

farm to table

E-I-E-I-O!

Four Great Oregon Farmstays

STORY BY KERRY NEWBERRY
PHOTOS BY DAVE BALDWIN AND JOHN VALLS



An inquisitive peacock named Peadiddy joins me at sunrise for coffee on the porch, on my first morning at Leaping Lamb Farm. About 10 minutes later, I find myself bottle-feeding a week-old baby lamb — one of a set of triplets, the other two frolicking nearby. It's love at first sight.

Next, I'm swishing through tall grass, successfully herding a flock of sixty salt-and-pepper sheep and lambs from a stately wood barn to sumptuous green pasture. Craggy fir trees and blue sky fill the frame. At that moment, I think sayonara city life, I'm moving to the country. The final activity for the morning is feeding the farm fowl — a chatty cast of chickens, two ducks, and a pack of warbling turkeys.

I'm on a farm vacation, a program that husband-and-wife farmers Greg and Scottie Jones launched in 2006 to diversify their farm income. "About 14 years ago, we became new farmers at the age of 50," says Scottie. "We thought farming would pay for itself, but two years in, we began using our retirement for unexpected expenses, like the tractor breaking down."

Scottie was familiar with farm stays from traveling in Europe. Farmhouse vacations — also known as agritourism — took root in Italy in the 1980s, as small farms became less profitable and many farmers were leaving the countryside for jobs in cities.

"We saw this as an opportunity to expand farm profits in a way that was more consistent and not based on things we can't control, like weather and the price of feed," says Scottie, who often meets families upon their arrival to offer a personal farm tour. "Also, rather than just talking to sheep, I thought it would be fun to talk to guests."

At Leaping Lamb Farm, guests can stay in a cozy two-bedroom cottage with a porch and views of the orchards and sheep pasture, or opt for a sprawling four-bedroom farmhouse circa 1895. You can hear the rooster crow from both places, so don't worry about setting an alarm clock.

"We got busy pretty fast when we launched," she says, and now the farm entertains visitors from around the world, with many returning each spring for lambing season. In 2010, Scottie received two U.S. Department of Agriculture grants to build a website (farmstayus.com) that connects travelers with similar farm and ranch stays in all 50 states. "At that time, there was no perceived travel niche of going

and staying on a farm. I realized there were enough of us offering this and that we should all be in one place and easy to find."

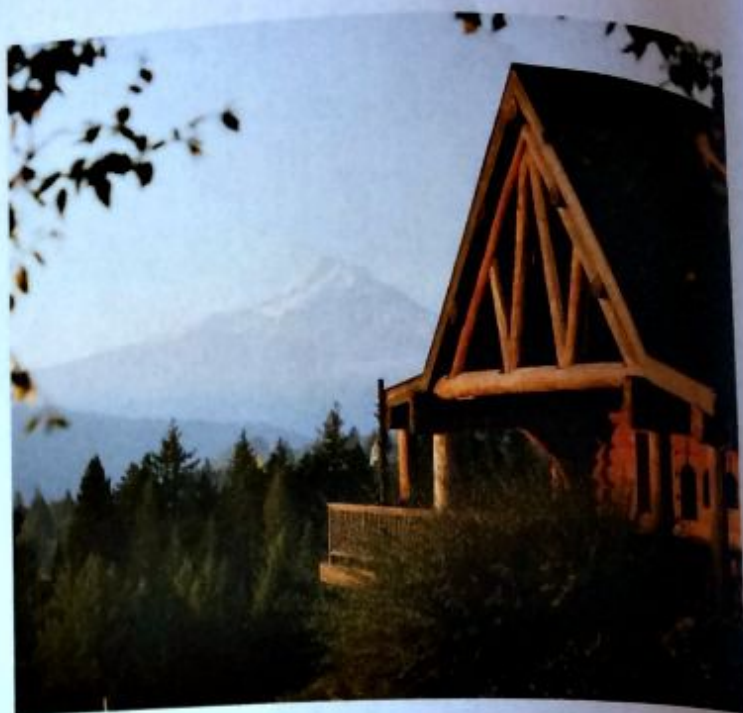
Currently, the site features more than 500 farms and ranches, 30 of which are in Oregon. The experiences range from a working cattle ranch near the Painted Hills to a goat dairy about an hour from Ashland, where guests sleep in a vintage Airstream and can hike with the herd. As more people want to see and experience where their food comes from, farm vacations are on the rise.

"Guests definitely enjoy interacting with animals the most," says Scottie. "Whether it's holding a baby lamb, playing with a goat, or brushing Paco, our miniature Sicilian donkey, these are the experiences that leave longstanding impressions."

After friending the many farm animals, visitors can explore the 64-acre property, with its ample trails to hike, a creek to play in, and a hayloft for building forts. "Kids get to be kids," says Scottie, "and parents get to relax."

Leaping Lamb Farm

20368 Honey Grove Rd., Alsea OR • leapinglambfarm.com



SAKURA RIDGE, HOOD RIVER

"It's more interesting to watch sheep eat grass than to watch a pear grow," says John Joyer, as he explains how his flock of Katahdin sheep quickly multiplied from two to eighty. On summer days, the sheep and lambs mingle across hillside pastures at Sakura Ridge, where John and his wife, Deanna, also tend to 30 acres of organic pear and apple trees. First planted in the 1880s, the farm's orchards serve as the primary commercial crop. "The sheep are his hobby," says Deanna. So are the clusters of beehives that supply honey for the five-room bed-and-breakfast.

Early in the morning, you can find Deanna harvesting from the kitchen garden and chicken coop, just below the lodge, before she makes a multi-course breakfast using farm-fresh ingredients. A large organic berry garden bursting with ripe blackberries, raspberries, and aronia berries in late summer, provides jam and jellies for guests to purchase and take home. "We love that there are 500 small family farms in the Hood River Valley," says Deanna.

The lodge sits just six miles south of Hood River, and locals proclaim the view of Mt. Hood from Sakura Ridge one of the most spectacular in the area. If it's too cloudy to catch the glaciated peak, the panoramic valley, mountain, and forest views from the veranda also enchant. In addition to feeding sheep, some guests have worked the bees with John, hired a local wild-foods expert to forage the 30 acres of surrounding forest, and scheduled a bird guide to explore the property. "In summer, the highlights are the long evenings, when guests can sit out on the deck or patio and stargaze," says Deanna. "And they are always welcome to grab a bowl and pick berries."

Sakura Ridge

5601 York Hill Dr., Hood River, OR • sakuraridge.com

WILLOW-WITT RANCH, ASHLAND

"Our entire property is off-grid," says Suzanne Willow, who runs Willow-Witt Ranch with her partner, Lanita Witt. On their 445-acre terrain — a mix of meadows, conifer and oak woodlands, wetlands, and streams — they raise and train pasture-raised Alpine goats for milking and backpacking, and pasture-raised laying chickens, ducks, and geese. The ranch was recently designated part of the expanded Cascade Siskiyou National Monument.

Guests can pick and purchase vegetables from the gardens, along with meats, bacon, sausages, eggs, and milk from the farm — all certified organic. "I think guests are most surprised at being able to pick vegetables fresh from the gardens (digging for potatoes is a favorite) and picking up an egg, warm, from under a hen," says Suzanne. "Also, the gentleness and personality of our hand-raised goats." During a ranch stay, all guests are welcome to join a complimentary farm tour and schedule a goat-pack hike with Suzanne and Lanita as they shepherd the foraging herd across the valley. "We plan the trips around lunchtime and either hike on our land to a beautiful volcanic outcropping or use a wonderful BLM trail next door to us."

For training the youngest goats, Suzanne and Lanita created "Kids with Kids," a shorter walk for the goat kids and human kids — no parents allowed. In addition to goat packing, part of the novelty of Willow-Witt is the variety of ways to experience the farm. You can opt for the Farm Stay Studio (which includes access to a wood-fired hot tub), the sprawling three-bedroom Meadow House with a wrap-around porch, or one of four furnished wall tents for a taste of glamping. All options offer a late-night ritual: In summertime, the warm days and cool nights are ideal for star-watching.

Willow-Witt Ranch

658 Shale City Rd., Ashland, OR • willowwitranch.com

PHOLIA FARM GOAT CHEESE DAIRY, ROGUE RIVER

"Everyone thinks goats are hard to keep in fences," says Gianacis Caldwell. "They might be, but once they get outside the fence, they don't go anywhere. They just want to see what's on the other side." At Pholia Farm Dairy, Gianacis and her husband, Vern, raise Nigerian Dwarf goats to make farmstead cheese, from a Romano-style tomme rubbed with olive oil and cocoa to traditional feta.

Six years ago, they launched a farm stay with a 1970 Airstream Land Yacht travel trailer that has a covered front porch with a view of the goats and wild turkeys. "It was kind of by accident," says Gianacis, of the novelty lodging. "We bought the Airstream for our oldest daughter, and eventually she moved out." After sprucing up the Airstream and turning it into a guest house for friends, Gianacis and Vern eventually opened it up on Airbnb. "Because, what farm doesn't need a little more income?"

Since then, they've had travelers from all over the world visit their off-the-grid dairy farm, located 10 miles outside the city of Rogue River. "It helps you appreciate not only your farm through other people's eyes, but also the region that we live in, because it's easy to take for granted if you are working all the time."

Guests are welcome to join in feeding the goats and even learning to milk a goat. In summer, the highlight for most guests is when it's time to hike with the goats through the surrounding forest. "You just go out walking, and the goats follow you, through the woods and up in the hills," says Gianacis. "People are always surprised that they just follow you; you don't need a herd dog."

Most of the guests who visit Pholia Farm aren't familiar with livestock, says Gianacis. And when they leave, they have a new perspective on goats, sometimes even a newfound dream of owning their own. 🐐

Pholia Farm

9115 W. Evans Creek Rd., Rogue River, OR • pholiafarm.com

Kerry Newberry is a freelance writer based in Portland, where she chases stories about people and culture through the lens of food and wine. She contributes regularly to local and national magazines. Read more of her work at www.kerrynewberry.com.



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