



Meadow Squier and her daughter

## Spotlight on Squier Family Farm

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The last year has been a big one for Meadow and Josh Squier. The couple took on their first mortgage for 300-plus acres of land, started building a house and welcomed a second child to their family—all while running their diversified Squier Family Farm in Middletown Springs

When they started the farm in 2011 on family land with a ¼-acre of vegetables, six chickens and two goats, both worked off-farm and they raised their first \$6,000 on the Kickstarter crowdfunding platform. As the Squiers gradually expanded the size, complexity and ambitions of their efforts, they carefully evaluated risks and rewards with the goal of building a sustainable business that contributes to a sustainable world.

### Are we making money?

Meadow always knew she wanted to farm animals and had come to understand that they could play a key role in building soil health. On the other hand, Josh studied adventure recreation at Green Mountain College but, by the time he was a senior, he had also decided he wanted to farm. “Local food was in the zeitgeist,” Josh recalls. He worked for Greg Cox of Boardman Hill Farm in West Rutland who taught him that agriculture is both a business and a mission. “He was always asking, ‘Are we making money on this?’”

Meadow kept her job at a local school until two years ago, an invaluable base source of income and benefits for the couple. They also acknowledge their good fortune in being able to get established on family land with no debt. Starting with small FSA loans of \$5,000 and \$10,000 for equipment helped them set goals and prove that they could make regular payments. By the time the couple started working with their FSA loan officer on the recent big mortgage, she knew them well. Meadow recalls, “She told us, ‘You have more work to do before this is going to happen.’” It took them a good year to develop the business plan and secure funding from FSA and the Vermont Agricultural Credit Corporation.

### Taking the long view

Squier Family Farm has grown into a complex interwoven web of agricultural practices producing grass-fed beef and goat meat, goat milk soap, organic vegetables and vegetable starts, berries, rice, wood-boiled maple syrup and seasonal wreaths. They sell through a CSA, the Rutland Farmers’ market and also supply vegetables to the Farmacy Project of the Vermont Farmers Food Center that aims to increase access and consumption of healthy foods for at-risk families in Rutland County.



Rice drying to save seed for the next season,  
Squier Family Farm

Meadow and Josh take the long view. Even eight years in, Meadow says, “We’re just starting this.” With an eye to the future, the farmers have planted more than 2,500 hazelnut and chestnut trees along with mixed fruit trees such as apples, pears, plums, peaches and cherries. Their new acreage also provides the opportunity to cultivate trees that will produce high-value veneer logs in 60 years. “We’re young now,” Josh says. “We have energy. We’re planting trees and things that take time.”

The multi-faceted, long-term approach is a form of risk management. “We are thinking about a world where the weather is more erratic,” Josh says. Their exploration of

agroforestry and silvo-pasture include planting trees like mulberry, poplar, willow and black locust. These species can provide some fodder for goats and cattle, reducing dependence on grass and hay during the increasing periods of drought. The trees also provide shade to protect grass, as well as windbreaks and shade for animals. “A combination of grazing and trees is the best thing in New England for sinking carbon,” says Josh. “This is how we can make Vermont more resilient.”

### Division of labor

The couple splits responsibility between animal and vegetable production, each playing the supporting role to their partner’s area of focus. Josh takes the lead on vegetables, Meadow on livestock. They consult each other but “we don’t have to discuss every aspect,” she says. “You only have so much brain capacity,” Josh adds.



Silvo-pasture at Squier Family Farm

Over the years, they have made the time to educate themselves through conference workshops and UVM

Extension programs, as well as relying on expertise from the

Vermont Vegetable and Berry network. The couple uses Excel and QuickBooks to track agricultural and financial records with payments and incoming revenue deposits automated as much as possible.

They also make efforts to track their time and revenues by farm product, going so far as to use the stopwatch app on their phones. This has provided helpful data leading them to prune certain vegetables from their roster and also scrutinize specific growing or other business practices. Some decisions are less about data than life balance; they have concluded that devoting whole days to the farmers market is harder with kids and, though the markets are usually profitable, they’re working on cultivating more wholesale markets in their mix.

## No cookie cutters

While some might find the complexity of Squier Family Farm overwhelming, the Squiers relish the variety. “One of the reasons farming is great is it isn’t cookie cutter,” says Josh. With two kids and a mortgage, the couple has a new set of tasks including evaluating life insurance policies and writing wills. They are both incredibly thankful for nearby family on both sides who help watch their little ones. “The childcare piece is enormous,” says Meadow. “Family and community make it work,” adds her husband.

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