

NEW FARMER CASE STUDIES

Hickory Hill Farm

Jack, Maria and their nine-year-old son, Jonathan, are novice, part-time farmers living on a small farm in Central New York State. Jack has been an administrator of human service and youth development organizations for the past twenty years. Maria is a Middle School Guidance Counselor. While they have lived in rural areas before and since being married in 1986, it has been Jack's dream to have livestock and to farm on a part-time basis.

After considering different farm names since purchasing the farm in October 2000, they settled on Hickory Hill Farm approximately one year ago. The farm sits on the crest of the hill overlooking the Chenango River Valley. Due to its Southern exposure and slope, Shagbark Hickory, an Appalachian Tree species, is the predominant tree species on their land.

The farm operation was started in 2000 with the initiation of a "family and friend" pastured poultry initiative. A family vegetable and herb garden was also started in summer 2000. The ten-acre property is comprised of approximately one acre of buildings and lawn, six acres of pasture and three acres of woods. The farm currently produces pastured poultry - a cooperative venture involving family and friends, eggs, lamb and a productive vegetable and herb garden. The lamb is marketed in New York State through direct sales to individuals. Surplus eggs are sold locally.

Jack, the principle operator seeks to operate a farm that keeps the land productive without compromising environmental quality, and that represents their family values of growing and consuming healthy, life affirming food; cooperative effort and rejection of corporate control over food, fun and health. Jack and Maria have studied holistic financial planning and initiated a family budget for the first time. With the assistance of Phil, a local Holistic Management Educator and Karen, an NRCS Grazing Nutritionist, Jack is developing a holistic grazing plan and has conducted biological monitoring on the pastures.

Currently they are seeking to "get a handle" on the financial component of their lives while developing their farm and food producing capacity. Jack utilizes Holistic Management principles, because they are consistent with his belief system and life experience. Holistic Management also challenges Jack intellectually, an important benefit of Holistic Management.

Holistic Management Beginnings

Jack first met with Phil, a local Holistic Management Educator, in

November of 2001 when Phil approached him about using Holistic Management with the non-profit agency where Jack serves as Executive Director. This was Jack's first formal exposure to Holistic Management. After presentations to both the staff and board of the agency, Jack expressed interest in furthering his personal learning. In the summer of 2002, he began attending Holistic Management learning community gatherings held monthly. Phil coordinated the meetings to allow those interested in Holistic Management to get together and discuss what they were learning in a casual atmosphere. The group met for approximately one year and afforded Jack an opportunity to discuss the practical application of Holistic Management with a small group of interested practitioners.

Phil approached Jack about using Holistic Management to help guide the development of his farm operation and Jack was excited about having Phil's help. Phil met with Jack and Maria for the first time during early 2002 and provided them with Holistic Management literature and information. It was decided that they would meet again to discuss holistic financial planning, as that was a major area of interest. Jack was interested in bringing the farm into line with the family's overall financial objectives. Jack familiarized himself with the financial planning model, which provided a good first step.

The greatest benefit Jack's family realized from studying holistic financial planning was that they now utilize a budget, something they had not done before. Their motivation for this was to gain a better understanding of their expenses and revenues and to be more conscious and deliberative in their spending, savings and investments, which was important because the financial impact of the farm operation was negatively affecting their household budget.

The next step in learning more about Holistic Management was to conduct biological monitoring, which was followed by holistic grazing planning. Karen, an NRCS Grazing Nutritionist, Phil and Jack conducted biological monitoring on his farm in October 2003. Much was learned about the pasture make up, and this will be a good baseline to measure progress as he fine tunes his grazing plan. A follow up meeting took place to conduct pasture quality and grazing planning.

Whole Under Management

1) Decision Makers: Jack is the primary operator and decision maker on farm decisions.

2) Resource Base: There are ten acres of land, farm buildings

and equipment, mobile pastured poultry and sheep shelters, vehicles, Holistic Management Community, family and friends, business acquaintances, literary resources, local agencies and organizations including Cooperative Extension, Central NY RC&D and internet sites.

3) Money: Income is derived from off farm income and farm sales of lamb, sheep and eggs.

Hickory Hill Farm Holistic Goal:

Quality of Life: Hickory Hill Farm (HHF) will demonstrate that part time farming can provide high quality, natural meats, eggs and produce for a large extended family, friends and a select customer base. Cooperative ventures will be explored and encouraged and will be supplemented by sales of natural farm products at premium prices. Cooperative ventures will include processing of poultry, use of neighbor grasslands for grazing or hay, and assistance in maintaining and improving agricultural infrastructure. As the land around the farm becomes increasingly suburban, HHF will demonstrate that the grassland resource need not become an energy sink and chemical repository, but can become an increasingly productive, ecologically diverse system for growing food, increasing biodiversity and altering the trends of corporate consumerism and food insecurity.

Summary:

- We want to raise high quality natural meats, eggs and produce.
- We want to maximize cooperative systems of food production to benefit family, friends and a select customer base.
- We want to demonstrate that the increasingly suburban landscape can become a productive, ecologically diverse system for growing food and increasing biodiversity.
- We want our farm operation to pay for itself and to make a modest profit.

Forms of Production:

- Jack's time - an average of 15 hours per day.
- Jonathan's and Maria's time - an average of 2 hours per week, each.
- Adequate permanent and temporary fencing and other farm infrastructure
- Livestock management that meet Holistic Management criteria

Future Resource Base:

- HHF will have family and friends that are engaged, active and

excited to participate in cooperative food production ventures.

- HHF will have a loyal customer base that pays premium prices for premium food.
- HHF will have a farm system that reduces external inputs and costs and maximizes sustainable forms of production.
- HHF will demonstrate the viability of having small acreages within the rural - suburban interface - become cost effective units of agricultural production that enhance ecological diversity and aesthetic quality.

Testing Decisions:

- 1) Whether or not to keep our original Ram when we purchase a second Ram.
- 2) Whether or not to buy hay from the same source we have for the past two years.

1) Whether or not to keep our original Ram if we purchase a second Ram.

a. Cause and Effect: The problem is the need to improve the genetics of the herd. I think I know what kind of sheep I want to raise now - those that require minimal external inputs (grain, veterinary services, etc.) and do well on pasture and hay. Our primary agricultural product is freezer trade lamb and the ram should take us in the direction of efficient and meaty lambs. The ram I have currently should probably be evaluated to determine if he is taking us in the right direction. If he is, we still need to determine whether or not to keep him when we get a second ram. He is a docile animal and fits well in our family-oriented operation. It may be possible to bring a second ram in for one breeding cycle - this is another option.

b. Weak Link -

1) *Social:* There is more of a management issue and more risk by keeping two rams.

c. Marginal Reaction: Unless the ram is moving our genetics in the direction we want in a substantial way, it would not be worth it to keep him.

d. Gross Profit Analysis: Not applicable.

e. Sustainability: It doesn't lead me to the future I describe from the perspective of not improving the economic performance.

f. Society and Culture: I need to have the ram I have evaluated for how he is moving the flock towards my production goals

Jack utilizes Holistic Management principles, because they are consistent with his belief system and life experience.

(grass-hay efficient, meaty- fast growing lambs, etc.). Once the ram is evaluated I will know whether to keep him for another season or to sell him and to bring in the next ram to improve my flock. I also want to explore bringing in another ram for a short time, and/or a swap.



*Holistic
Management
Educator
Phil Metzger*

Decision: Evaluate current ram

2. Whether or not to buy hay from the same source we have bought it from for the past three years.

a. *Cause and Effect*: The problem is to maximize the feeding of hay and to reduce the feeding of grain. This is only possible if the quality of the hay is high. The hay we have been purchasing is cut late and the quality is poor to fair. Changing quality of hay would address that issue.

b. *Weak Link* -

1. *Social*: Continuing to buy the hay from Ralph will not have any adverse social impacts, but not buying hay could.

2. *Financial*: It doesn't strengthen the weakest link in the chain of production - my time. Buying poor hay also has an adverse impact on the need for external inputs - more grain, resulting in the same or more expense when compared with the purchase of higher quality, perhaps more expensive hay.

c. *Marginal Reaction*: The purchase of high quality hay provides the greatest return toward my holistic goal for time and money spent

d. *Gross Profit Analysis*: Not applicable.

e. *Energy/Money, Source & Use*: Not applicable.

f. *Sustainability*: Purchasing the poorer quality hay will not lead toward the future I described in my holistic goal, the higher will.

g. *Society and Culture*: The single biggest issue about the quality of this hay is when it is cut. It is cut late. The protein content of the hay is low. I may call Ralph and let him know I would take 3 - 400 bales if he cut it in June rather than August. Otherwise, I need to find another source of affordable, high quality hay.

Decision: Give Ralph a chance to provide high quality hay.

If we look at the impact of Holistic Management, we see the following results:

Decision/Process	Result
Keep only one ram	Reduce labor and stress ↓
Change hay source	Improve feed source ↑

Decision Testing Summary

Decision—Best way to address genetics of flock. Should they keep old ram if they get new ram?	Pass	Fail	Not Applicable
Cause & Effect		X	
Weak Link-Social			
-Biological			
-Financial		X	
Marginal Reaction		X	
Gross Profit Analysis			X
Energy/Money Source & Use		X	
Sustainability		X	
Society & Culture		X	
Outcome—Check genetics of old ram first. If he isn't performing, swap for one that it is.			

Decision—How to get better quality hay. Purchase hay from same source	Pass	Fail	Not Applicable
Cause & Effect	X		
Weak Link-Social			X
-Biological			X
-Financial		X	
Marginal Reaction	X		
Gross Profit Analysis			X
Energy/Money Source & Use			X
Sustainability	X		
Society & Culture	X		
Outcome—Give current supplier one chance to meet hay requirements.			