

## **Bringing Cattle Back to the Farm – A Partnership is Formed**

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The farm is an old dairy farm located in Adamstown, approximately 15 miles south of Frederick, where cows once roamed the fields and crops were farmed as feed. That was 20 years ago and Harry Kanode was much younger. Today there is no livestock, part of the growing trend of losing dairy farms in Maryland. Maryland has lost 1,000 dairy farms a decade since having 4,000 dairies in 1970. If this trend continues there will not be a dairy farm left in Maryland by 2010. Today the farm is managed by Harry's daughter, Hope Green, who wants to bring livestock back to the farm and turn the farm into a sustainable agriculture operation. Last year Hope contacted Mark Seibert, the District Conservationist working for NRCS in Frederick County to discuss options for conservation on the farm. One of the areas of particular concern was the mile of Tuscarora Creek flowing through the farm. Mark provided a list of conservation programs available through the government while also recommending Hope contact me at the Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF). CBF has a Farm Stewardship Program which provides free stream bank fencing and trees with the goal of restoring water quality in streams while also improving herd health in cattle. At the time we were in the beginning stages of forming the Maryland Grazing Network, recruiting both dairy and beef cattle farmers that had been grazing for years to serve as mentors for farmers wanting to make the switch from conventional confinement operations. One of the mentors recruited was Ryan Bapst who manages Hedgeapple Farm in Buckeystown, less than 10 miles from Adamstown where Hope was brainstorming ideas to make the farm a sustainable one.

With the local food buzz in full swing and my experience with purchasing grass fed beef from CBF's Clagett Farm, I put Ryan in touch with Hope to see if Hedgeapple would be interested in expanding their operation. Hope's farm is relatively large with 175 acres and its sloping lands would be excellent for pasture rather than the typical corn-soybean rotation with row crops. Within a couple hours of receiving my message, Ryan had already driven by the farm and was very interested in speaking with Hope about converting her farm into a grass fed beef operation. Hedgeapple Farm takes full advantage of getting their fair share of the food dollar by selling a "value added" product while also direct marketing this product through a store located on their farm. The human health benefits of eating grass fed beef over grain fed are numerous, and consumers are becoming more educated about these benefits in this niche market. In fact Ryan mentioned that they couldn't keep up with the demand for grass fed beef and that my call was timely.

Once a formal agreement was made to pasture Hedgeapple cows at Hope's farm, it was time to bring the project full circle and contact Mark Seibert at the District. The program that best fit the proposed transition was the Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA)

program that is geared to help farmers make the transition to organic and also provides funding to set up grazing systems. Some of the big cost items include perimeter fencing, water troughs and pasture establishment, all of which are covered through this program. So while my initial meeting with Hope was to discuss planting trees along her stream to restore wildlife habitat and water quality, the project has expanded to include the whole farm. The water trough was installed this fall with fencing scheduled to go in this winter. One hundred fifty volunteers planted 1,400 trees on Saturday November 8<sup>th</sup>. Volunteers, also Maryland consumer's, learned about sustainable agriculture and supporting the farms that feed them. This farm project and the whole farm approach is a win-win for the landowner, the local agricultural economy, the Maryland consumer and the Chesapeake Bay. It is a story I hope to replicate throughout Maryland. Through converting row crops (corn and soybean fields) to permanent pasture and restoring the streamside forest buffer this one farm alone will reduce its nitrogen runoff by 2,000 pounds per year. Hope is currently working with the Carrolton Manor Land Trust to pursue a permanent agricultural easement on the farm so that it will be a working farm for generations to come.

Please contact Rob at 443.482.2175 or [rschnabel@cbf.org](mailto:rschnabel@cbf.org) if you are a landowner interested in the Grazing program or planting trees along your stream.

**Side Note:**

Hedgeapple Farm is situated along the Monocacy River and owned and operated by the Jorgensen's. In 1997, the Jorgensen's gifted a conservation easement to the Maryland Environmental Trust to ensure against development. The Jorgensen Family Foundation, Inc. was also created in 1997 as a beef research and educational foundation.

Today, Hedgeapple Farm is operated for the benefit of beef producers in Maryland and the surrounding region. Hedgeapple farm focuses on the development and feasibility of production and marketing strategies to help make the region's smaller beef operations more viable. Outreach programs and tours are conducted several times throughout the year to educate not only beef producers, but also members of the general public who are interested in farm life and the operation itself. Learn more about Hedgeapple Farm at [www.hedgeapplefarm.com](http://www.hedgeapplefarm.com)

Farmers interested in learning more about Grazing should attend the annual **Future Harvest – Chesapeake Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture Conference** in Frederick, MD on January 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>. Contact Rob Schnabel for more information.