

Farmer-Turned-Mentor Offers Virtual Coaching Services

Lisa Wheeler Duff of Oak Spring Farm in Freeland, Md., offers virtual business coaching for workers in the agricultural industry.

"My consulting business grew out of my own journey as a CSA farmer," she says. "Twenty years ago, I started Oak Spring Farm with a passion for growing food but very little understanding of how to run a profitable farm business. Like many farmers, I focused on production and assumed the business side would somehow work itself out."

Those early years of farming were marked by many mistakes.

"I underpriced products, overcommitted my time, and tried to be everything to everyone. But as a single mom with three kids, I didn't have the luxury of farming as a hobby. It had to support my family."

The pressure worked, and Wheeler Duff built a profitable Certified Organic CSA farm that generated more than \$200,000 annually on just 4 acres.

"Other farmers began asking me how I made it work," she says. "I realized that many were struggling with the same challenges I had faced. That's when CSA Love was born."

Wheeler Duff stepped back from the day-to-day operations of her farm to focus on mentoring. Today, she helps beginning and growing CSA farmers build profitable, sustainable farm businesses without sacrificing their families, health or love of farming. She focuses on one-on-one coaching, often through a six-call coaching program.

"This gives us enough time to identify challenges, create a plan, and implement

meaningful changes," she says.

Sessions are virtual, allowing her to connect with farmers worldwide.

"Each coaching relationship is tailored to a farmer's specific goals. We might cover launching a CSA, improving profitability, streamlining operations, strengthening marketing, or creating better work-life balance."

She's also expanding resources on her website to provide farmers with practical tools and guidance for 24/7 access.

Duff offers an introductory coaching package for new and growing farmers, consisting of six 45-min private sessions for \$600.

"I ask farmers to commit to the same day and time each week and to show up prepared," she says. "Coaching isn't a passive experience. These conversations can be challenging because we often uncover the root causes holding a farm business back and develop practical solutions. Six sessions give us enough time to build momentum, implement changes, and see measurable results."

She also offers a free 30-min discovery call to help farmers determine the fit.

"Coaching is a partnership. It's important that both of us feel confident moving forward."

Clients see real results. Currently, one is a first-year farmer using grant money to work with her.

"We recently completed 10 sessions, and he's already signed up for 10 more. Together, we refined his crop plan, filled his CSA, strengthened his confidence as a business owner, clarified his purpose and vision for farming, and developed a marketing strategy to grow his audience. Watching him move through his first season with clarity and con-

fidence has been incredibly rewarding. That's what I love most about coaching — not just helping farmers solve immediate problems, but helping them build the skills, systems and mindset needed for long-term success."

Next on the agenda is the launch of group coaching programs.

"One of the greatest benefits of group coaching is that farmers can learn from others' experiences," Wheeler Duff says. "This industry can be isolating, and there's tremendous value in hearing how others have solved similar challenges. Group coaching will also help reduce the per-session cost while creating a supportive community of farmers who are learning and growing together."

Wheeler Duff's most common advice is simple.

"Treat your farm like a business, not just a production operation. Many farmers spend hours figuring out how to grow better crops, with very little time understanding their numbers, marketing, pricing and customer experience."

In this way, she helps farmers identify the bottleneck holding them back: pricing, marketing, poor systems or a lack of boundaries.

"You don't need to grow more to make more," she says. "Most farmers assume the solution is to scale up. In reality, improving efficiency, increasing retention, raising prices and creating better systems can increase profitability without adding acres, employees or stress."

Her mission remains the same: to help farmers build businesses that support the life they want.

"Whether you're dreaming of starting a



"We might cover launching a CSA, improving profitability, streamlining operations, strengthening marketing, or creating better work-life balance," says Wheeler Duff.

CSA, trying to make your existing farm profitable, or simply looking for more balance in your life, reaching out for support can dramatically shorten the learning curve."

Interested farmers can visit her website for free resources and tips to protect their profits while living the life they love.

"Reach out to me directly for a free discovery call. Sometimes one 30-min call is revolutionary."

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Confined to a wheelchair after an industrial accident 17 years ago, Clark began building custom sheep wagons. Today, his Wyoming Sheep Wagon Company repairs vintage wagons and builds highly functional new ones.

Accident Led To Custom Sheep-Wagon Business

When an industrial accident left George Clark in a wheelchair 17 years ago, he set out to create a future filled with hope and purpose rather than inactivity and depression.

Clark discovered his purpose at a draft-horse sale in Colorado, where he saw a sheep wagon sell for \$15,000 at auction.

Not long after that sale, Clark and his wife, Lori, started their Wyoming Sheep Wagon Company in Buffalo, Wyo. After adopting the company slogan — "Building the Future, Preserving the Past" — the couple hasn't looked back.

Sheep wagons are compact, mobile cabins invented in the 1880s for shepherds in the

American West. They allowed shepherds to live on the open range for months at a time while tending their flocks.

Clark's first sheep wagon was built on the running gear of an old draft-horse cart. To get started, he recorded measurements of a sheep wagon at a nearby museum in Buffalo. He uses lodgepole pine lumber from the nearby Big Horn Mountains to build them. The lumber is milled, planed and kiln-dried on-site. Most of the wagons Clark has built are 10 ft or 12 ft long and sell for \$20,000 to \$30,000.

His latest model will be 20 ft long and will feature a king-size bed, side-opening doors, a wood stove with a front-exit chimney, solar panels for electricity, a deluxe chuck box mounted on the back of the wagon, and a wheelchair lift scavenged from an old school bus. All of Clark's wagons are covered with sailboat canvas, which withstands severe hailstorms common in the West.

Although the Clarks have sold many wagons to sheep farmers in Wyoming and nearby states, they've also identified emerging market niches, including agrotourism, hunting camps, Airbnb rentals, family celebrations, and even "glamping" — a style of camping that blends the adventure and nature of traditional camping with the modern amenities and comforts of a luxury hotel.

Past wagon buyers include the governor of Wyoming, several museums, and even hotel owners who offer the novel option of overnight stays in a sheep wagon.

The company employs a full-time shop manager, but Clark is hands-on during construction despite being confined to a wheelchair.

"I'm Scotch-Irish and I'm stubborn," he says. "I knew I couldn't just sit and watch somebody else have all the fun working on the wagons. So I designed and built a



Clark has built wagons that sell for as much as \$30,000.

wheelchair platform measuring 40 in. high by 4 ft wide by 10 ft long, with a 24-in. wide by 10-ft expanded-metal ramp. My scissor-lift wheelchair allows me to work even at the top of a wagon."

Asked how he gets new business, Clark says word-of-mouth is the best form of advertising.

"The sheep farmers all know each other, and they often work together, so if one of them likes our wagons, the rest of them call us when it's time for a new wagon."

He adds that the color photos of sheep wagons on the website are helpful for discussing wagon features and options with customers before they build their wagon.

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