Summary & Resources - Old Homeplace Farm
June 2025 OAK Farmer Field Day


Community-Supported Agriculture and Pastured Livestock

Maggie and Will Bowling are building their diversified family farm on hard work, educated decision-making, smart systems, creative marketing and good old-fashioned trial-and-error. Innovation and adaptation have enabled Old Homeplace Farm to expand its product offerings and customer base. Maggie and Will continue learning from the land and lived experiences over ten years of farming in Clay County. The Bowlings led a tour of their farm on this early summer Farmer Field Day, sharing about the growth of their vegetable Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) and pastured livestock operation.

Farming Journey

Maggie Bowling is no stranger to vegetable production and marketing, growing up on her parents' organic vegetable farm in Southern Ohio. When she and Will were married, Maggie easily integrated into the Bowling family's pastured livestock operation and helped manage their wholesale meat CSA and retail sales, adding vegetable production to Old Homeplace Farm in 2014. Starting out at farmers markets, Maggie added an online store, with pickup and delivery in multiple southeastern counties.

The customer-centric online marketing was a novel idea for the region at that time, and it eventually led Maggie to develop a CSA in 2018 for the customer base she had built through local markets. Old Homplace Farm has never looked back, now selling almost exclusively through their CSA shares and a couple of aggregated CSA programs. "It's hard to disentangle the farm from the CSA," Maggie explains. In 2023, Old Homeplace Farm joined the Kentucky Farm Share Coalition (KYFSC), expanding their customer reach through Kentucky employer workplace CSA programs. They now sell small, medium and large shares to cater to customers of various demographics and preferences.

The Bowlings' meat CSA, launched in 2012, grew out of several years of adding diverse livestock to their cattle operation and selling custom-processed meat from pastured pork and grass-fed goat, lamb and beef. In 2014, they began providing retail meat cuts as add-ons for their vegetable CSA customers. Will and his parents have since diversified and improved their pastures over time, integrating cool-season grasses, select native forages and silvopasture–adding trees to their pastures for shade, soil health and stability and additional crop offerings.

Good Crop Farming Practices

Maggie is very familiar with certified organic practices from her years of experience growing up on her parents' organic farm, and, although Old Homeplace Farm is not certified organic, its practices are informed by and align with National Organic Program (NOP) regulations. Maggie's crop production centers "healthy soil biology, coupled with the use of crop rotation and cover crops, allowing Old Homeplace Farm to maintain healthy crops without using synthetic pesticides or chemical fertilizers."

Maggie uses Tend.ag to do her crop planning, helping her visualize her crop rotation, field layout and harvest timing. A few seasons ago, Maggie noticed how difficult it was to plant new successions in August due to other farm demands and has mitigated this by increasing long-duration plantings of crops like peppers, potatoes, tomatoes and others that don't need to be planted in succession.

Maggie rotates her crops within and between seasons to reduce pest and disease pressure and prevent nutrient deficiencies. By alternating which crop families are planted in each part of the farm, Maggie breaks up the life cycle of common pests and pathogens and diversifies the nutrients that light- and heavy-feeding crops consume or contribute to the soil. (Tip: NOP regulations require crop rotations and the removal of non-organic mulches (e.g., landscape fabric, tarps) after one crop season as a best practice for organic growers.)

To prepare beds for planting, Maggie uses occultation (with silage tarps), mowing and tillage. Cover crop blends at Old Homeplace Farm often include, at a minimum, grass, legume and root crops, providing multiple benefits for the soil. A fall-planted, overwintered cover crop mix, like cereal rye, crimson clover and tillage radish, adds biomass and organic matter, breaks up compacted soil and "fixes" nitrogen in the soil. In early spring, Maggie flail-mows her cover crop and covers it with a black UV-resistant silage tarp for two to five weeks before incorporating it into the soil with tillage. When a bed is being "flipped" from a spent crop to the next, similarly, Maggie flail-mows any remaining crops and weeds, applies fertilizer and/or compost (based on her soil test results and the season) and tarps the bed for two to five weeks to decompose the residue.

During the tour, Maggie described her various low-tunnel systems. When the weather is hot, she grows lettuce under a shade cloth and frequently irrigates it to keep it cool, which extends the lettuce season. For crops susceptible to pest damage, she uses ProtekNet to keep flea beetles, cucumber beetles and other pests off the crops. She noted that the coverage can also increase moisture and disease pressure, so she keeps a close eye on those crops. For in-season weed management in a crop bed, Maggie uses a flame-weeder to create a "stale seedbed" for direct-seeded crops and landscape fabric for transplanted, longer-term crops.

Maggie's has implemented several efficiencies into Old Homeplace Farm's vegetable production to make their high-yield, small-acreage, low-labor operation run smoothly. Some examples of this:

- Tarps and landscape fabric are neatly folded and stacked onto pallets, organized by type of landscape fabric (e.g., 2 rows of holes that are 18" apart in-row).
- Tarps are cut in half (from 100'x32' to 100x16') to make it possible for one person (most often Maggie) to move by themselves.
- Maggie's packshed is laid out for an efficient flow of harvested produce to quickly move from field to cooler
- .After years of primarily using drip-tape irrigation on the farm, Maggie shifted to overhead irrigation in the field using Senneger Xcel Wobblers. While drip irrigation can be a more

water-efficient way to irrigate crops directly at the root zone, it is inefficient in other ways: it creates plastic waste, is not easily reusable, involves more labor time to set up and take down and requires more mid-season maintenance. Each wobbler is affixed onto the top of a light-duty (easy-to-move!) T-post with zip ties and fed by orchard tubing. One line of this setup can water three beds on either side of it. Maggie continues to use drip tape under landscape fabric for her high tunnel crops to prevent high humidity, which can encourage disease.

Maggie's labor force has typically been two to four local teenagers who help with planting, weeding and harvesting. Maggie has been intentional in building relationships and trust with her employees and genuinely enjoys spending time with them. She has learned to play on each employee's strengths and give them specific tasks that they are in charge of (which sometimes coincides with her least favorite tasks!). For example, one of her employees loves to clean, so she is in charge of scrubbing and sanitizing all harvest bins and the pack shed when harvest is done.

Improved Pasture Practices

Ronnie, Gloria and Will Bowling purchased land from a family member and started their livestock farming as a traditional cow/calf operation. New to farming, they learned by doing, succeeding and failing along the way, and remaining open to exploration. Utilizing technical assistance and educational opportunities from the University of Kentucky's Forage Group, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Kentucky Forage and Grassland Council, the Bowlings made rotational grazing part of their system and began improving their forage to improve land and animal health. Blending native warm- and cool-season grasses boosts biomass for hay production and provides a greater diversity of forage, so when some species are less productive, others are thriving. They initially added small ruminants to the operation to control weeds, but those have also provided Old Homeplace Farm with additional market products, like breeding stock, fiber and meat.

Will and his parents divide their pastures into multiple paddocks for rotational grazing using step-in posts and poly wire that connects to the perimeter high-tensile electric fencing. Depending on weather, livestock needs and what they are trying to accomplish, they move the animals about once a week, sometimes leaving the small ruminants (Katadhin sheep and Kiko goats) in a paddock for an extra few days to control patches that have a lot weeds (ironweed and brambles in this case). When the goal is to put on more weight, they move animals through a paddock more quickly. The Bowlings aim to leave about half of the forage in a paddock standing.

With open pastures and increasingly trampled, bare treelines on their edges, Will sought options for shade for his livestock and started silvopasture plantings of fast-growing sycamore and cottonwood trees in his pastures in 2014. He has since added black walnut, pecan, persimmon and pawpaw trees to add diversity and harvestable native crops. Will purchased his bare-root native trees from the KY Division of Forestry and the Missouri Department of Conservation (100 trees for ~$30) and uses tree tubes with a fiberglass stake to keep the tube in place ($7) to protect the bareroot tree seedlings from deer and livestock.

Will shared that they have a fair amount of predators in the area, including coyotes, bobcats and dogs. He and Field Day participants shared multiple experiences with livestock protection options, including guard animals (dogs, llamas and donkeys) and night pens. Will and his parents have tried guardian dogs, but deemed the time it took to train them (3 years) and the cost of raising them to be excessive, so they now lock small ruminants into night pens. Will shared the nightly ritual of putting

the animals away makes him check on them more frequently and intentionally, which also helps him be a better manager.

Will does not have a lot of parasite pressure, and he keeps it that way with frequent pasture rotation, selecting (and culling as appropriate) for parasite-resistant stock (low EBVs), and monitoring parasite loads by doing fecal egg counts. Will shared that sending manure to a lab is inexpensive, but he uses a cheap ($125) microscope and McMaster's slides to count the eggs himself. It takes him a couple of hours to collect samples and a couple of hours to prepare slides and count eggs. Old Homeplace does not use any dewormers in their breeding stock, but they do treat kids and lambs one time right after weaning.

Learning by Doing

Maggie and Will combine firsthand knowledge and education with a commitment to continual learning in their farm's progression. Adding to their families' farming experiences, both farmers bring degrees in natural sciences and the completion of the immersive Kentucky Agriculture Leadership Program to inform their decision-making. They also seek out farm-based research that can help with production challenges and choices. From a query on whether their practice of alternating beds of high tunnel tomatoes with beds of "greasy beans" offers more than anecdotal benefits, to blending multiple species or adding perennials to their pastures for soil and animal health, Will and Maggie continue to learn, study and improve from and for their farm.

Surviving two floods that submerged most of their fields, destroyed fencing, damaged infrastructure and wasted materials and soil health, the Bowlings have adopted practices to protect their investments:

- Storing folded tarps and landscape fabric on wooden pallets for quick removal from flood-prone areas
- Using cover crops and planting perennials to restore and hold soil in place
- Improving drainage in and around the crop fields to reduce damage
- Installing a deer fence that can be easily removed ahead of predicted flooding to prevent it from dragging through critical infrastructure
- Leaning on the help and assistance from others.

Maggie and Will grow and improve their farming using innovative ideas, paying careful attention to the land, crops and livestock, and knowing they're not in this work alone. Explaining her purchase of organic vegetable starts from a local farmer to allow herself time to recover from spring floods, Maggie said: "I love our farming community, and it's a reminder that you do not have to do every aspect of farming yourself in order to be a good farmer."

Gratitude

OAK is grateful to Will and Maggie Bowling at Old Homeplace Farm for their hospitality on a HOT summer day and their time and efforts for this Field Day, to Grow Appalachia for providing essential participant support and to all the farmers and ag professionals who joined us to share in the learning and conversation.
Grow Appalachia and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Institute of Food and Agriculture provided support for this Field Day. OAK's Farmer Education program is supported by the Kentucky Agricultural Development Fund (KADF).

Related Resource Links:

OAK Resources:

- Upcoming OAK Farmer Field Days - Hosted on working farms, these events highlight organic practices used in crop and livestock systems and best practices in production, marketing, business and resilience on Kentucky farms. Register today to learn from and with other farmers!
- Annual Organic Farming Conference - Save the date for OAK's 15th Annual Organic Farming Conference, *Cultivating Connections: Growing Organic Together for 15 Years*, January 30-31, 2026, at Kentucky State University's Harold R. Benson Research and Demonstration Farm in Frankfort.
    - Interested in speaking at the 2026 OAK Conference? Session proposals accepted until July 23, 2025.
- Kentucky Farm Share Coalition (KYFSC) creates market opportunities for Kentucky farms growing for community supported agriculture (CSA), a weekly box subscription of the farm's harvest. KYFSC partners with farms and employers to facilitate workplace CSA programs that incentivize employees to purchase CSA. Learn more today!
- Organic Production Assistance Program - The organic production consultation services provide dedicated organic technical assistance to commercial Kentucky farmers who are currently using or interested in adopting or expanding organic practices.
    - OAK Farming Tools and Templates
- OAK Transition Program - Organic Transition specialists assist farmers who are interested in transitioning to USDA-certified organic production. Organic Specialists are available for one-on-one consultations, providing a personal level of service and technical assistance on-site, at the farmer's convenience.
    - The Midwest Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP) is a coalition of partners across 11 states providing mentorship, technical assistance and wrap-around support for transitioning and existing organic producers. With TOPP support, OAK connects farmers transitioning to organic with local, experienced organic mentors in the Organic Farmer Mentorship program.
- OAK Conservation Program: Conservation Outreach Coordinator provides one-on-one assistance for Kentuckians interested in adding conservation practices to their land or farm management on owned or leased land. Eligible participants are Kentucky farmers and landowners with production or subsistence farms, urban or rural growing spaces, community-run projects or privately managed lands.
- Join OAK today! The organic food and farming network in Kentucky is growing, and together, we can create a thriving local food system. Your support and participation helps OAK deliver educational programming, provide community outreach and enhance market opportunities for growers across Kentucky! Receive discounts on OAK events and other member benefits!
- Sign up for OAK newsletters - For farmers and consumers, OAK offers a variety of regular communications to stay connected to Kentucky food and farming news, research and events.
- OAK YouTube - View recordings, snapshots and lessons learned from host farmers in past conference and field day playlists.
- Check out Suppliers and Farm Resources on OAK's Find-A-Farm Directory

Grow Appalachia Resources

- Grow Appalachia addresses food insecurity throughout central Appalachia through home and community garden initiatives, foodways, farming and hunger relief programming. As a Strategic Initiative of Berea College, Grow Appalachia partners with organizations, communities and families in Appalachia to create healthy, resilient and economically viable food systems.
- Beginning Farmer Series and Garden Grants
- High Tunnels and Growing Supplies - Social Enterprise - Kayla Preston

Soil Health Resources:

- Soul Fire Farm's How Alive Is My Soil?
- Cover Crops for Sustainable Crop Production - Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE)
    - Managing Cover Crops Profitably and Building Soils for Better Crops - SARE
    - Cover Crop Termination for Organic Growers - Johnny's Selected Seeds
- Cornell Soil Health Manual - Cornell University's College of Ag and Life Sciences
- Building Soil Health in the South - Organic Farming Research Foundation (OFRF)

Crop Production Resources:

- OAK Farming Tools and Templates
- General Production Resources | Center for Crop Diversification
- Organic Agriculture | Center for Crop Diversification
- Crop Rotation on Organic Farms | SARE
- Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Production Manual of the Organic Farming Unit at the University of Kentucky (UKY)
- High Tunnel Production Resources - University of Kentucky Extension
- Crops Under Cover - the most recent research-backed and farmer-advised row cover innovations; University of Kentucky
- University of Kentucky Plant Pathology Extension Publications for Organic Producers
    - Cultural Calendars for Commercial Vegetable Production
        - Beans
        - Broccoli, Cauliflower & Other Cole Crops
        - Cucumbers, Melons & Squash
        - Tomato & Peppers
    - Organic Commercial Spray Schedule for Field Production:
        - Beans, Broccoli, Cauliflower & Other Cole Crops, Cucumber, Melons
        - Peppers, Pumpkin, Summer Squash & Zucchini
        - Tomatoes, Winter Squash
    - Disease and Insect Control Program for Home-Grown Fruit in Kentucky, including Organic Alternatives ID-21
    - Disease-resistant vegetable cultivars can be found in the Vegetable Production Guide for Commercial Growers ID-36
    - Small Acreage & Backyard IPM Guides (for smaller-scale or hobby organic growers)
        - Bean & Pea IPM Guide for Small Acreage & Backyard Production
        - Cole Crop IPM Guide for Small Acreage & Backyard Production

        - Cucurbit Crop IPM Guide for Small Acreage & Backyard Production
        - Tomato & Pepper IPM Guide for Small Acreage & Backyard Production
    - The Department of Plant Pathology Extension Publications page contains additional resources for vegetables, fruit, and ornamentals. Many publications, such as cultural calendars and disease profiles, are not labeled as organic but contain important and applicable information for organic producers.
- Suppliers:
    - High Tunnels and Growing Supplies - Grow Appalachia, Berea KY
    - Walk-Behind Tractors and Hand Tools - Earth Tools, Owenton KY
    - Farm/Garden Supplies - Martin's Produce, Liberty KY
    - Farm/Garden Supplies - Shrock's Garden/Farm Supplies, Crab Orchard, KY
    - Farm/Garden Supplies - Deerfield Supplies, LLC, Elkton, KY
    - Organic Farm And Garden Supplies - Fresh Start Growers Supply, Louisville, KY

Grazing and Livestock Resources

- Small Ruminants (Sheep and Goats)
    - Small Ruminant Toolbox - SARE
    - Improving Profitability: Sheep, Goats, and Cattle - NCAT ATTRA
    - Tips for Marketing Sheep and Goat Products: Vegetation Management Services - NCAT ATTRA
    - KGPA | Kentucky Sheep and Goat Development Office
    - SRPS - Small Ruminant Profit School
    - Goat Production - Kentucky State University
    - Goats: Sustainable Production Overview - National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT)'s Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas (ATTRA)
- Livestock Management / Nutrient Cycling in Pastures:
    - Managed Grazing Tutorial - National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT)'s Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas (ATTRA)
    - Nutrient Cycling in Pastures - NCAT ATTRA
    - Building Healthy Pasture Soils - NCAT ATTRA
    - Forage Production for Pasture-Based Livestock Production - Cooperative Extension System
    - The Accrued Benefits of Adaptive Grazing - Soil Health Academy
    - Livestock Systems Promoting Soil Health and Biological-Based Fertility recording
    - Fertility Pastures book by Newman Turner - excerpts and content links
    - Pasture Feeding, Streamside Grazing, and the Kentucky Agriculture Water Quality Plan
- Forage
    - AGR-175: Forage Identification and Use Guide - University of Kentucky
    - David Mathis, Shelby Insurance Agency recommends that graziers always work with their FSA office to get a farm number and to file crop acreage (including hay) reports: FSA: Crop Acreage Reporting (farmers.gov). Necessary for crop insurance and good to have if the need arises to apply for disaster assistance

Funding /Technical Assistance Resources and Service Providers

- Kentucky Center for Agriculture and Rural Development (KCARD)
    - Free business planning for Kentucky farms and agribusinesses
    - Funding assistance and grant information (Kentucky and beyond)
    - Sign up under “GET UPDATES” on KCARD website to receive e-newsletters
- Kentucky Horticulture Council
    - Small-scale On-Farm Water Management Grant
    - GAP (Good Agricultural Practices) Cost-Share Program
- U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)
    - Read this first! A Guide to USDA Resources for Historically Underserved Farmers
    - USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA)-Kentucky
        - How to Start a Farm: Beginning Farmers and Ranchers
        - Find your county’s office in West Kentucky or East Kentucky
    - USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)-Kentucky
- Kentucky Department of Agriculture (KDA)
    - Organic Marketing Program
    - Grants and Funding Opportunities
- Grants:
    - SOAR loan - southern and eastern KY
    - KSU Small-Scale Farm Grant
    - County Ag Investment Program (CAIP) grant: county-specific! Ask your County Cooperative Extension Agent