

ALUMNI NOTES

WINTER-SPRING 2015

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“We wanted to know where our meat was coming from.”

Caroline Fiske Owens (GSM'86) and her husband, David (ENG'90), who raise organic livestock on a 112-acre farm in Pennsylvania

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Life on a Farm

A small family farm becomes a full-blown business for alum couple

IN THE WINTER-BLUE LIGHT OF THE Pennsylvania dawn, Caroline Fiske Owens leads 12 sleepy-eyed children across the frozen mud to her barn, where a ewe is giving birth. The children are stunned into silence as Caroline helps the animal deliver twin lambs.

Caroline (GSM'86) and her husband, David (ENG'90), host a number of these lambing slumber parties each February and March—lambing season—to give children the opportunity to experience life on a working farm. The children help feed the animals, administer medication, and weigh and tag newborns. At the end of the weekend, the children head home with a new perspective on farm life. But for the Owensens, raising sheep is more than just a way of life. It is their life's work.

The couple met in 1986 on an Appalachian Mountain Club biking trip in Martha's Vineyard when they were both still studying at BU. Caroline, who went on to work in marketing, and David, an engineer, were drawn together by their mutual love of the outdoors and their shared passion for environmentalism and sustainable living.

In 1990, a few years after they married, the couple moved to a 13-acre farm in Pelham, N.H., where they began raising sheep, pigs, and chickens without chemicals or growth stimulants. "We wanted to know where our meat was coming from,"

says David. When neighbors and friends began requesting organic lambs and chickens, their small family farm became a full-blown business.

"The local food movement was under way, and we were at the beginning of it," Caroline says.

As their farm's reputation grew, the Owensens, who have three children, began offering educational programs; by 2008, their farm had outgrown its land. The family relocated to 112 acres in Sunbury, Pa., where they began offering educational programming like the lambing slumber parties and adopt-a-sheep, which allows a sponsor to follow the life of a ewe. They also expanded their organic methods, like grass feeding their livestock and rotating

their pigs and sheep from field to field, a practice that cuts down on parasites and the need for antibiotics.

The business was not without growing pains. Among other adaptations, the couple learned how to adjust their equipment to the larger space, like developing portable fencing that can be moved with the livestock as they switch fields. "The challenge of being a farmer is owning a lot of land, buildings, and capital," David says. "You have to insure it and maintain it."

The Owensens are eager to share what they have learned over 25 years. They host a workshop that covers sheep grazing strategies, marketing, and meat production, and they hold a lambing clinic, which brings together shepherds, veterinarians, and farmers for sessions on sheep health and management practices.

"We are strong believers in peer-to-peer mentoring," says Caroline. "Today's sustainable farmers are forging bridges between traditional production methods and new technologies, and that knowledge base is continually adapting. We are all working together to meet the needs of a public that is increasingly seeking humanely raised, healthy meat."

"For Dave and me, sharing our knowledge is our way of giving back to the public that has created for us a rewarding and meaningful life, both personally and professionally."—GIGI MARINO

Drawn together by their passion for sustainable living, Caroline Fiske Owens (GSM'86) and her husband, David (ENG'90), raise organic livestock and host educational programs on their Pennsylvania farm.



ROBERT LANDRY (2)

