

## Pownal farmers: Drawn to the lifestyle

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POWNALE — The day for Angela and Brian McGinness begins with hauling water back and forth in five-gallon buckets to feed the livestock they keep on Two Spoon Farm.

After that, much of the day is spent "rotating fences" over the 40 acres they lease from Chris and Shannon Barsotti. The grass must first be worn down by the cattle and sheep so the chickens and turkeys can be moved in. The chickens need to be moved almost every day, as they mess up the ground faster than the other animals, Angela McGinness said, while giving the goats their first milking of the day.

The goat milk gets fed to the pigs. Two Spoon farm doesn't yet have the equipment to process and sell goat milk to people. "We just got them as an experiment," Angela said.

Two Spoon Farm is a meat CSA (community supported agriculture) operation. People buy shares in advance, which provides them a certain amount of meat. Those with shares can come by the farm, located at 141 Roizen Road, on CSA days to pick up their meat.

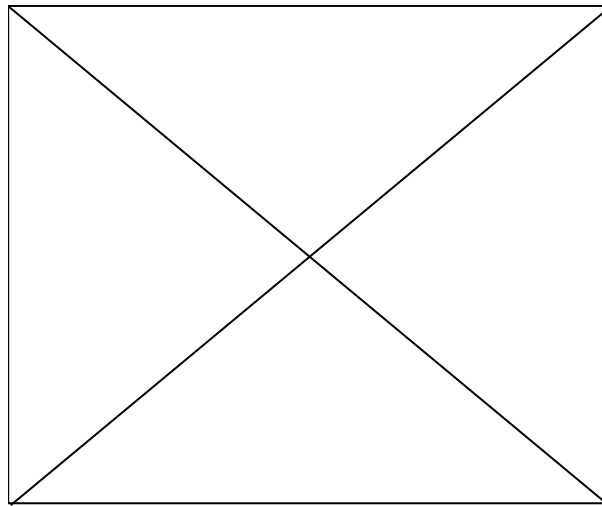
Leasing land

Few of the structures at the Two Spoon Farm are permanent. All the fences are plastic and the barns are tarpaulin tents. On hot days the fences get moved into the shade to give the animals cover from the sun, Angela said.

As much work as the farm is to run, it took a fair amount of effort to get it started. This is the Two Spoon Farm's first season and it didn't start coming together until April. The

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decision to do it didn't come until the fall. "We've been chasing the farm dream for a long time," she said.

"You can always come up with a reason why you can't do something," Brian McGinness, who also works as a biology teacher at Mount Anthony Union High School.

Brian and Angela McGinness aren't strangers to farming. Both worked on farms before coming to Vermont two years ago. Angela worked a farm in North Dakota and Brian had some farming experience in Arizona. "Vermont is friendly to small farmers," Brian said.

Taking the plunge into farming first involved acquiring land. Angela McGinness and Shannon Barsotti met while taking their children to a play date, which is how they came to lease part of the Barsotti's property. The next step was buying all of the equipment, feed and livestock.

"At the beginning it's scary because we had to go into debt and find out market," Angela said. She said they had to go \$25,000 to \$30,000 in debt to get the farm going, but plan to pay it all off this season.

Leasing land was also a compromise. "The dream is that you have your own beautiful farm in Vermont, but we're not in a financial position to own," Brian said.

Getting the business end of the farm set up took many late nights in front of a computer screen looking at spreadsheets, Angela McGinness said. "We've been around agriculture enough to see alternate marketing methods," Brian McGinness said.

The farming itself wasn't without its trials either. The first time they processed chickens, the McGinnesses were up until 4 a.m. That left them two hours to sleep before they would start their day watering the animals.

"The cows got out one night and Brian was up all night chasing them," Angela said. He nearly had them home when a car scared them off again.

While the animals on the Two Spoon farm are free-range, and the cows are fed grass and the chickens are fed only grain and what they can scratch up, they are not certified organic as none of the animals, so far, have been grown on the farm, Angela said.

The McGinnesses are involved with the Walloomsac Farmers Market, where they have gotten much exposure and support. "We've got a lot of encouragement from other people, especially other farmers," Brian said.

Having people buy shares in the CSA operation in advance made it easier for the McGinnesses to raise capital for the farm, Angela said.

This season the McGinnesses plan to pay off the initial debt and they think they'll make a little money. Brian said he would someday like to teach part-time and become a full-time farmer.

"It's a whole lifestyle," Brian said. "It's more than just a business."

Two Spoon Farm is one of at least four commercial farm operations in Pownal.

The farm offers grass- and organic-fed chicken, turkey, pork, beef and lamb, according to a brochure. For information, call 802-823-7308.