

Organic Flower Business Adds To Orchard

When Calli Garvin returned to her IT job after 12 weeks of maternity leave in 2021, she decided almost immediately that the corporate world wasn't her future. She began considering what kind of work she could do to supplement her husband's income.

"Grant works with his parents and brother at Gilchrist Orchard, a family business," she says. "I had always loved arranging flowers, so I decided to start a floral business for weddings. I reached out to people I knew who were getting married and got some orders."

To fulfill those initial orders, she purchased flowers at the Minneapolis Farmers Market to deliver the wedding arrangements. Not long after, Grant suggested they start growing their own flowers for Calli's arrangements. Calli says she followed through on the idea by planting their front yard full of cosmos and zinnias.

"The following year, wedding bookings grew to 15, and we saw an opportunity for a larger growing area, so Grant tilled more than an acre of ground at the orchard site."

Calli says she and Grant got a real boost during the startup phase of Cal & Lily Flower Farm by attending an online workshop on floral farming and floral design from Floret, a flower grower in Washington state.

"We learned so much from that series on what flowers to grow, how to grow them, and also about the flower-arranging part of the business," she says.

Calli strongly believes in growing only organic flowers.

"I discovered early from arranging flowers bought from a wholesaler that many wholesale flowers have been treated with chemicals. In my case, those treated flowers caused numbness and irritation to my hands. So I vowed that the flowers grown at Cal & Lily Flower Farm will be chemical-free."

She primarily grows zinnias and cosmos, along with some scabiosa, marigolds, delphiniums and dahlias. Since most of these flowers don't start blooming until midsummer, Calli is considering adding earlier-blooming tulips and daffodils to extend the season of flowers in bloom.

Since one good idea often leads to another,



Calli Garvin, her husband Grant, and their family have turned a flower-growing hobby into a revenue-generating business.

the new flower-growing plot at the orchard site has led to the launch of a "Saturday U-pick" service. Customers can make appointments to cut and arrange their own bouquets. By naming the new service The Flower Farm at Gilchrist, Calli hopes to expand the summer flower experience by adding a coffee bar, other beverages, sweet treats, picnic tables, workshops and maybe even breakfast.

"I just love the social opportunities and

meeting new people that the beautiful setting of the orchard and flower fields provides," Calli says.

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Farm Business Features Bin House And More

"This farm was headed for industrial development or big-box retail, but I bought it because I wanted to see it remain a farm with happy, healthy animals and thriving crops," says Alabama farmer Jon Fleenor.

He and his wife's 640-acre "Katie Farms" is located near the Tuscaloosa National Airport. Fleenor and his wife, Margaret, have added one enterprise after another since purchasing the property in 2007. They love to show it off to schoolchildren, senior citizens and anyone else. Visitors see free-range chickens and long-haired Scottish Highland beef cattle, taste fresh honey, pick their own blueberries, and pet the barn cats in Katie Farm's "catuary."

The couple's passion for sharing the wonders and beauty of their farm animals and bountiful vegetables was one of the reasons they were named County Farmer of the Year by the Kiwanis Club of Greater Tuscaloosa.

The farm maintains 10 acres of tilled ground for heirloom vegetables, 200 acres of pasture for cattle, and the remaining area in native timber and wetlands.

The rich garden soil produces heirloom purple sweet potatoes, tomatoes, okra, onions, garlic, purple new potatoes, corn, peppers and summer squash. Much of the produce is sold to local restaurants in the Tuscaloosa area. Several restaurants highlight and promote "vegetables grown within a few miles of this restaurant on a local family farm."

On the advice of a neighbor, the couple started keeping honeybees to help pollinate their open-pollinated vegetable crops. They keep about a dozen hives and have been able to sell some of them locally.

Fleenor planned a beef cow-calf herd from the start and considered all breeds, finally settling on the Scottish Highland. He says they're the oldest registered cattle breed and seemed like a good fit for their farm. Fleenor has sold more than 50 registered Highland bulls to producers. He also crosses his Highland bulls with Red Angus cows and has trademarked the name Highland Red for the resulting breed. Fleenor says the cross produces "the most desirable traits of both breeds, including well-marbled meat."

Another attraction at Katie Farms is a well-furnished two-story apartment. Jon and Margaret designed and built it from a 24-ft. dia. grain bin in their spare time. Jon purchased the bin in Montana and had it trucked to Alabama. They worked on the project for two years, installing living, sleeping and eating quarters. Jon says the toughest part was figuring out how to install square windows in the circular bin walls. They positioned the windows to catch the winter sun and offer a view of the pastures and their herd of Highland cattle.

The couple doesn't live at Katie Farms. Jon says the bin house "is our little getaway spot." It's also available to relatives or farm guests traveling through the area.

Jon and Margaret say that in their operation, the mission focuses on outreach.

"We're eager to provide agri-education in Western Alabama and are proud to have introduced farm life to groups such as YMCA day campers, students of all ages, Girl Scouts, OLLI participants, and senior



Jon Fleenor and his wife, Margaret, designed and built a two-story "bin house" from a 24-ft. dia. grain bin as part of their Katie Farms operation in Alabama.

living facility residents."

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They Specialize In Lightning Strike Protection

WB Lightning Rods of Glasgow, Del., installs and repairs lightning rods and systems to protect houses, barns, stables, pole barns and trees. With offices throughout Florida, Texas, Oklahoma and Alabama, the company provides protection across the U.S.

"Lightning poses a serious threat to rural America, especially on farms, where barns, stables, pole buildings, livestock shelters and valuable equipment are vulnerable," says William Burden, owner and CEO. "A single strike can spark devastating fires, destroy electronics, damage structures, and endanger people and animals."

These accidents can result in tens of thousands of dollars in damages and far more when livestock, stored crops or farm machinery are involved.

"We specialize in complete lightning protection systems for farm buildings, homes, and commercial or industrial buildings. All our systems use high-quality, UL-approved copper and aluminum

materials and are installed to meet or exceed NFPA 780 standards."

While many people believe lightning rods attract lightning, they actually provide a safe, low-resistance pathway for massive electrical charges to follow. This keeps buildings intact and protects livestock and people from harm.

"Farm structures tend to be the tallest points in open areas, making them prime targets during thunderstorms," says Burden. "Worse, lightning can ignite hay, damage electrical systems in milking parlors, and create costly power surges that destroy computers. A well-installed system will dramatically reduce these risks."

Family-owned since 1950, WB Lightning Rods is fully licensed and insured and holds an A+ rating from the Better Business Bureau (BBB).

"We're different from our competitors because every project is personally supervised by one of the owners, and all work is performed in-house by our own crews, trucks and equipment. No subcontractors," says



While many people believe lightning rods attract lightning, they actually provide a safe, low-resistance pathway for massive electrical charges to follow.

Burden. "This ensures consistent quality, attention to detail, and reliable results from start to finish."

The company is versatile, with a team that's willing to help customers evaluate their home designs.

"Our teams ensure every system is code-

compliant and built to last," says Burden.

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