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Sustainable Living

Farms with a Future: Creating and Growing a Sustainable Farm Business
Rebecca Thistlethwaite
Chelsea Green
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As a farmer and sustainable agriculture consultant, Rebecca Thistlethwaite understands how important it is to share information about small farmers who have redefined success, finding ways to sustain their families, their communities, and the planet. The stories of innovative farmers who have embraced their "inner entrepreneur" fill this collection and serve as ample inspiration for readers who are dreaming of their own farming ventures, as well as those who are searching for new approaches.

With chapters organized around specific principles such as "Identifying Your Market Niche" and "Harvesting and Processing," the emphasis of Thistlethwaite's book is incorporating necessary tools for survival and profit in a family-based business. In each chapter, case studies of a variety of farms across the United States are told through inviting stories, bringing each principle to life. From the Amaltheia Organic Dairy, in Montana, which explores record-keeping and regulatory compliance in Melvyn and Sue Brown's goat farm, to Minnesota's Hoch Orchard and Gardens, which articulates the need for eagle-eyed accounting practices and financial management, every aspect of small farming businesses is examined and made clear through detailed examples.

In perhaps the most inspirational story of the book, in the "Equipment and Infrastructure" chapter, the story of Matt and Jerica Cadman's Shady Grove Ranch, in Texas, demonstrates that careful, incremental planning can grow an idea into a lifestyle. When a digestive illness threatened Matt's livelihood in his early twenties, he and his wife decided to start farming to see if conventionally-grown food (and the stress of living a nine-to-five lifestyle) was the problem. It was. They started small with a herd-share program, marketed their meat, milk, and eggs to college friends and fellow church-goers, and have been able to steadily slowly grow their business.

Each chapter contains photographs of the farms and farmers, which helps drive home for

the reader that these are real people who have—through sacrifice, planning, and hard work—found ways to farm that supports their values. Additionally, each chapter ends with "Take-Home Messages," a bulleted summary of dos and don'ts that affirm much of what each family farm story demonstrates. A superior book for its information, organization, and examples, *Farms with a Future* is essential for dreamers who intend to be doers, and doers who are seeking more creative dreaming.

Jennifer Fandel