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Lessons learned from the field

By Micayla Giffin
Giffin Farms

I can hardly believe I am approaching the end of my first row crop cycle in the wife's seat. Just six months ago we were planting tiny seeds, and then feeding and weeding them. Of course, we have science on our side and we hope we have Mother Nature on our side, but we are still extremely invested in an extremely risky crop. I thought I knew what went on behind the scenes. I thought I was prepared ... And as always, I learned I have plenty more to learn.

Row-crop farming is a different way of life, but it's a good life. It has stretched me and grown me and made me dig down deeper. As I reflect on this first season, there are four specific truths row crop farming has reinforced in my life.

Inputs change outcomes. Crop inputs like fertilizer, pesticides, and even the genetics in the seeds make all the difference in the health of our crops come harvest time. Modern agriculture has all kinds of tools to help us measure the health of our soil and our crops. Farm technology is becoming more precise. Soil sampling can show us which specific acres need more or less fertilizer. GPS keeps us from overlapping rows during planting and will even drive the tractor in straighter lines.

You see it's not just what we put in, but where and when and how. What a perfect reminder for life itself. I try to be careful with my mind, my body, my bank account, my time ... what I allow into my life today will have a monumental impact on what my life becomes in the future.

Do your best; trust God with the rest.
Giffin Farms Row Crop
Lets just be honest, we



Dust rises from a cornfield on Giffin Farm

all want control. Sometimes I feel like I want it more than others, but I'm learning that what I really need is trust - trust that the millions of seeds we put in the ground will soon poke through the Earth, trust that the heavens will eventually open and water our thirsty plants, trust that Derek's endless hours in the field will pay off in the end. We do our best, because we believe that it's the right thing to do. We can sleep at night, because we know that God is in the process of making our best a part of His plan.

Good things take time. Of the two of us, Derek has always been more patient. In fact, that was one of my favorite things about him. I'm really beginning to wonder if it was this lifestyle, putting seeds in the ground and then waiting, waiting, waiting for the return, that helped him cultivate this trait. Obviously I didn't love learning about patience this year, but it has helped me prepare for the more ultimate investments in life. The best things in life take time, and everyday on the farm makes me a little more willing to wait for them.

Roots matter. This summer I witnessed just how essential roots are. Plants with good roots withstood windy thunderstorms this spring and fierce drought this summer. Not only did they live through hardships, they dug deep

into the soil and produced something meaningful. People are the same. We need roots to get us through life's storms and give us nutrients for growth. Our roots can be good friends, family, passion, faith, anything that keeps you connected to the person you want to be. This summer has made me so thankful for the roots I have and so excited to grow new ones.

I guess I could put it more simply by saying the farm is teaching me more about responsibility, trust, patience, and purpose. Life on the farm is different from many, but at the same time it's still life. We face many of the same struggles and worries and challenges that everyone else does ... but in a unique way the farm forces us to stay grounded.

We are constantly faced with the reality that we will harvest what we sow, probably a long time after we sow it. We have no choice but to cultivate trust when we are unsure and patience when we are restless. We are required to dig deep to find purpose and meaning, because Lord knows this life is not easy.

But it is worth it ... just to witness all the tiny miracles of life, to be a part of the big job of providing the world's food and fiber, and to be reminded everyday of these little truths that help us live a happy life.

With a full (and slightly more patient) heart.

5 homestead skills that you can practice anywhere

By The Faithful Farm Wife
Special to The Press

When you hear the word "homestead" what comes to mind? Is it acres upon acres of land? Living off the grid? Livestock grazing?

A homestead can be all of those things, but it can also be none of them. My homestead is on six acres. We have electricity and running water so we are not off grid. We do have livestock, but only what our land area can sustain. Some people homestead on less than an acre of land and others work on their homestead skills while living in a city apartment. With these 5 basic skills, you can learn to homestead wherever you are.

5 Basic Homestead Skills

1. Gardening

If you have enough space to garden outside, you can plant straight into the ground (I prefer the Back to Eden method) or into a raised bed. If you do not have the land to garden outside, you can plant a window garden or a vertical garden. Growing plants indoors is convenient and it helps to purify the air in your home.

Window or Wall Garden Herbs grow great on a windowsill or in hanging wall planters. You can also grow flowers and greens this way. You can even use aquaponic planters in your window garden!

Vertical Garden

Veggies can be grown in a vertical hydroponic garden along a wall or on a floor stand. This is a great option for year-round indoor gardening.

2. Food Preservation

So you don't grow your own food yet ... that doesn't mean that you can't stock your pantry and freezer for the winter months. Make jams and jellies, wine and mead, apple butter, pickles, and more through canning, dehydrating, and freezing fruit and veggies from your local farmer's market!

Canning

You can learn to can by asking someone to mentor you, reading articles, or watching video tutorials. If you don't know anyone who can teach you face to face, then I highly recommend using video tutorial or a webinar in addition to reading articles. I also recommend starting out with hot water bath canning before moving onto pressure canning.

Freezing

Another option for food preservation is

freezing. Some foods require blanching before freezing, but many foods can be frozen without any additional prep.

3. Cooking from Scratch

Even if you don't grow your own produce or raise animals for meat, you can start cooking from scratch. Replace pre-packaged and processed foods with homemade goodies! A good place to start is with these recipes for biscuits and bread.

Keep your pantry stocked with staples that will allow you to make just about any food from scratch without needing to make a trip to the store.

4. Making Household Supplies

Cleaning

I started making my own household supplies because I ran out of cleaning spray and I couldn't get to the store to purchase more (we live way out of town). My all-purpose spray is my favorite homemade cleaner and I use it on everything from counters to floors to toilets.

Other cleaners that I like to make are dish detergent cubes, laundry powder, furniture polish, drain cleaner, and glass cleaner.

Paper Products

Paper towels, napkins, wipes... all of these contribute to a huge waste epidemic and they cost you money that you don't really need to spend. You can replace the disposable products with reusable cloth to help your wallet, your home, and the environment.

Bath & Body

Make your own soaps, lotions, body butter, salves, balms, bath bombs, and more! I LOVE using fresh goat milk for all of these products!

5. Budgeting & Frugal Living

Frugal living isn't limited to homesteaders, but it is vital to living a homestead lifestyle. Be conscious of your spending habits and make sure that everything you spend money on serves a valuable purpose.

Start out by creating a budget. Make sure that you set realistic numbers so that you don't get discouraged as soon as you start. You will want this budget to work for you, not set you up to fail.

Implement a cash envelope system for your monthly spending categories. This will help you avoid frivolous spending and overdraft fees.

Plan your meals and stick to a grocery list. Don't buy anything that isn't on your list. Download grocery rebate apps to give you cash back for your shopping trips.

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