

Money-Making Ideas To Boost Farm Income

Capybaras get excited for yoga sessions, doing zoomies before settling into laps and bringing a playful calm to the class.



Farm Offers Unique Animal Yoga

Westmeister Farms of Shelby, Ohio, offers yoga classes alongside two otter companions. The farm, which opened to the public in 2023, has gained popularity through viral TikTok videos showcasing its menagerie. Highlights include a two-toed sloth, a zebra, kangaroos and African crested porcupines. Private tours allow visitors to interact with more than a dozen animal species, both native and exotic. For many visitors, the highlight is the chance to practice yoga with the otters.

"I was looking to add new event classes to my virtual yoga studio, Meta Soul Yoga Studio, so I knew I wanted to reach out to places to see about hosting events," says Trish Sexstella, Westmeister Farm's yoga instructor. "I grew up on a farm and was president of 4-H and FFA, so I was hoping to incorporate animals into a class but

wanted to do it in a very animal-forward way."

For Sexstella, the Westmeister Farm's commitment to putting animals first stood out.

"Originally, when I emailed, I thought the owner would want me to do goat yoga or yoga by the highland cows... but she was the one who replied, asking if I'd want to teach yoga with otters. I stared at that email for a while and then started giggling excitedly. Do I want to teach yoga with otters? Ya otter believe it!"

Sexstella began experimenting with the classes a year and a half ago.

"It's been magic ever since," she says.

"There's a lot any animal can offer us in different ways, but otters are unique. Currently, we're the only place in the world where you can do yoga with otters."

The farm's two yoga otters, Harbor and

Cove, are known for being a riot.

"What makes us unique is that we give the animals free will, which others especially appreciate," says Sexstella. "I've learned to see how the animals interact as well, and now I tailor the class and poses around what they seem to like the most."

Beyond otter yoga, the farm offers classes with capybaras and sloths.

"Each session is an hour long, and the classes are very different because the animals are different," says Sexstella. "Some days the otters are very talkative; some days they take naps during class; and others they jump from person to person, off their shoulders or backs. We never know how they'll be on any given day. The capybaras get very excited about yoga, do zoomies, and then settle into a few laps. During sloth yoga, we get into relaxing, supportive poses while we watch him crawl around the branches and check us out before we do a meet-and-greet. That class is very slow; we embrace our inner sloth."

For participants, these yoga sessions offer many unique joys.

"My favorite part is the genuine, unfiltered, natural, raw joy in people's faces," says Sexstella. "So much of today's world is planned, filmed multiple times just for social media, set to look a certain way. When I post photos of our class, just looking at the facial expressions in the pictures makes me smile so much."

Still, there can be challenges. These primarily involve enforcing boundaries to keep the animals safe.

"We didn't anticipate how much otters love earrings and how easily they could get them out of people, posing a serious choking risk,"



Otter yoga classes pair poses with visits from Harbor and Cove, whose playful antics make each session unique.

says Sexstella. "The capybaras love trying to eat yoga mats, so we use towels instead."

All safety details are shared via email in advance.

"Now, our biggest challenge is that we sell out quickly."

Classes start at \$80 per person and sometimes book up 6 mo in advance. Kids over 10 are welcome as long as an adult accompanies them. Private tours are occasionally offered after yoga for \$65 per person. They last up to 2 hr and include opportunities to feed and interact with animals.

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Retired construction worker Gilbertson creates eclectic artwork on materials ranging from saw blades to empty refrigerant tanks to 12-ft tall metal dinosaurs.

Artist Creates Unique Artwork

"My mother put a pencil and paper in front of me when I was 4 years old and asked me to draw a picture. I drew a fine-looking dog, cut it out for her, and I've been drawing and painting ever since," says retired construction worker John

Gilbertson, now in his 70s.

Over the years, he's painted farm scenes on 36-in. dia. sawmill blades, created a life-size shark on metal the size of an automobile hood, and painted Minions on refrigerant canisters.

"When someone comes up with an idea for artwork and a 'canvas' to paint it on, I can get it done," Gilbertson says. "In the spring of 2026, a good friend bought a 'life-size' rusty metal dinosaur. He asked me to paint the head and face of the 12-ft tall by 12-ft long creature, but I got carried away and painted the whole thing. It took me 28 hr, but now he's got a colorful, iconic, one-of-a-kind prehistoric parade animal mounted on a tandem-wheeled trailer."

Gilbertson paints like a person who plays piano by ear. He creates farm scenes, animals, still lifes, and landscapes on any medium, mostly from memory or small photos.

"Some artists have to sketch a scene in pencil and then paint it, but I can just look at a picture on my phone, scale it in my mind, and put paint on canvas, metal or any other material," Gilbertson says. "I've done farm and cabin scenes, life-size tigers, elephants, sharks, birds, horses and cattle. I've done memorial artwork for people's pets and created life-size eagles in patriotic scenes."

When a friend brought in two refrigerant canisters, two days later he'd turn the bland gray jugs into colorful minions.

"He really loves them, so I created a whole family that he has displayed in his shop," Gilbertson says.

Other creations include remaking the artwork on the sign for Al Capone's northwoods



Gilbertson turned plain gray refrigerant canisters into a colorful family of Minions now displayed in a friend's shop.

retreat for a local taxidermist and producing a 3-ft by 5-ft compilation of Chicago that he titled "City of Big Shoulders." It depicts the skyline, Dick Butkus, Al Capone, Wrigley Field, Chicago hot dogs, and the Chicago theater district. He also creates large metal bird and butterfly yard ornaments.

"I took a few art classes in high school, won Gold Key awards, and wanted to go to college, but that didn't pan out," Gilbertson says. "I worked construction, and painting became a nice hobby. The best advice I got was from an art teacher who told me, 'John, you're an artist, not a camera; paint it the way you see it, and people will like it.' I took that to heart and have been running with it ever since."

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