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Resident Farming

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Footsteps Farm Offers Something for Everyone to Enjoy

Craig L. Floyd listens to the animals that he raises at Footsteps Farm. The land runs along Laurence Eleanor Road that takes invited visitors to habitats for turkeys, guinea hens, chickens, peacocks, cattle and pigs– along with two pet dogs and cats. Roosters crow. Peacocks screech.

“A farmer spends a lot of time standing around looking and listening because these animals can’t talk to me,” Craig said as he led the third group of people from throughout the state over his property. The visit was sponsored by the state’s Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA). Also on the tour was Studio Farm Products at the corner of route 49 and Sand Hill Road in Voluntown and Terra Firma Farm on Al Harvey Road in Stonington.

Yellow slickers and umbrellas stood out at each place because of rain that created muddy fields, but failed to dampen the inquisitive spirits of those who sloughed through wet vegetation in an effort to become better informed. The Voluntown tour, led by owner Dot Wingate, showed an expansive vista of green fields and growing produce. Jars of jam, fresh strawberries, lettuce, and flowers were plentiful in a barn shed near the main house.

An organic luncheon was the main attraction for many at Terra Firma Farm, owned by the Connecticut Antiquarian Society and operated as a non-profit educational facility.

Bill Duesing, executive coordinator of NOFA, provided his homegrown greens for the entrée. Rob Schacht contributed fresh Super Sugar Snaps he had picked earlier in the day at the farm he and his wife, Teresa, maintain in Hunt’s Brook Road in Waterford.

But it was Craig’s animals and his passionate, informative stories that kept visitors lingering longer, snapping photos, and asking questions. A few said they do a bit of farming. Many classified

themselves as “simple gardeners.” But all wanted to know about the methods Craig uses to raise “the best turkeys, the best chicken, pork—everything.” The back of the shirt he wore defined his products; “Highland Cattle, Tamworth Hogs, and Bourbon Red Turkeys.” He repeatedly emphasized nutritional values and the lack of hormones, injections, and artificial additives.

“I’ve read they (commercial companies) feed some arsenic to chicken,” declared one woman. She asked why. Craig’s answer was quick. “It increases the appetite and they can bring those birds to market quicker,” he replied.

Moving from pasture areas to pens’ Craig talked to his animals, often calling them by names usually reserved for pets. “You have to respect the animals. We’re working with God’s creatures. They’re doing something good, and you have to respect that,” he said. Stopping by a muddy pen filled with pigs and hogs, he carried his respect emphasis further. “I won’t sell just one pig to someone who wants to raise pigs. They like a companion. Just one, it’s not right,” he declared. Additionally, he said, pigs are smart—smarter than dogs.

In an entertaining mode, Craig told stories about a cow that refused to be hauled away and the runaway bull that required emergency service personnel and darts to finally end the lengthy adventure. He talked about his research and finding an answer to the bull who sired only males until he learned that a manganese deficiency might be the problem. “Newt had (sired) three daughters this year,” he related, smiling. He estimated Newt’s weight at 1,400–1,500 pounds. “With large animals, you always have to be careful. They can hurt you.” Electric fencing is in place throughout all areas. “Don’t touch the fence,” he warned.

Craig is actually a part-time farmer. By day, he is clerk in charge at the West Mystic Post Office. After-hours and weekends are spent with his wife Sheryl and their family, the land and the animals. Farming encompasses about 300 acres belonging to different members of the Floyd Family. His father, brothers and a cousin live on or farm other parts of the land. Craig is dedicated to his heritage. “My ancestors settled here in 1712. I figure every time I walk around here, I’m walking in the footsteps of my ancestors. That’s the reason for the name of Footsteps Farm.”

He hopes the public will pay more attention to organic farmers and their products. “You need to make it financially worthwhile for us to continue to do this,” he said. “The only way it can happen is for people to go to local farmers, establish a relationship. And let me tell you, unless you are eating fresh food, you have no idea how good food can taste.”

Orders for fresh chickens, turkeys and pork can be placed at his website: www.footstepsfarm.com. Information about NOFA, the tour sponsor, can be obtained at www.nofa.org, or call 203-888-5146. The northeast unit has nearly 4,000 members who are “striving to live in greater harmony with our planet.”