

HIGSON'S FARM — A LIVING, LOVING AND LEARNING EXPERIENCE

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"Our life is a good one.

We enjoy what we are doing."

Those positive comments are from Ronnie and Tina Higson who live on a family farm located just across the Potomac River from Cumberland, Maryland near Wiley Ford, West Virginia. Higson's farm has become well known over the years to thousands of cub scouts, elementary school students, and others who enjoy the serene setting, festivities, and fresh produce the farm offers. And it is Ronnie and Tina who keep the farm an enjoyable place to visit for fun and fresh vegetables.

Tina's parents, H. Murell and Nora Kline, along with Kline brothers William, Murell Jr., and Perry, took a leap of faith during the depths of the Great Depression in 1935 when they purchased 192 acres of quiet bottom land along the Potomac River near Wiley Ford, West Virginia. The Kline's new dairy farm initiated much hard work to support twenty-six cattle that required hand milking. Unfortunately, the St. Patrick's Day flood of 1936 quickly created trying times for the family because much of the rich soil along the low lying areas washed away, and litter was strewn about the property. Through additional hard work, the Kline's were able to overcome the setback and continue their progress.



In the early days, two horses provided pulling power around the farm; it wasn't until later that a used tractor became available through a \$1.00 per month payment plan. Two barns were also built providing shelter for animals and a dry environment for animal feed. Expansion of the dairy occurred in 1960, when purchases brought the total amount of farm land to 534 acres.

H. Murell's passing in 1984 brought about a period of uncertainty concerning ownership of the property. Eventually the farm, including all equipment, was sold in 1986 to an individual not related to the family. But the new owner, "worked with us. He realized we were trying to keep the family farm," recalled Tina.

Ronnie and Tina initially purchased 168 acres of the original Kline tract from the new owner in 1986; since then, additional acreage has been added.

Ronnie and Tina started their farming enterprise by raising about thirty beef cattle, along with some vegetables that were planted each spring. "As the vegetable crops increased, we had less time to work with cattle, so we eventually got out of the cattle business," recalled Ronnie.



Higson's Farm the morning of the Fall Harvest Festival.



Real 'pumpkin patch' kids, Armana Grace & Braydon Smithberger.

Today, the Higsons harvest a variety of summer vegetables and fruits, starting with asparagus in April and continuing with strawberries, raspberries, and corn in consecutive weeks through May, June, and July to October. Other summer produce includes cucumbers, tomatoes, lima beans, zucchini, squash, and peppers. October offers the ever popular pumpkin crop. And it is the fall harvest that brings the most excitement to Higson's Farm.

Higson's Fall Harvest event has been held the first weekend in October for the past eleven years, and thousands of visitors have enjoyed the activities offered at the beautiful setting. Wagons and tractors provide for hayrides while the 4-H hosts ponies, horses, and a variety of small animals that bring joy to youngsters who can associate fun times with farm life. Refreshment vendors, craft exhibits, and vegetable sales increase the offerings to guests of all ages. The Fall Harvest grows annually as the Higsons continue to add activities.

While the Fall Harvest is a scheduled event (**October 7th in 2007**), the Higsons also host schools, church groups, and birthday parties at different times of the year upon request. Visits to the "punkin patch" are a favorite October activity because children get to pick their very own prize pumpkin. "Sometimes the children will come back with a trunk load of them. The kids really enjoy the 'punkin patch.'" Tina also provides lessons and demonstrations on the life cycles of the fruits and vegetables they pick.

One need not attend a special event to enjoy Higson's fresh vegetables and fruits. Ronnie and Tina will be pleased to meet with you, in season, at several locations, including the Country Club Mall on Tuesdays, the Downtown

Cumberland Mall on Thursdays, and Frostburg on Fridays. Higson's vegetables are also available at retail businesses in the area. Also at appropriate times, customers may pick their own selections at Higson's as the farm is open Sunday through Friday (closed Saturdays).

The favorite choice of customers at all outlets is summertime sweet corn. What makes Higson's corn so special? According to Ronnie, "Timing is the key to picking corn and we hand pick all of ours. Each ear is examined to see that the kernels are still small and have the right 'feel.' Any corn that is not ready, we don't pick." This is important because depending on weather

conditions, each stalk may vary in size; some stalks may be ready while others could require another couple of day's growth. Leaving the corn on the stalk too long also causes the sweet taste to diminish. Machine harvesting can't

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Background photo: Higson's farm lies in a majestic valley along the Potomac River.

Inset photo, left page: A scenic, old fashioned hayride returning to the festival area after a ride around the farm.

Inset photo, this page: The "perfect pumpkin" awaits visitors at the pumpkin patch, during festival time.



Ronnie Higson providing a hayride for visitors.



Visitors enjoying fresh air and scenery on a Fall Harvest hayride.

Higson family members can be seen around the farm and Fall Harvest Festival



Ronnie and Tina Higson.



Daughter Tracy, husband Brian, children Lacy and Brian Jr.



Granddaughter Christina and daughter Brenda.



Granddaughters Jennifer and Roseanna with great-granddaughter Xoe, daughter-in-law Karen & son Ronnie Jr.

discriminate among different stalks; a mechanized harvesting decision would be made based on whether the majority of stalks are ready for picking.

Satisfaction and success may be measured in different ways, and the Higsons are certainly not persuaded that accumulating money is the best measure of those terms. “To work the land, plant the seeds, watch them germinate, and bear fruit is amazing,” reflects Ronnie. Both Ronnie and Tina have experienced the satisfaction one feels by witnessing the annual agricultural rebirth cycle because they have been closely associated with farming all of their lives. Success can also be measured in the quiet pride the Higsons derive from watching their children, grandchildren, and employees help to pick sixty acres of sweet corn in the same fields where previous generations labored. In fact,

Tina and Ronnie believe that family experiences have contributed to their business success. “If it wasn’t for my father and brothers and the hard work that they did, our farm wouldn’t be what it is today.” The Higsons also credit their success “to the glory of God. It is God who makes our work possible. We have been blessed more and more as the years go by. And we have been able to help other people by what we do on the farm.”

Seventy-two years of dedication and hard work have brought forth bountiful harvests at Higson’s farm, the fruits of their labor. The Higsons are truly living the good life.

The Higson Farm sign is located along WV Route 28 near Wiley Ford in Mineral County, West Virginia. Their phone number is 304-738-8946.



Horse teams were an everyday sight during early farming days at the Higson farm. Charley Lechliter with horses Bill and Dick, haul a load of manure from the barn to spread on the fields for fertilizer.



H. Murell Kline (left) and son, William Kline (second from left), work with the owner of the ditch digging machine to lay drain tiles for field drainage in the early 1940s. At that time, their farm had the most fields in the area with a drainage system.