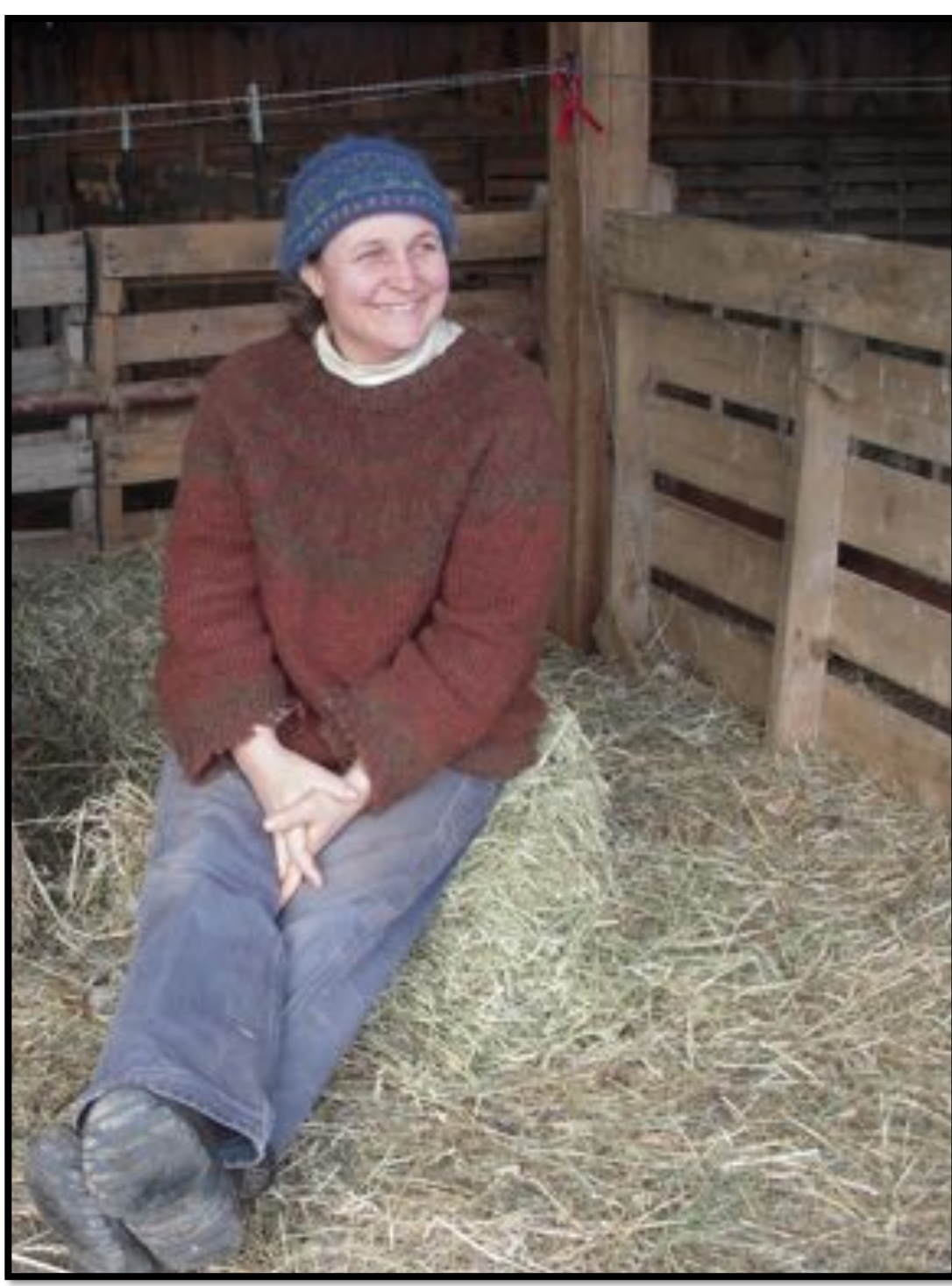


# Oakwood Farm

Judith Madey - Journey into Farming

CRARYVILLE



## EARLY INFLUENCES

"I grew up in what is now suburbia, in Switzerland. There were always cows around me, with bells on them, which I really liked. I think my first recollection of being interested in working the land was when I was about nine. I had helped my mother plant things, and my violin teacher came to our house and I was very dirty, and he was very concerned about the soil on my hands, and I couldn't understand that at all, because I just felt so happy that my hands were so dirty."

## A GROWING INTEREST

"When I was 17, we took a trip with the Waldorf School to England, to work on a biodynamic farm there, and the farmer was really amazing, and he inspired us all... I wanted to become a doctor and for some weird reason, decided that I should learn to hand milk a cow before I would become a doctor, and so I went to a farm and worked there for four weeks. It kindled this interest in me even more. When I quit my studies and I moved here, because Abe, my husband now, was here, that was when I realized I really wanted to pursue that dream. I always said if I don't become a doctor, I'll become a farmer and people always laughed at me, and I decided, 'Well, I'm not becoming a doctor, so I will become a farmer.' And so I apprenticed at Hawthorne Valley."

## LEARNING TO FARM

"[My philosophy is] to let the animal do what it's made to do. A cow needs to be grazing. Pigs need to be able to root around. I feel pretty strongly about that."

"I'm the kind of person that learns better at first from just doing... When I started at Hawthorne Valley, I didn't know anything. I was especially scared to death of bulls. Every time the bull came in, I would run out of the barn. I was very confused, and at the same time very interested. It was lucky for me that at that point, my husband, Abe, was sailing on ships, because that spring he was gone, so I just immersed myself. I spent every minute I had on the farm, and I think that's what it takes to really get into it. The first year I was there, they were short on people, and because I volunteered so much, I ended up making all the hay with Steffen [the herdsman at the time] in my first year, and then in the second year, I ended up doing that again. They couldn't afford to hire somebody, so they were more than happy to have an apprentice pull the weight, which makes you learn a lot, so I was lucky in that respect... [Even after the apprenticeship], I was always involved in the herd. I did a lot of the weekend milkings and a lot of afternoon milkings, and then eventually, [Steffen] wanted to not be quite so much with the herd anymore, and that's when I took on the responsibility [of herdsman] ...I did it for three years."

## DECISION TO START A FARM

"I wanted to start my own place to try out all these things that are hard to try out when you're in an established place... Also, I realized I really wanted to have more kids, and I did not want to have children again and work a job. It was too much to do that."

## FINDING LAND

"I knew from the beginning that we would not have the money to buy land outright. I always had heard about people renting land, or leasing it for free in return for taking care of it. For me, it was very important to live where my animals were, because I didn't want to have to drive. I wanted to be able to go out and see them. I heard about Hans [a man looking to buy land and lease it to a farmer], and started talking to him, and realized that this was a really good potential [match]... I never went to websites. I never went to ads. I never looked around that way, and I didn't look that far. It just kind of came my way... It would never, ever have been possible without finding a person that was interested in having a farm on his land. I stopped working the fall of 2005, and the year after, we moved here. So it was pretty quick, in some ways."

## STARTING THE FARM

"I always knew that I would start with [dairy] cows, because that's what I was trained in. That's what I was good at. It seemed crazy to me, with my family at the place it was, trying to start something that I didn't have any experience in... We had some money, so we invested some, mostly into fencing and calves. It was hard, but also a lot easier than other people have it. I tried not to invest in too much equipment, and I got lucky that my landlord [had some equipment]. Now, apart from the raw milk, I raise pigs I sell for meat, and I sell beef, too."

## SELLING RAW MILK

"I knew my strength was milking and I knew I wanted to produce raw milk, and when you want to produce raw milk, your market is pretty much set. By law, [the customers] have to be present when I fill [their bottles]. That makes it a little bit tricky, because I always have to be there. Eventually it has to be streamlined a little bit more, because I can do it for 30 people, but not for 100 - I won't get anything else done. I wish I could go to farmers' markets, because that's my favorite way of marketing. At farmers' markets, you bring your things, and the customers are free to come. You get to talk to them, but then you can pack up and go home. If I could take raw milk to farmers' markets, that would be great."

## THINKING ABOUT SCALE AND DIVERSITY

"I realized that it's not good to spread out too much. It's not good to have chickens and pigs and everything before you're really ready. That first year, I just wanted to try out things that I [had] never had a chance to do, and that cost me a lot... I like the picture of having one enterprise that's your centerpiece and adding on to that, and having it on a human scale, so that it ties into a family and it's not huge. I'm covering my costs and more with the raw milk, and with just a little bit more, I can get more income, proportionally. But I can only do that when I can be full time on the farm or at least seventy-five percent. Without expanding right now, though, I'd like to be able to sell 100 bottles a week."

## BALANCING FARM AND FAMILY

"My fourth child put everything here on the back burner, and it also took a lot of energy out of me... I am a mother first. That is, I have a full-time job that's not on the farm. But I enjoy it very much... In a year or two, [my youngest child] is going to be in school, and then I can start doing this more as a job again, and not just on the side burner."

## Farming Journey

**Originally from:** Switzerland

**Types of Training:**

Apprenticeship and on-farm employment

**Land Search Length:** 1 year

**Land Source:** Leased land

## Oakwood Farm

**First Year:** 2006

**Location:** Craryville, NY

**Land Base:** 80 acres (40 in pasture and 40 in woodland)

**Markets:** On-farm sale

**Products:** Raw milk, beef, and pork

## Relationship to the Land



"That's five years since we moved here, and I think it really takes you at least five years, if not more, to get to know your land, to really have a relationship to it, and see what speaks to you, and not just force your plan onto it."



Judith and her four children: "In summer, [the kids] always have an hour of work. It's helping with wood, garden work, cleanup, helping with the haying."

**Kitchen Garden:** In addition to raising livestock, Judith also enjoys spending time in the garden, where she grows food for her own family's consumption.



## Oakwood Farm

**Raw Milk:** "In some ways, raw milk is a hard product to do, because it has high regulations." Judith and her husband, Abe, had both worked for Hawthorne Valley Farm, for the dairy and creamery respectively, so they had experience with the regulations involved in selling raw milk. "We have a good relationship with the state, and that helps. And that's why, for us, it wasn't as daunting."



**First impression:** "I came here once, early in the morning, when we first looked at places, and there was something about this place that really spoke to me, and Abe independently had the same kind of impression."