

The acquisition of our farm or our farm story starts with a line from John Lennon's Beautiful Boy song, "Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans". The fact that I own, perhaps, the prettiest piece of farm property in the Town of Dunn is pure luck, or for sure happenstance. I was in the right place at the right time but for the wrong reason. Buying a farm, living on a farm, working on a farm, or for that matter even living in the country was not a plan that ever entered mine or my husband's dreams as we were plotting out our chapters as a young family. We were both born and raised in Madison, had lived there our whole lives, neither of us spent any time on farms when we were young, and really had no ambitions to become farmers, he was a nurse and I was a teacher, city folk. But, as fate would have it, the farm found us. In 1989 3 events would change my life forever, and rightly so; I lost both of my parents to Cancer and my sister had been diagnosed with breast cancer earlier in that same year, at the same time I was finishing up my teaching degree at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, while raising our 3 children who were 10, 8 and 6 years old at the time. Needless to say, it was a very stressful, sad and desperate time in our lives and clearly the most difficult year I had ever experienced. So, the following year, in 1990, when our friends Lisa and Greg asked us if we would be interested in renting the old farm house they were in as they were preparing to do a mission trip to the Dominican Republic, I jumped at the chance, not that I needed any more stress in my life but I just needed a change, something different and perhaps a move that would help lift me out of my spiral of intense sadness and grief. Greg and Lisa were renting it from a pilot who worked for United Airlines and lived in Chicago, he had plans to retire, move to the farm, tear down the old farm house and build another. When he found out that Greg and Lisa were going to leave he was very interested in getting another good, responsible tenant in the house who would be willing to do repairs and tolerate the inconveniences that go with living in an old, run down, drafty house. The rent was cheap if we were willing to sort of rent it 'as is'. We moved in on Labor Day weekend just in time for me to start my new teaching career on Tuesday morning and gave Lisa and Greg time to

pack and leave for the mission field, however, those plans fell through at the last minute so they didn't leave before we arrived and we moved into the beautiful, old, drafty farm house at 3718 Halverson Rd. with Greg, Lisa, their 5 kids and our 3 kids. It had 4 very small bedrooms, 1 bathroom and one of the most uniquely renovated kitchens I had ever seen, complete with an old Franklin pot belly stove right in the middle of it. 8 children and 4 adults all scrambling each morning to get ready for the day had me convinced I **was** in the right place at the right time, I fell in love with the place and we all had a blast living, working and playing together in our new role as 'country folk'!! Eventually they left for their mission trip and we were left to fend for ourselves with very little knowledge of how to live on a farm and navigate all the chores and unforeseen obstacles that living in the country can generate. We didn't own a truck, a chain saw, a lawn mower or a snow blower, 4 items that proved to be as much of a necessity as the indoor, flushing toilet. But, eventually we figured it out, got all the necessary tools we needed to actually sustain our stay and fell in love with living on the farm. We got used to the wide, open space and slow, quiet pace of country living, the kids loved playing in and around 2 old tobacco barns, a small creek to wade in and almost 40 acres of woods to explore, we were hooked and knew we could never go back to the city but also were well aware we were just renting and this too would eventually end. However, as I mentioned before, our acquisition of the farm was pure luck, the pilot that owned it while living in Chicago got a job transfer to the state of Washington and was willing to sell the farm to us, all 100 acres, on a land contract for a price we couldn't refuse yet really couldn't afford, however, in 1993 we bought the farm. The piece of property has about 45 acres of tillable land so we just continued renting it out to the farmer that had been renting it for years who grew corn, soybean and wheat rotations conventionally, using pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers. In 1998 we sold the old farm house to my brother and his family on a 10 acre parcel and built a house on a parcel that is a bit elevated and gives us a pristine view of the back 40, the woods and Lake Kegonsa. In 2008 our son Franco started growing organic vegetables on a small piece of the property

and, every subsequent year since then we have pulled more and more of the acreage out of conventional land and turned it into certified organic. I am very proud to say, as of this past year the whole farm is certified organic with a diverse mix of alfalfa hay, vegetables, various nut and fruit trees, a small apple orchard, 23 acres of pasture for custom rotational grazing of cattle, chickens, and goats that I hand milk, and a 7 ½ acre pollinator habitat where we are currently raising bees. With the continued support from family and friends which we refer to as 'our village' and a few local super heroes, John, Janelle, Paul, Jackie and Luke who have been swooping in to save the day, we have transformed this property into a food forest and a little piece of heaven here on earth. Sadly, in 2014 my husband Ronaldo passed away and the future of the farm was in jeopardy, or at least in question. What to do, how to move forward without him, without his working hands and skillful help as well as the loss of emotional and financial support to keep the farm going. It was a huge loss and forced us to re-evaluate. We had worked so hard to finally create this amazingly diverse and sustainable ecosystem, void of chemicals and poisons and full of potential to produce a wide variety of food, yet there was doubt that we would be able to continue without him when I received a notice in the mail from the Town of Dunn to apply to the PDR, property development rights, program. I knew a little about this program as we had applied for it several years after its inception in 1997 but had never been selected, so you can imagine how grateful I was to finally have been selected to receive the PDR grant through the collaboration of Groundwell and the Town of Dunn in 2017. Through their generous financial support and focus on ecological resilience to maintain, protect and enhance the rural character of the Town of Dunn, I was able to keep the farm and know that its beauty and valuable soil will remain protected from the outside forces of potential ruin chasing after greed for generations to come! Knowing that I or anyone down the line can never succumb to the pressure to rape and destroy the land for limestone, or development and urban sprawl, or worse, gives me peace of mind that this farm will remain farmland for ever. Groundswell has helped foster in us a true sense of the value of and necessity of good

land stewardship and as we witness the tragic loss of family farms, where Wisconsin sadly leads the nation, I am convinced that it is even more important that we, as a culture support and embrace family farms with our vote and money. As Aldo Leopold so eloquently said (a quote I found on the Town of Dunn website), “We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong we may begin to use it with love and respect.” I respectfully call myself 'country folk' now, I am forever grateful for this unintended country life, farm and hard-work that found me and I recognize all the opportunities it has awarded my life by filling it with amazing relationships and community as we touch the earth gently together.

This year we are taking a break from CSA and focusing more attention on the pasture. In the past we have grown more than 40 different types of vegetables to be able to supply enough vegetables for up to 50 families for a 20 week period of time during the summer early fall but as we have become more diverse in our operation we realize that this is maybe more work that we have hands and time to do. We put the pasture in two years ago and the past two years we have rented out our pasture to other farmers who needed more pasture space for their cattle but this year we are hoping to buy our own cattle and raise them on our own pasture. We will still grow vegetables for the our family and the Stoughton Farmer's Market as well as a few other wholesale accounts but we plan to have organic grass-fed beef available by the fall and winter for sale either by the pound or by ¼, ½ and whole sections. We also plan to participate in a few community events this summer in the Town of Dunn that will showcase a few of the farms in the town that may include a progression tour and/or eating event, these are in the planning stages right now. Lastly, we are hoping to create space to offer an AirBNB to folks who want a more rural experience, farm breakfast, feeding animals and maybe even milking goats.