

Cool Whisper Farm

Matt & Lisa Schober - Journey into Farming

HILLSDALE



Matt and Lisa raise Highland cattle, a heritage meat breed from Scotland known to be especially hearty.

EARLY INFLUENCES

Matt grew up on his family's dairy farm in Columbia County.

Matt: "I'm one of seven, a large family. We all worked the farm as kids. Right from the beginning, I was always in dairying. I was underneath cows at the age of eight. I might have been driving tractors at 13 or 14 years old. I always had a knack for equipment... For some reason I was always finding out the way it was done [in the old days]. Every part of your land was used."

Lisa: "You were just sucked in, with the whole romance of the old ways of farming. Your grandfather was the person you hung out with, too, all the time."

Matt: "I graduated from high school and proceeded to move away from agriculture. Then I came back. I knew college just wasn't for me. I knew I wanted to be in agriculture. I came back to the farm and worked with my father. I worked there for 19 years, until October of 2010, when my father sold the dairy."

GROWING A BUSINESS OF THEIR OWN

Lisa: "His dad was intending not to continue the farm for a long period of time. We had bought 35 acres [of it], and we'd like to be able to buy the rest. We knew that we had to start working to get [our own business] in place, so we started with five Highlanders, and then just started growing from there."

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Matt: "We have always raised some of our own meat. We had a pretty good [beef] herd by the time the dairy ended."

Lisa: "We never really intended to go into pigs, and pasturing chickens..."

Matt: "We just didn't trust the meats in the store. That was our decision-making of having our own beef, chicken, and pork in the beginning, and right from the get go, you could tell the difference in flavor. We just messed around for our own freezer, for family and friends, and then people were asking, and it became more and more popular."

Lisa: "We're trying to make a plan, how many pigs a month we want to be able to sell, how many beef we want to be able to sell. We don't want to be so big that they're not happy, or that it's not healthy. We're trying to make it so that it's a nice size that sustains us here, helps us to live here. We're not looking to be rich, just to be happy. And as low impact on the property as possible."

RAISING HIGHLAND CATTLE

Lisa: "We enjoy heritage breeds. We did a lot of research [on Highlanders]. They do really well on pasture. They eat everything else that other breeds won't. It just seemed to be the way to go as far as cost-effectiveness, and little input but maximum output, without stressing the land."

Matt: "We have over 40 Highlanders. They're very hearty animals, but they're slow growers."

Lisa: "You're talking three years before they're butchering age. When you have your Highlanders taking longer than a lot of the other [breeds], that's why you're carrying a certain amount of animals [on the farm at one time]."

Matt: "On a bad day, if you want to calm down, you go down to the Highlanders and just be amongst them, and it calms you. That's my favorite thing, is to bring them out on fresh grass."

Lisa: "It's the noise, and it's the breath. They're calm. It's contagious."



Matt checks in with a resting Highlander.

OPENING A COUNTRY STORE

Lisa: "We've been trying to get a country store going, which is a whole mix of stuff. It will have the meats, some home accents, kitchen stuff, and my sewing, like linens and tablecloths. We also have approval to put in a commercial kitchen, so then we can start playing with our own meat rubs and sauces, and make our own sausage... [Our customers have] been a huge variety of people. We're really one-on-one, meeting people and getting to know them, and it's really great. If we just had our stuff in somebody else's store, we wouldn't have that interaction and get to know [people] and share in [that way]." Lisa has an upholstery business, and her shop is in the room adjoining the country store: "We also thought about doing the farm markets, but to take the time when we could be here... If I'm down there working in my upholstery shop, I can just be working, and if somebody comes in I can take care of them and go right back to work."

Matt: "Here, it gives us the option for her to stay working here, and I'm continuing to clean pigs, build pig sheds, haying, things like that. If I had to go to a farmers' market on a Saturday and it was gorgeous weather and I could be making hay, I wouldn't be at the farmers' market."

HOLDING ON TO THE FARM

Lisa: "We want to see it as one whole farm, so the one major goal that we have is to be able to earn the money to buy the rest of this land from his dad, so it doesn't get sold and built up. That is our biggest driver."

Matt: "When [my father] got out of dairying, [some of the] land had to be sold in order to meet those old debts of dairying. I grew up on 500 acres, and now I'm down to 148, or 35 [owned acres] right now."

Lisa: "That whole idea of being able to set up a farm to be able to pass it down, like it used to be years ago, is kind of a dream. The ultimate goal is to have the farm pay for itself, be debt-free, and be able to pass it on to the kids. It means everything to us, because we're taking everything that we're earning and it's going right back into here, so this is literally everything. Every dime comes right back into our own place. That's why we're trying to do this, to be able to hold onto the land. You can make a home anywhere, but this is pretty special, and we really want to keep it."

Matt: "It's much more enjoyable when you're working on your own land than renting. It's a totally different feeling. You're pushing yourself more to make things better. The land, the soils are good, the water is good. [What needs improvement] is basically structure, which boils down to money. We have the knowledge, it's just our pockets are short. We're building every building. We're doing every single thing we can here, all ourselves."

Lisa: "I can honestly tell you, we've been flying by the seat of our pants. We're just kind of riding the rollercoaster, and we're trying to keep happy about it, and believe me, we have our moments, but we try and stay as optimistic as we can. It's been a long time trying to get all of the puzzle pieces to fit, but we think we're about there."

WHY FARMING

Lisa: "It's a lot of work, but it's definitely a way of life, and it's a good one. There's a lot of people that don't know what they're missing. To be able to work so hard at something, and enjoy what you're doing, and to be able to put out a good product...you're satisfying people. There's a lot of rewards."

Farming Journey

Originally from: Columbia County
Type of Training: Working on the family farm

Land Search Length: Used family's land

Land Source: Leasing family's land and purchasing slowly over time

Cool Whisper Farm

First Year: 2001

Location: Hillsdale, NY

Land Base: 148 acres (some owned, some leased)

Markets: On-farm "country store" and restaurants

Products: Beef, pork, and chicken

Family Farm History



A young Matt Schober is pictured above, atop a tractor at his father's farm on Schoolhouse Road. "My grandfather came over from Austria. He saved up money and he decided to buy a farm. Started out with 70 acres in the 1940s. He went in dairying right away, and my father and my aunt worked there all through childhood. My father purchased another farm on Schoolhouse Road, adjoining properties, and then in 1975, he purchased this farm here and just continued to grow in dairying."



Country Store: Matt and Lisa are in the process of opening an on-farm store to sell their meat as well as home accents and kitchenware.



Pigs: Matt gets an enthusiastic welcome in the pig pen. This year they plan to raise 50 pigs.

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Grazing: At Cool Whisper, the pastured chickens, housed in 'chicken tractors,' as pictured above, are used synergistically with the grass-fed beef operation. **Matt:** "I move them every day to fresh grass, and they fertilize. When you pasture cows, you wait five days and you bring the chickens in."