ForeWord Reviews

SUSTAINABLE LIVING

The New Horse-Powered Farm: Tools and Systems for the Small-Scale Sustainable Market Grower
Stephen Leslie
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As homesteading and back-to-the-land movements gain momentum, many people are drawn to small-scale farming, where they feel more connected to the earth and its rhythms. Although there are plenty of cutting-edge tractors and implements available to them, sustainability-minded growers are gravitating toward more traditional methods for cultivation and farm maintenance, and often that means employing horses.

In his outstanding guide *The New Horse-Powered Farm*, Stephen Leslie covers a wide range of topics that will help many readers feel more comfortable about introducing horse labor into farming and gardening. “A quiet revolution is occurring out in the heartland,” he writes. “Largely dismissed by industry and government and most often ignored by the press, thousands of small farmers across the nation are bringing workhorses back onto the land.” With his comprehensive, crucial presentation of best practices, it’s likely that Leslie will serve as informal mentor to thousands more.

Leslie backs up his advice with extensive experience; he and his wife manage an organic farm in Vermont, and he previously served as an apprentice at a biodynamic farm in upstate New York. His book has its origins in a series of articles Leslie wrote for *Small Farmer’s Journal* about working with Fjord horses, which he expanded into a thorough, useful guide that will shepherd farmers through choosing a breed, basic horse care, training horses, making compost, and plow usage, among other topics.

Also well articulated are topics on growing, including use of plastic mulch, seeding cover crops, and planning vegetable fields according to horse-powered harvest methods. Throughout, Leslie includes numerous photos that illustrate his main points and some of the horse breeds and harness systems that vary from farm to farm.

In addition to handy sidebars with plenty of tips, Leslie includes commentary from other farm owners, making the book into a rich compendium of opinion and advice.

Fascinating and exceptionally well written, *The New Horse-Powered Farm* is a major

work that deserves to be on the shelf of every small-scale market grower, whether they use horses or not.

Although he covers an variety of technical information—right down to thoughts about the tongue length for implements pulled by draft ponies—Leslie writes in an accessible style that's understandable to the layman. When he veers slightly into the realm of sustainability issues like water retention and soil conservation, he introduces an idealistic tone without sounding dire or political. He simply believes in what he's doing, and conveys his beliefs with passion and commitment.

Elizabeth Millard