more consumers.

"Most Americans don't know what they're putting in their mouths," he said, "and our object here is not to feed a lot of people, but to take care of the ones we do."

That may include educating a new generation of farmers.

Andrew Burkhart plans to leave a possible Navy career to start a farm. At Footsteps, Burkhart has exchanged "labor for education" for the past five months, and said he "learned more from working for Floyd than from any textbook."

Why farm?

"I really couldn't tell you. I guess I find it satisfying at the end of the day," Burkhart said.

Craig said, "Andrew has been a godsend."

Andrew hopes to start his own farm in Maryland, near his wife's kin.

As the seasons change and his 60th birthday approaches, Craig accepts the natural course of life. He will probably scale down some of the farm's offerings, and said, "I should also think about reducing my workload as that birthday comes nearer."

For more information about Footsteps Farm, visit www.footstepsfarm.com, come to the farmers' market on Sunday, noon–3 p.m. at 120 Pequotsepos Road, Stonington, or call (860) 536–8377.