



# ANIMAL WELFARE ON OUR FARMS

Creambrook Farm

## KEY STATS

Approximately 30% of our portfolio (by number of farms) supports animal agriculture.

- 10% represents diversified livestock operations
- 17% represents dairy operations

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

Learn about how integrating animals within organic systems benefits soil health:

- [Soil Health Principles](#)
- [Soil Health In Practice](#)

Some of our farmers belong to cooperatives or hold additional certifications that have animal welfare guidelines. Learn more:

- [Animal welfare on farms that produce for Organic Valley](#) (4 farms in our portfolio)
- [Animal welfare on farms that produce for Maple Hill Creamery](#) (1 farm in our portfolio)
- [Animal welfare at Savory Hubs & American Grassfed](#) (1 farm in our portfolio)
- [Animal welfare approved certification for dairy goats](#) (1 farm in our portfolio)

## CONTEXT

Healthy animals living in natural conditions positively impacts soil fertility, biodiversity, carbon sequestration, and ecosystem health. All ecosystems on earth have co-evolved with animals: they are essential to the health of the land. Organic and regenerative agriculture integrates animals and works with them in ways that mimic nature to support positive on-farm outcomes, from soil health to a farm's financial health.

Industrial agriculture is destructive to our ecosystems and degrading to the animals it keeps in confinement, while producing food in ways that are unhealthy for people. The information below highlights how and why Iroquois Valley supports farmers who raise animals using organic & regenerative methods, an alternative to the dominant conventional system that comprises approximately 99% of all farming in the US.

We credit the rise of vegetarianism and veganism in highlighting the serious shortcomings of industrialized animal agriculture. More recently, the increased awareness around regenerative agriculture has helped re-frame the way consumers consider animal habitat and welfare on farms. We hope that all eaters recognize the power of their dollars to create change in the food system - and that they use them wisely to support farmers like ours who are responsible and thoughtful in their work.

## ANIMALS & ECOSYSTEM HEALTH

Each farm is its own unique ecosystem. Our farmers use regionally relevant practices to manage their operations in ways that support healthy animals and landscapes, offering individualized care to their herds. Livestock are an important part of organic systems, whether animals live on those farms or not. Their manure is used to help vegetables and other crops grow in place of synthetic fertilizers that create runoff in watersheds and harm soil health.

Iroquois Valley supports small-scale livestock farmers that play an important role in their community and regional food systems. Meat and dairy from these farms is often purchased locally in direct sales, CSAs, cooperatives and grocery stores. These pastured, organic products offer an alternative for omnivores looking to avoid the industrialized meat system. The positive impacts of these producer-consumer relationships include humane treatment for animals, healthy soils and landscapes, and economic development across the regional supply chain, most notably at the farm.



## EXAMPLES FROM OUR LIVESTOCK FARMS

[Yker Acres](#) raises heritage breed pigs and cattle on boreal pasture in northern Minnesota. Their most basic goal is to create an environment where their animals can live as naturally as possible and play, graze, rest, and find shelter. Raising animals on pasture builds topsoil as animals graze, leave manure, and work it into the soil. On crop farms that do not have livestock, tillage is one tool used to work manure into soil, which can have varying effects on soil depending on the methods and tools used.

John & Holly Arbuckle farm at [Singing Pastures Farm](#) raising heritage breed pigs and grass-fed cattle in coastal Maine. They are modeling what they see in nature and attempting to create it through ecosystems, following the idea that in nature, there are no ecosystems devoid of animals. Singing Pastures is a non-industrial operation where animals play a role in increasing sustainability. Animals, including draft horses, replace the need for machines that require oil like tractors, or trucks to carry mined fertilizers. They believe they have a responsibility to raise animals well and ask themselves the question, “if we had to trade places with our animals, would we be willing to do so?” – they would because they are providing everything their animals need to live happy, healthy lives.

Both Yker Acres and Singing Pastures work with whole animal butchers. Because they recognize the sentience and sacredness of the animals they raise, they feel one way to honor them in death is by not allowing any part of them to go to waste.

“Raising animals regeneratively allows us to create topsoil, which is scarce and disappearing, capture carbon in the soil, and retain water, even in drought years.”

*Matt Weik, Yker Acres*



Mint Creek Farm

At [Mint Creek Farm](#) in central Illinois, the Carr family engages in an ongoing process to restore native prairie, an important Midwestern ecosystem now at only 4% largely because of agriculture and suburban sprawl. Their livestock graze rotationally and mimic the movement of the species that once grazed this landscape. Mint Creek raises sheep, poultry, turkey, pigs, goats, cattle, and honey on native perennial pastures.

Harry Carr, lead farmer, believes that “what we do best at Mint Creek is rest – nature happens when we rest our pastures in between grazing cycles.” After cutting hay, they leave the dried stalks in the ground, which feeds the soil and keeps it covered. At the same time, cut grasses in resting pasture retain moisture and will continue to grow, even through the dry seasons.

“We see farming as creating food in nature’s image. We are a haven for wildlife and have created a system where our farm is actually carbon positive – sequestering more carbon than we release into the atmosphere.”

*John Arbuckle, Singing Pastures Farm*

## FURTHER READING

- [The Benefits of Organic Meat](#) - The Organic Center
- [Raising Animals Sustainably On Pasture](#) - FoodPrint



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# EXAMPLES FROM OUR DAIRY FARMS

Iroquois Valley supports organic, pasture-based operations. Across our dairy portfolio, cows graze rotationally, moving frequently through paddocks to feed on fresh pasture. The remaining grass and manure from previously grazed paddocks feeds the soil and improves its capacity to cycle nutrients. Under the National Organic Program, organic dairy herds are required to be on pasture at least 120 days, but our farmers strive to keep their cattle out on pasture as much as possible. For those who choose to consume dairy, organic and grass-fed products offer high nutritional value, and can positively impact the land.

[Beyercrest Farms](#) is led by Rory Beyer, who raises cattle for dairy and beef, as well as organic crops, on about 500 acres in the driftless region in Minnesota. He produces milk for Organic Valley. Rory is the youngest generation on his family's farm and convinced his family to go organic in 2006 after they sampled their soil and saw that its organic matter was down to 1.7% after years of conventional farming. Going organic made it possible to earn more for their product, drastically lowered input costs (because manure is their fertilizer), and rebuild their soil.

Ben & Kristen Beichler raise their dairy herd on certified organic pasture in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley at [Creambrook Farm](#). Their cows are entirely grass fed, leading to a product packed with nutrients and omega 3's. They produce their own direct to consumer line of raw milk, which includes live enzymes in the product. Selling directly has enabled Ben & Kristen to set their own prices, which supports their long-term financial viability and ability to steward the land.



**"In just under eight years, we've grown our organic matter to 4% –even during drought years, we're sequestering carbon and retaining water."**

*Rory Beyer of Beyercrest Farms shown leading a field day on his farm during the 2013 drought.*

## PRACTICES ON OUR LIVESTOCK & DAIRY FARMS

- Farm systems integrate rotational grazing & pasture access for their animals
- Farm animals receive individualized care
- No Confined Animal Feeding Operations (CAFO's)
- No feedlots
- No manure pools
  - » Manure stays on pastures and becomes part of the nutrient cycle
- Two farms out of eight dairy farms use artificial insemination as a way to introduce genetics that support herd strength in a cost-effective way



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