

Money-Making Ideas To Boost Farm Income



"We want individuals with disabilities to be the face of the farm. Navarro Farm is a place to grow, no matter your abilities," says Sherri Navarro.

Farm Caters To All Abilities

Navarro Farm in Frankfort, Ill., offers an inclusive space where people of all intellectual abilities can grow. Founders and visionaries Damion and Sherri Navarro were initially looking for a property to store their construction business's heavy equipment.

"But as we walked through the soybean field, I felt God's presence to focus on other people's needs, not our own," says Damion.

Inspiration struck the pair to use the property to create an inclusive farming community that served people like their son, Carter, who was born with a congenital heart defect and Down syndrome.

"We'd never farmed before, but the idea was heavy on our hearts," the Navarros say. "We invested all our savings into this project."

Navarro Farm launched as a nonprofit in September 2020. Since then, it has supported

over 600 participants with intellectual disabilities in exploring farming. The property has expanded from its original 5 acres to more than 30, including both owned and rented land. It features a barn, fire pit, fruit orchard, vegetable and flower gardens, vineyard, pumpkin patch, caregiver quarters and plans for a greenhouse.

"We were going to knock down the big barn on the property, but a local farmer told us it was sound. Instead, we renovated it, and now it's a feature point of the property."

Early on, the Navarros ordered semi-loads of gravel to make the farm accessible to all participants and to provide access to dozens of garden beds.

"We wanted people of all abilities to interact with the raised beds. It took a lot of Googling to figure out the best systems."

That's in line with the farm's mission, which suddenly occurred to Sherri one night.

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Today, the farm offers program sessions throughout spring, summer and fall. Programs run from 9 to 11 a.m. on Mondays and Wednesdays, with participants divided into groups to work with the raised beds, tend to the animals, prepare produce for resale at Carter's Corner farmstand, and interact with customers. A chef even leads hands-on dirt-to-dish cooking classes.

Selected farmers who have completed all

sessions are eligible to apply for training programs to help with field trips, transition schools, corporate teambuilding exercises and more.

Beyond this programming, Navarro hosts various community events that keep farmers in the spotlight. Farmer's Got Talent has become a popular event. A live nativity also keeps things busy during the winter. Once the farm builds a greenhouse, there's hope for year-round programming.

"We're always seeking donations and volunteer support to accommodate as many participants as possible."

Finding staff can be a challenge.

"We work hard to build our teams with people who have a heart for our mission," says Navarro.

The farm's programming has a much wider impact than just farm work.

"We've changed the landscape of our community dramatically," says the Navarros. "People really see the difference in a society where individuals with intellectual disabilities aren't hidden away but are part of society. The best thing is that we empower our farmers to take ownership of the farm and property. They do a great job."

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"You really become one with the herd," Rury says. "Along the trail, the goats will wander next to you, between you, in the woods. They love to show off all their different and unique personalities."

Goat Treks Offer Nature Experiences

Hoof It Goat Treks of Galena, Ill., lets walkers explore the woods and prairies alongside a herd of attention-loving goats.

"This venture began in 2019 as a way to teach my sister and me how to start and run a business while saving for our college educations," says co-founder Sami Rury. "It started as a side hustle with my sister, then things took off."

The business idea came about when the family's two pet goats, Willow and Otis, followed the sisters on a walk through the woods.

"It became something fun we did as a family," says Rury. "Then, when we were thinking of ways to help pay for college, our mom, Christina Eisbach, had the idea to open up our walks to the public so people could

join us on the trail with our goats."

That spark of an idea has since blossomed into a full-time, year-round operation, with 44 goats and counting.

"The land we operate on is organically managed family land that has been in the family for four generations," says Rury. "Hoof It has allowed us to share our land with others and to get people outside, exposed to nature and animals."

Each trek is a stroll suitable for most ages and abilities. It includes multiple stops to let the goats forage and share goat facts, along with background information about Hoof It and the family land. One stop is designated for group photos and for hand-feeding carrots to the goats. In most cases, it takes 45 min to an hour to complete the 1.25-mile loop. They tend to maintain a ratio of one goat for every two people.

"You really become one with the herd," Rury says. "Along the trail, the goats will wander next to you, between you, in the woods. They love to show off all their different and unique personalities."

While the business offers wine-tasting treks, a foraging hike with a salve-making class, a "Goats + Floats" root beer tasting experience, and a kids' summer camp, the public goat trek remains the most popular activity. Private goat treks are also available for those who want an exclusive experience with just their group, the goats and a guide. The business is open year-round, but reservations are required for all events and treks.

The business isn't without its challenges.

"There's a unique balance of operating a full-time business while also caring for a herd of goats," Rury says. "It's like managing two full-time jobs at the same time."

Sometimes that's a good thing.

"Waking up in the morning and starting the day with chores has a way of resetting the mind. We can have a meeting in town, then get back into our farm clothes to scoop manure when we finish; we wouldn't have it any other way."

The business also brings other joys.

"Offering an experience that emphasizes fun and education on organic family land with animals is a true passion of ours. Sharing it with others every day is such a joy," says Rury.

The family also appreciates the opportunity to provide its dozens of goats with an amazing, natural lifestyle, including natural forage, time in the woods, and love from all the guests.

"Our goats truly love going out on the treks. The herd is always our top priority, and being able to give them this kind of lifestyle is something we're so proud of. They're the most spoiled goats you'll ever meet!"

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