

Wildom Farm

ONE FARMER'S COMMITMENT TO REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE
NEAR DEEP CREEK LAKE, MARYLAND

Written by: **Mary Reisinger**



Julie Friend sits in the meadow with a few of her grass-fed cattle. PHOTO BY JEFF SWENSEN

Julie Friend has family roots in Western Maryland and grew up in Western Pennsylvania, but her path to Wildom Farm in Garrett County, Maryland, led through Chicago. Julie went to college in Pittsburgh, where she started a job with Nordstrom Department Store that took her to Cincinnati, and then on to Chicago.

By the time she was living in Chicago, Julie had started to notice that there was a lot of waste and overconsumption in the fashion industry, and this piqued her interest in sustainable living. She began to explore thrift shops for clothes, and ultimately opened a vintage clothing business, saving clothes that would otherwise be discarded, and demonstrating the benefits of wearing clothes without harmful dyes and chemicals.

There was a farmers' market close to her Chicago apartment, and she began to shop there, only going to the grocery store for staple items she couldn't get at the market. Julie enjoyed talking to the producers of the food she was eating and knowing how it was grown. She cooked with whole foods and saw her health improve. Convinced that what we put into our bodies affects how we feel and function, Julie completed a nine-month course with the Nutritional Therapy Association, becoming certified as a nutritional therapy practitioner.

As Julie's commitment to a sustainable lifestyle grew, her parents acquired a farm in Garrett County that had belonged to Julie's grandfather. For years the fields had been farmed conventionally in corn and soybean rotation; Julie and her

parents began to wonder about the chemicals being used in the fields. The farm was in an area that was not only familiar to them, but also had large numbers of visitors each year. Julie became intrigued with the idea of practicing regenerative agriculture in a rural community that could provide many customers. Julie and her parents saw this as an opportunity to steward the land in a different, more natural way.

With her parents' support, Julie moved to the property on Sang Run Road in February of 2020. Almost immediately the pandemic shut down everything that she might have missed about being in a city, and she was happy to be living comfortably with plenty of space. Julie set about creating an environment that encourages biodiversity and healthy natural systems. Her aim is to produce food in a way that is good for the animals, good for the land, and good for the consumer. Animal welfare, ecology, and human health are pillars of her philosophy. She chose the name Wildom Farm to reflect the integration of wild and domestic elements in farm life.

That first year, Julie began with 10 pigs, 500 meat chickens, 100 layers, and 50 turkeys. Initially, she wasn't very excited about raising pigs. However, she knew that at nearby Backbone Farm, pigs were being raised in the woods, and she could get some piglets from them. Since Wildom Farm has 60 acres of woodland, it seemed a worthwhile experiment. She has enjoyed watching the pigs follow their natural instincts to root and eat acorns, seeing how content they are, and observing how well they fit into the environment. Now pigs are her favorite animal on the farm.

Julie and her employees have worked to transition 90 acres of corn and soy into perennial pasture for the grazing animals. The farm uses movable fencing to rotate animals into different areas, allowing months for rejuvenation of each



Julie has carefully chosen breeds of cattle, pigs, chickens, and sheep that thrive in their pasture and woodland homes.

PHOTOS BY JULIE FRIEND



As cattle, sheep, and chickens are moved to new areas of the pasture, their mobile feeding station and chicken coop go with them. On hot days, a wide canopy can be stretched from the feeding station to the coop, providing shade from the sun.

TOP PHOTO BY JEFF SWENSEN, LEFT PHOTO BY MARY REISINGER

including as mulch on the garden, and sheep hides are tanned. Pig lard is refined and used as an ingredient in skin moisturizer.

There are always challenges to overcome, such as predators who appreciate a good chicken dinner.

section before it is used again. The chickens roost at night in coops that Julie calls egg-mobiles; solar-controlled doors automatically open in the morning so that the chickens can spend the day outside. At this point, Wildom has 40 cattle, 75 pigs, 80 sheep, 1500 meat chickens, 75 laying chickens, and 100 turkeys.

The farm has been expanding from its focus on meats to including more garden produce. The first garden plot was cleared by pigs rooting in it and then chickens having a turn at further processing the soil and insects.

Julie tries to use products that might normally be discarded. For example, sheep's wool is used for several purposes,

Regenerative agriculture demands continual attention to best practices for housing and feeding livestock and keeping them healthy. Fortunately, Julie's background in nutrition, her ability to do research, and her efforts to learn about the practical skills of sustainable farming have equipped her to solve problems when they occur.

In another piece of luck, Julie's family farm already had ample buildings to use for machinery and other necessities of farm life. In one of them, Julie has a small shop where she sells farm products that include grassfed beef and lamb; pasture-raised chicken and turkey; eggs; forest-raised pork; lard-based moisturizer; dog treats; and more.



Wildom Farm's stand can be found at the Deep Creek Lake Farmers' Market held at Garrett College on Friday afternoons, where pork burgers are a big hit; at a Pittsburgh farmers' market on Tuesdays; and occasionally at the Oakland Farmers' Market on Saturday mornings. It is also possible to order some products online. Julie rents space in a commercial kitchen now, but in the future, she plans to build a commercial kitchen at the farm so that she can prepare food on site. Julie says that cooking led her to the farm and the farm has led her back to the kitchen.

Julie has held several popular farm dinners with ingredients from the farm or sourced locally. Sometimes these dinners are followed by a demonstration of butchery. Julie notes that it's very educational for people to see how few skirt steaks can be cut per cow and how little bacon there is in a single pig. Look for these events to be held starting in May and June, and if you're interested, reserve your place early; they always sell out.

Left: The early spring vegetable garden has sheep's wool mulch in some rows.

Top right: The two tom turkeys strut—walk slowly while raising and rattling their tail features—to attract attention from the hens.

Above: The pigs at Wildom Farm have a hearty appetite for whey, a byproduct of the cheesemaking process at Firefly Farms in Accident, Maryland.

PHOTOS BY MARY REISINGER

Julie has also staged a few kitchen takeovers, where Wildom Farm does the cooking for a day in a restaurant. Again, as much as possible, Julie uses ingredients from her farm or other local sources.



Guests enjoy one of Wildom Farm's outdoor dinners.

PHOTO BY JESSICA FIKE

Because of Wildom Farm's approach to agriculture, it has recently received ecological outcome verification (EOV) from the Savory Institute. This is an annual certification; each year the organization will look for an increase in biodiversity of animal species, insects, ground covers, etc. It is a continual form of monitoring that is helpful both for the farmer and for the consumer.

Julie loves the beauty and vitality of Garrett County. In her time here, she has found some keys to a sustainable way of life that she is eager to share. Wildom Farm offers farm tours, farm yoga, dinners, demonstrations, and wholesome food products. To check store hours and the events calendar, and to learn more, contact Julie at 724-494-5259 or visit the website: www.wildomfarm.com.

Wildom Farm is in the McHenry area, at 6675 Sang Run Road, opposite Mountain State Brewing Company. Look for the Wildom Farm sign.

