

farm & ranch[®]

L I V I N G
FOR FAMILIES WHO LOVE THE LAND.

Great Pumpkin

Pick the perfect one
in a Virginia patch



PLUS:

- Friends pitch in at an Idaho potato farm
- Visit a hay castle
- Learn life's lessons from a horse

Solar panels on the roof of the 1932 barn at Leaping Lamb Farm power its lights and the farm's irrigation system.



Working Vacation

This travel destination has lambs—and the chance to gather eggs for breakfast.

BY SCOTTIE JONES ALSEA, OREGON

I wasn't born to be a farmer. I think, as a child growing up in suburbia, I might have dreamed of life as a cowgirl on the open range, but not as a sheep farmer in a slot valley of Oregon's coast range. My husband, Greg, landed us here. But he's not entirely to blame. I was right by his side, ready to dig into the romance of living off the land.

We were searching for the cool, moist green of Alsea as we ran from the urban sprawl of Phoenix. The ideal of a rural, sustainable life appealed to us, and the farm we found on the internet had the most magnificent old barn. The romance lasted right up until the first pipe broke in our extensive irrigation system, blasting me with cold water from our mountain creek. Or maybe it faded the first morning our dogs tried to kill the rooster. Whatever lifted the veil, it did so within days of our arrival at our new home.

We moved in June, and by the end of our first summer, we had dealt with livestock births, escapes and deaths; tractor breakdowns; and daily irrigation woes. We had also met most of our neighbors, who tried to help where they could. Where they couldn't, they offered advice over a cold beer. I knew friends were making bets, both back home in Arizona and right in our little community, about how long we would last.

They shouldn't have bet against me, even though our learning curve

for farming was steep. And it wasn't all about how to do things. For us it was also about how to be sustainable without dipping into our retirement. The profit from the sale of 40 locker lambs and 5 tons of excess hay a year didn't cover the farm's repairs and upkeep. That desperation led to an aha moment: Our family and friends loved to visit our farm so much, sometimes it felt as if we ran a dude ranch during the summer.

What would happen if we charged guests—not family—interested in staying on a farm? We had a cottage, ostensibly waiting for our youngest daughter to return after college, but we reasoned she could just as well stay in the farmhouse with us. I had brought hospitality and marketing experience with me to the farm, but I'd had no use for it tending sheep. We had all the lemons—now was the time to make lemonade.

So I began my foray into the farm-stay business, the practice of offering overnight lodging to paying guests interested in vacationing on a farm. The concept had revitalized many rural farming communities in Europe, where tens of thousands of farms welcomed vacationers. But only a handful in the U.S. had tried something similar when Leaping Lamb Farm Stay opened in 2006. We have never looked back.

We started with our full-service cottage: two bedrooms, one bath, a living room-kitchen setup, a deck and a killer view over the hayfield. Ten years later, we added our 1895 farmhouse with its five bedrooms, three baths, large kitchen, dining room, living room and a deck overlooking the orchard. Greg and I moved to a smaller house on the

Greg and Scottie Jones (in barn) opened Leaping Lamb Farm Stay in 2006 to overnight guests—and frequently, their grandson, Henry (far left).

GREG AND SCOTTIE: KATE RIVERA; KIDS AND SCOTTIE: JOANNA LEZAK; OTHERS: SCOTTIE JONES



Scottie Jones' guests help with the daily chores, including herding the livestock out in the morning.



We have become Grandma and Grandpa's farm for a generation of kids whose grandparents moved off the land years ago.

property to increase revenue and, honestly, to be warmer during our damp Northwest winters.

Our guests are enthralled with the beauty of our farm, just as we were when we first saw the place. Their reactions remind me to look at our farm through their eyes from time to time and not to see just a constant to-do list. We include our guests in our chores: feeding the chickens, collecting the eggs, helping with the sheep, brushing the donkey and throwing hay down from the hayloft for the horses.

We have become Grandma and Grandpa's farm for a generation of kids whose grandparents moved off the land years ago. The farm is a place reminiscent of Lassie's world, where kids can be kids. They play in the creek, build forts in the hayloft, hike into our green coastal rainforest looking for fairies, bottle-feed the lambs and roll in the grass with our playful goats. Grownups play right

alongside them, and they recount their experiences at the end of the day over meals together.

Our guests find us online, on our website and Facebook, Twitter and Instagram accounts. Word of mouth helps too, and guests post reviews on sites like TripAdvisor, where we're grateful to have a five-star rating. Outside of referrals, many guests find us through web-based searches, magazine articles, blogs, the Oregon tourism agencies and specialty sites.

And there's *farmstayus.com*—a site I created in 2010 as one more giant leap of faith to establish an agritourism movement specific to the U.S. Back in 2006, when we were wondering if people would pay to come stay at a farm, a search for farm stays would likely have led you to Italy and its famous *agriturismo*-filled landscapes. But there was no place for U.S. farms to advertise to domestic travelers.

Enlisting the help of my children, their college-age friends and other women farmers I knew, we found about 1,000 working farms and ranches across the entire country offering farm stays. Many farmers were either unaware of the farm stay model or couldn't fathom why anyone would pay to stay on a farm for a vacation. From a traveler's perspective, Americans didn't know and hadn't imagined they could stay overnight on a farm. And the term "farm stay" was unfamiliar to most.

Funded through a pair of federal Department of Agriculture grants, I launched the U.S. Farm Stay Association along with the website and began the process of educating, cultivating, and marketing our farm-stay members to a traveling public. The most-visited post on the site is "What is a Farm Stay?" We answer questions ranging from what to wear to what to expect.

The site also offers farm members a platform to promote what they do and a place to engage in a private forum to share best practices and questions. The association provides accreditation standards and a handy business guide to farmers thinking about a farm-stay model, including everything from startup advice to insurance estimates.

About to enter our 15th year on the farm, we are no longer "new" farmers, as defined by the USDA. It's been a journey from urbanite to farmer, but one I would choose again if I had it to do over. Hard as farming may be at times, I feel it is my privilege to share our lifestyle with others, if only for a short time. I hope the experience will leave an indelible impression that, for some, will translate into an interest in becoming the next generation of farmers. Maybe one of them will even be my grandson. For him, at least, going to visit Grandma's farm is not a notion from the past, but very much a modern tradition. **R**

Scottie Jones is the author of *Country Grit: A Farmoir of Finding Purpose and Love*. A witty account of daily life on a small farm, it's available wherever books are sold.