



David and Jessica Hochreiter of H & H Farms in McKenzie with son Jaxon. "We can guarantee every single chicken in our coops, he's coddled," said David of the almost-four-year-old's love of farm life.

## Small farm offers Rent the Chicken program and more

By KAREN CAMPBELL  
Press Reporter

Huge is the norm. Huge stores require a small hike from light bulbs to a carton of milk. Huge farms encompass hundreds of acres and hundreds of thousands of dollars in equipment. Huge livestock barns are supplying chickens and pigs in the thousands.

But the small family farm is not dead. And to stay in operation, some, like H&H Farms at the corner of McKenzie, just 100 yards down the road from Weakley County, are getting very creative.

David and Jessica Hochreiter started their first-generation farm in 2016. Both are teachers. During the day he's talking to 8th graders in Humboldt about English, and she's working in special education in McKenzie. And, later, on the farm, they are practicing the very creativity they hope to inspire as they fashion yet another twist to the unfolding story of H&H Farms.

Not only are they producing pork sausage that has customers returning to buy out each new batch and selling fruit and vegetables at the local farmers markets including Martin and Dresden, but they are also offering families and schools the opportunity to hatch, rent and adopt chickens.

"We decided if we were going to do it, we are going to do it the right way," David said of their purchase of the 20 acres they now operate as an LLC.

They are relying on de-

greens in ag business and education from the University of Tennessee at Martin and special ed at Bethel University, along with their passion for farming, to shape new enterprises that will supplement their teaching jobs and provide school children with a chance to get their hands dirty while learning.

Their Rent the Chicken program allows "renters" to have farm fresh eggs in their own yards as the Hochreiters provide the chicken coop, two laying chickens, enough feed for six months and a book on how to care for the animals. For schools, they also provide a curriculum they've written and split the six months into two three-month segments so that if one set of third graders are tending to the chickens at the end of one year, another set can finish the job the next school year. The couple delivers and picks up the coops so that teachers are not responsible for maintenance during the summer months.

"We are trying to bring the farm as close to the kitchen table as possible," said David. "We know all too well that most kids are three to four generations from any type of ag background. We want kids to know where their food comes from and that there is an ethical way of raising and growing food."

Several families and several schools are taking part in the program, which costs \$450 for a six-month rental. Schools may qualify for grants to cover the costs.

Families sometimes decide to graduate from renting to adoption. When that happens, they get to keep the coop, hens, feeder, waterer and book for an additional fee.

For a similar, hands-on, up-close-and-personal-experience, they offer Hatch the Chicken. This program includes an incubator and seven fertilized chicken eggs for \$180 and three weeks of observation.

"They get to see the baby chicks hatch out of their shells," David said. And if the schools don't want to keep the chicks, they return them to the farm.

While the rental business is gaining traction, pork is the "moneymaker," David explained of the effort that began with two pigs and now encompasses 10 with the first litter birthed on the farm in January.

"That was the turning point for us as a family farm," he noted as they had previously had to purchase the piglets and raise them. H&H Farm uses the principles of permaculture, which is the development of agricultural ecosystems intended to be sustainable and self-sufficient. They run their 70 chickens over the same ground that they will run their fruit and vegetable crops through, thereby saving on fertilizer. Any fruits and vegetables that are left over, like a pumpkin with cracks or okra that

has grown too long, is fed to the hogs.

"Waste is profit loss. We are a zero-waste farm," David said.

They are also plasticulture gardeners using soil coverings to protect the valuable resource. And they started using drip irrigation this year.

David acknowledges that focusing on high-value/less-yield items like watermelon, peas and okra is more labor intensive, but he says they consider it a labor of love.

"We figure a successful season is when we pay the bills, and we get to make the family farm better than it was," he said, noting that the rent/hatch/adopt chicken programs help make that possible.

David is proud that in December, their efforts and his two tours of duty as an Army medic, earned H&H Farm the designation of Homegrown By Heroes. The Homegrown By Heroes (HBH) label is the official farmer veteran branding program of America. The label serves to inform consumers that agricultural products donning the logo were produced by U.S. military veterans.

More information about H&H Farms, 870 Mitchell Loop, McKenzie, TN, can be found on Facebook. For more information (731) 333-1266 or email at david.rogerreed@gmail.com.

## What does farm to table mean?

By AMANDA STEELE  
Special to The Press

Did you know 15 percent of the U.S. food supply is imported, including 50 percent of fresh fruits, 20 percent of fresh vegetables, according to food-safety.gov? It is hard to believe. My question is, what can we do as consumers to lower these percentages and give a greater support to our nation and its hard-working farmers, and benefit personally along the way? There is a concept known as farm to table, and it is a great start.

What exactly is farm to table? Farm to table relates to fresh, locally-grown or produced foods. However, it is much more than that. It is the connection between our food and people. More specifically, it is the connection between our food and our community. Sadly, local areas where foods were grown and raised usually don't benefit as well financially. On the other hand, buying food locally grown can greatly improve the economic vitality of small, local farms.

In addition to helping the local economy, local foods tend to be more environmentally friendly. To put things in perspective, the average, loaded 18-wheeled semi-truck travels about five miles per gallon. This means to haul produce an average 1,500 mile distance, many foods are traveling, about 500 gallons of diesel are needed. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), because diesel has a higher carbon content, it emits more carbon dioxide per gallon of fuel consumed when compared to gasoline, giving us an idea of why there is such an environmental impact with semi-truck travel.

Not only do locally-grown foods taste amazing, fresh produce is typically ripened fully prior to harvesting, which can improve nutrient content and flavor versus produce that has had to endure long distances via transport. It is important to note that increasing your consumption of both fruits and vegetable is a great goal for most Americans, as the majority of us are not consuming the recommended amounts. Fruits and vegetables are associated with a wide variety of health benefits including,



but not limited to, reducing the risk of cancers, heart disease, diabetes, and assisting in weight management. For more information regarding the benefits of fruits and vegetables, visit [choosemyplate.gov](http://choosemyplate.gov).

At this time you may be asking yourself, "How can I engage more with my food and the farmers that grow it?" A great way is to purchase foods from farmers at farmers' markets, roadside stands, or directly from the farm. Also, I highly recommend that if your grocery stores do not carry locally grown foods, encourage them to start. At a farmers' market, there are many different types of local, fresh food. The Martin Farmers Market is located on Main Street behind the C.E. Weldon Public Library in downtown Martin. It opens Saturdays at 8 a.m. and Mondays and Wednesdays at 2 p.m. It features many family farms, animal goods, and artisan foods.

Family farms at the Martin Farmers Market include: Blackberry Pond Farms, Hidden Hill Farm, Jill Magness and Richard Duncan, Richard Turnbow, The Dixie Chile Ranch. These farmers have a wide variety of seasonal fruits and vegetables. Animal goods include: Giffin Farms (comes on most Wednesdays with grainfed beef) and Sunnyside Farm (fresh eggs). Artisan foods include: Auntie Tina's Jams and Jellies & Riley's Small Farm (homemade jam and jelly and fresh garden produce), James P's Special Recipe (homemade barbecue sauce), and Oma's Country Kitchen (baked goods).

The Dresden Farmers Market, Terry Oliver Plaza, 421 Linden St., Dresden is coordinated by DeDe McClure who helps make the time in the pavilion during

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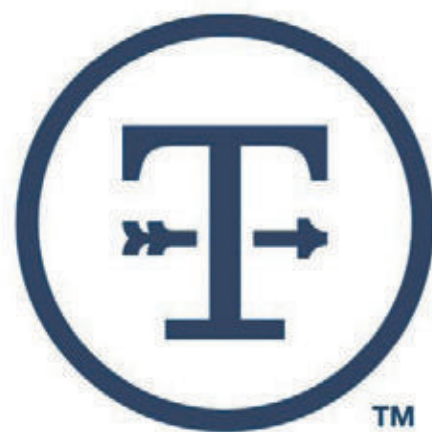
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