

Agriculture

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August, 2021

Common sustainable agriculture practices



Agriculture is at the roots of our existence, but that's especially true in Sullivan County, which boasts a rich history of family farming. There are substantially less farms in the area today than there were decades ago, and those still in existence have had to adapt over time.

While everyone has their own tricks of the trade, as this article states, the use of sustainable farming practices is beneficial to all involved.

The concept of sustainability varies by industry. Within the agricultural industry, sustainability is a multifaceted concept that has become increasingly popular in recent decades.

According to the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, sustainable agriculture seeks to increase profitable farm income, promote environmental steward-

ship, enhance quality of life for farm families and communities, and increase production for human food and fiber needs. In an attempt to reach those goals, farmers who embrace sustainable agriculture may look to various practices.

- **Cover crops:** The Union of Concerned Scientists, a nonprofit organization that aims to employ independent science to address the planet's most pressing problems, notes that cover crops are planted during the offseason when soils have traditionally been left bare. Cover crops can help prevent soil erosion and replenish the nutrients in the soil. Cover crops also can limit weed growth, reducing the need for herbicides that can prove harmful to the environment.

- **Reduce or eliminate tillage:** According to the UCS, traditional plowing, or tillage, can cause a significant amount of soil loss, even as it prepares fields for planting and reduces the likelihood of weed problems. Eliminating or reducing tillage involves inserting seeds directly into undisturbed soil, which can reduce erosion and improve the

health of the soil.

- **Integrated pest management:** Integrated pest management techniques aim to minimize the use of chemical pesticides that can prove harmful to the environment and local wildlife. According to the University of California Statewide Integrated Pest Management Program, IPM strategies like habitat manipulation and the planting of disease-resistant plants are designed to promote long-term prevention of pests and the damage such pests can cause.

- **Agroforestry:** The Association for Temperate Agroforestry defines agroforestry as an intensive land management system that incorporates trees and/or shrubs to optimize the benefits they provide when deliberately combined with crops and/or livestock. The shade and shelter provided by trees and shrubs can protect plants, animals and water resources.

- **Crop/livestock integration:** The UCS notes that there is growing evidence to suggest that the careful integration of crop and animal production can help farmers make their farms more efficient and profitable.

Sustainable agriculture is a complex concept that can benefit farmers, their local communities and the environment in myriad ways.



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Dreams come true on a farm where cows make the ice cream

STORY AND PHOTOS
BY KATHY DALEY

Rianne Erlwein, the child, had her heart set on running her own ice cream shop. Fast forward to Rianne, now age 27, who is raising 44 light brown Jersey cows and processing their milk herself. And yes, she's hard at work stirring up cool delights to sell from the family farm.

Ice cream on the farm will be the newest product, available this month in flavors of vanilla, chocolate, maple, "cookies and cream of the crop" and "cookie dough si dough," says Erlwein with a grin. "I'll be adding more flavors quickly as soon as the recipe is perfected!"

In the meantime, customers are flocking to Myers Century Farm on Earl Myers Road in Jeffersonville for Erlwein's delicious minimally processed farm-produced milk.

"We've actually never sold milk off the farm before," said Erlwein, who represents the seventh generation to run the dairy operation.

Rianne joins her parents, broth-

ers and their wives and her grandfather in working the 184-year-old farm. There, for generations, some 130 white and black Holsteins have produced milk for the nation under a milk pricing system controlled by the federal government, an arrangement that continues to send working farms into ruin.

Determined to find a way to continue farming into the future, Rianne linked with farmers Bob Franklin and son Eli at the Bethel Creamery operating on Happy Avenue in Swan Lake. Since 2020, Erlwein's Jersey cows have produced thousands of gallons of raw, that is, non-processed A2A2 milk, which is especially good for people who cannot digest regular milk. Daily, the Franklins haul the milk from the Myers farm to their own milk processor in Bethel.

Then in January 2021, Rianne began processing her own raw milk with a vat pasteurizer, bottling it and selling it through on-line or phone orders. Customers then pick up the milk at the farm on Saturdays from 1-4 p.m.



Erlwein's fresh milk also graces the dairy departments of Peck's Markets in Callicoon, Jeffersonville and Livingston Manor. Her milk is also used at the Jeffersonville Bake Shop and at Tavern on Main in Jeffersonville, as well as at Rease's Cup, a coffee shop in North Branch.

"During the week, Bethel Creamery takes my raw milk," explains Erlwein. "On weekends I use my Jerseys' milk for my own."

Garbed in a special lab coat, shoes, gloves and hairnet, Rianne

enters the room harboring the vat pasteurizer, one of the most effective methods of heating milk in a vessel.

"The milk flows through the pipeline from the cow into the vat," she said. "The jacket that is formed around the vat is filled up with hot water. The heating elements heat the water to the designated temperature and heating up the milk as well."

The milk is held at a specific temperature for 32 minutes while it is continually being agitated to pre-

Rianne Erlwein of Myers Century Farm in Jeffersonville is pasteurizing her cows' milk and selling it in stores and at the farm itself. Early on, she got tips from Evelyn Weissmann of Weissmann Farm on the Gulf Road in Callicoon Center, who is also pasteurizing on-the-farm milk.

At right: One of Erlwein's milk producing cows is Lisa Marie, a tawny-colored Jersey whose breed is popular for creating tasty milk and high milk production.

vent the milk from scalding.

"Once the time has been reached, the pasteurization process is finished and the hot water is replaced with cold water," she said. "The vat is hooked up to the chiller and the pasteurized milk is cooled down and bottled."

In addition to A2A2 milk, Erlwein creates "whole cream line milk" in flavors of chocolate, coffee and maple. Whole cream line milk is pasteurized but not homogenized as is typically sold in supermarkets. Homogenized milk uses high pressure to break down fat molecules

into tiny particles, surrendering flavor and health benefits, say experts.

By contrast, vat pasteurization has a track record for turning out milk that tastes better, is easier for dairy sensitive people to tolerate, and is considerably more nutritious.

"I have some wonderful, loyal customers," said Erlwein. "It's so rewarding when people tell you how much they like the products and when you have relationships with people who are drinking your milk."

Still, the wider farm work for the Erlwein-Myers family continues daily, particularly during the summer season.

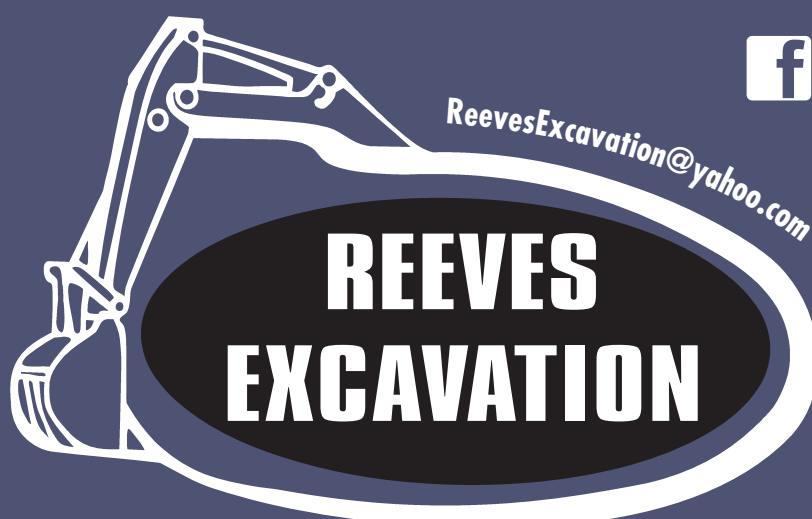
"It is exhausting," said Rianne, "but the goal is what you're working towards: self-sufficiency. And there's nothing better than being able to work with family and with nature. As much work as it is, it's a blessing."



Uncovering and painting the beauty of our local farms

Helen Diehl of Callicoon works on painting a local landscape: that of the Myers Century Farm in Jeffersonville, on Saturday, July 31. Diehl has spent much of her professional life in advertising and marketing and studied art years ago. She is one of the artists engaged in a workshop series entitled 'From Field to Canvas: Paint Historic Farms of Sullivan County,' with Jay Brooks, a local artist and teacher. The public art event attracted five painters and was hosted by Zane Grey Plein Air, which promotes environmental awareness by hosting public art events in partnership with sustainable businesses and conservation organizations in the Upper Delaware region. The series has invited painters of all levels to Yasgur's Farm in Bethel, Diehl Farm in Callicoon, Myers Farm and an upcoming fall outing to the Cowen farm in Pond Eddy.

KATHY DALEY / DEMOCRAT



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Registration is required.

This is a co-partnered program, supported by grants from NYS Office for the Aging's Caregiver Program and the Alzheimer's Association, between the Sullivan County Cornell Cooperative Extension and Office for the Aging and the Alzheimer's Association Hudson Valley.

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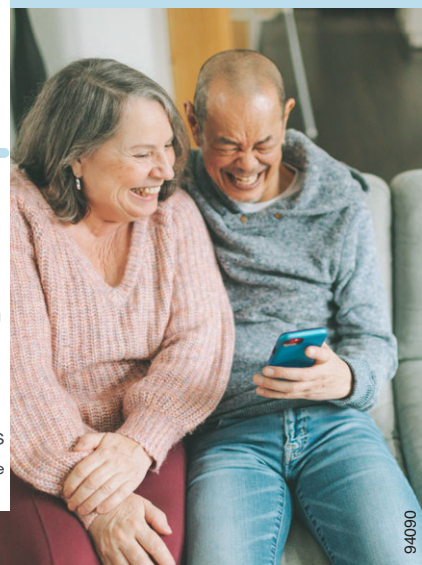
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Agriculture and the economy

Many people rely on the agriculture industry for their foods, but think little of the impact that agriculture has on the larger economy. However, data indicates that agriculture can serve a significant role in the process of solidifying the economy of a country, particularly developing nations.

Agriculture also can contribute to the economic prosperity of advanced countries. IPP Media points out that the economic history of many developed countries indicates that agricultural prosperity contributed heavily to their economic advancement.

When the basic food supply is strong, the national economy can be strong as well. Particularly in the early days of the United States, farming held a crucial place in establishing the American economy and culture, and still shapes the country today. Many states find that farming and other agricultural pursuits contribute much to the local and national economy. For example, new research from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and University of Wisconsin-Extension show that agriculture is a powerful economic force in Wisconsin.

Agricultural businesses help generate more than \$83 billion in activity and have created more than 400,000 jobs in that state. The public should not disregard how strong a factor agriculture can be in establishing a strong economic environment. Safeguarding agricultural jobs and the agricultural industry is crucial to economic stability.

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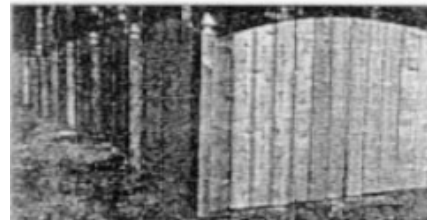
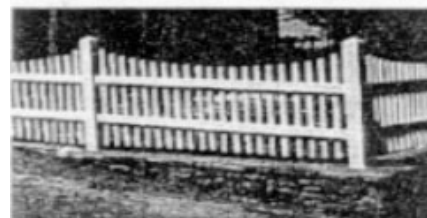
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