



FarmerKarl  Jun 27 7 min read

The Farm - Home for Everyone

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Learn how Homefields adapts their farm work so that everyone, no matter what their capabilities or interests, wins.

April 11, 2022, Millersville, PA

Kelly Morris, Farm Manager

Andrew Phillips, Farm Supervisor

Julian Harnish, Lead Farmhand

For More Information:

<https://www.homefields.org/>

<https://redwiggler.org/>

<https://lancasterfarmfresh.com/>

<https://www.friendshipcommunity.net/>

<https://carefarmingnetwork.org/>

The rolling hills of Lancaster County radiated life as I approached Homefields, a care farm serving those with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Bright yellow signs at the farm's entrance announced "CSA Sign-up Time", one of their biggest sources of funds for the farm. Millersville, PA is centered in what feels like paradise in the heart of Pennsylvania Dutch country. The town boasts a population of 8,000 people, but when the Millersville University students arrive, the town swells to 16,000.

In a green, tree-lined dale lies Homefields' 18-acre farm, of which 8 acres is under cultivation. Kelly Morris, Farm Manager, emerged from the propagation house to give me a tour.

Care Farming



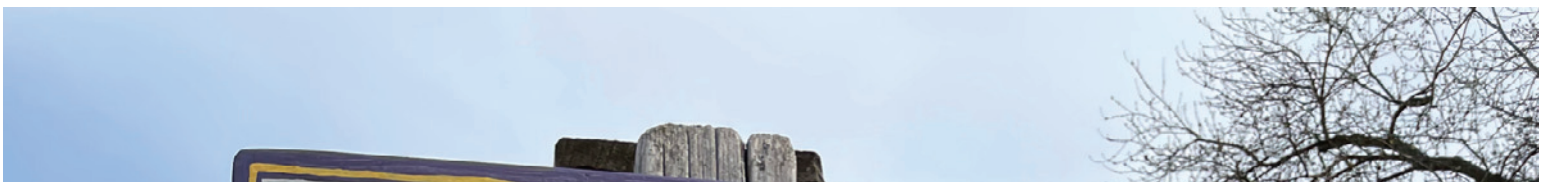
As we started, Kelly explained the mission of the farm. "This is one of many care farms in a network that seeks to support each other. Care farming really came from the United Kingdom. Those leading care farming in the UK have really advanced their programming to be year round and even provide boarding on campus for our residents. The residents here even have pen pals there! The United Kingdom has over 200 care farms. Of the care farms in the United States, Red Wiggler Community Farm near Washington, D.C. is likely the largest and most developed. They're trying to share information about how the best programs work at carefarmingnetwork.org." Kelly shared. "Many of the workers we employ have barriers to traditional employment."

Homefields Farm's History



In the 1990's a few families and community leaders with children with developmental disabilities gathered to brainstorm about what could be done. In 1992, they decided to buy a horse farm with a larger piece of property for a farm for their children to be in nature. The barn became storage for farm tools and supplies as well as office and meeting space on the lower level. Two residential buildings and the farm itself are right next to each other. Community Services Group, a provider of living services for those with disabilities, manages the living needs of the farmhands. Goodwill Industries used to hire these farmhands and run it as a program where they would get paid by the bushel. Then in 2017, Homefields took over the management of the farm and program. They empower their farmhands through paying them an appropriate wage.

Farm Setup and Operation





**Welcome to the
Pick Your Own Fields!**

- * Do not pick if you are sick
- * Wash your hands
- 1. Wet your hands
- 2. Use soap and scrub for 20 seconds
- 3. Rinse your hands
- 4. Dry your hands and dispose of your paper towel
- * Refrain from touching your face
- * No pets allowed on the property – service animals only
- * Cough or sneeze into your elbow or a tissue
- * No sampling in the fields!
- * Stay at least 6 feet away from others
- * Bring your own pruners or put your Homefields' pruner in the bucket of sanitizer in the pickup area when you're finished
- * Only touch what you plan to pick

Enjoy the fields and happy picking!

 Homefields
Care Farm

As I scanned the large fields, I spotted lavender planted along the edges. Kelly explained that it is a

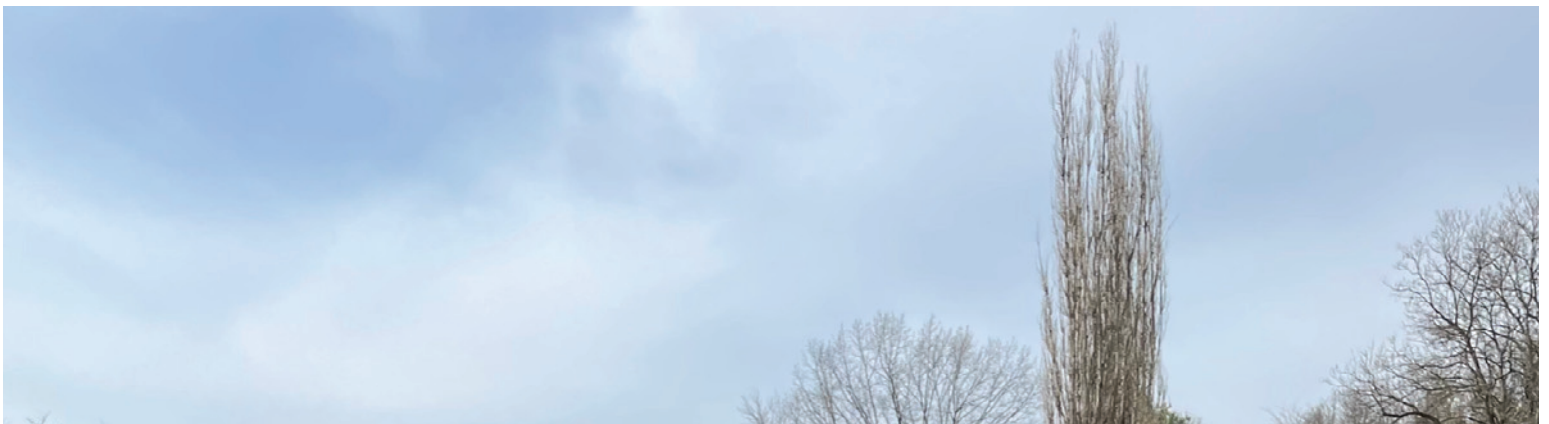
popular herb for beauty, calming, and healing. That's the sense I got as she pointed out the three greenhouses, the large barn which has now been converted into storage space and a lower-level office. At the lower level of the barn next to the office is a loading dock and breezeway multi-purpose area. Harvest comes in from the fields to be washed in large plastic tubs equipped with overflow regulators that shut off when level is full. Once washed, the produce from harvest bins is placed into packing bins of a different color. From there, the produce is weighed, bundled or packaged. Wooden tables serve as workspaces for produce processing or projects. A small and a large walk-in cooler, 5' x 8' and 12' x 9', are kept at different temperatures for optimal fresh vegetable storage until market day.

At the back of the farm are large compost piles. They are turned by a tractor with a front-end loader. "That compost really helps our crops grow!" Kelly commented. Most of the field consists of 300-foot' rows. Strawberries, garlic, tomatoes, cucumbers, cauliflower are popular items - and they are not too difficult for our farmhands to grow. On the east hill were more than two-dozen asian pears trees and several rows of blueberries. Cover crops are planted after beds are harvested to preserve the soil fertility. When necessary flame weeders are used to keep the weeds down.

When asked how they managed to keep up with so much under cultivation, Kelly said, "We have learned to be very fluid when it comes to who does what. Close communication is key. We have learned to work as a team to get the farm daily tasks done." Monday is Kelly's day to plan. Kelly continued, "Homefields enjoys a diverse set of volunteers. Many of our volunteers have personal care aids who allow them more independent living. Some come to support as the volunteers do their work."

Kelly continued, "We've been able to keep the deer at bay. Electric fence 33" off the ground does a pretty good job of keeping them off the rest of the property. Remy(R) cloth is used as a covering to protect the young seedlings in their beds from insect pests. We are glad that the hawks help to keep our rabbit population down." Kelly explained. "A healthy colony of praying mantis helps control our destructive winged insect pests."

Matching Task to Person





"We try to keep it simple here." Kelly said. "It's about designing the farm space to work for those who are farming it. That means we can't max out the space to just grow plants. Instead, we design for ease of access so that our farmhands can easily plant and see the weeds. That's how we design for success. 'Success' to us is having each participant feel a sense of accomplishment in what he or she has done. It's about finding the balance between learning something new and centering on the repetitive nature of a

task. The program is tailored by considering each person as tasks are matched with skills. Where possible, the participants discuss their desires and set short-term goals." Kelly explained.

She went on, "What's unique about this farm is that we find ways to use people for their strengths. We try our best to be inclusive - making sure people, all people, feel comfortable and safe. Given that we have successfully established this environment, we try to challenge our staff to step out of their comfort zone at times and try a variety of tasks around the farm. We don't need everyone here to do the same things. They need to do a particular task. Our farm staff can show them how."

Kelly's Story

When asked how she got to this farm, Kelly Morris shared, "I always had an inclination to protect the environment. For 15 years, I worked in corporate America, earned my MBA in sustainable management, and helped my employer establish a sustainability green program. Yet for me, it was not close enough to do with people and nature. I wanted direct experience. That's when I found Homefields. At the beginning of COVID, I started working at Homefields as the Lead Farmhand. I had previous farm and managing experience." When asked what she likes about her work, Kelly said, "It's a magical, wonderful place to work!"

Work Experiences that Bring Satisfaction as a Farmer

When I met them on a Monday, Andrew Phillips, Farmer Supervisor, and Julian Harnish, Lead Farmhand were pulling up row cover and irrigation. We have three part-time farmhands who each work less than 20 hours a week. We prefer not to segregate our farmhands from any of our staff. We are all farmers that may or may not be individuals with disabilities. Those farmers with developmental disabilities, join the rest of the farmers Tuesday through Friday. Harvest is always done on Thursday, so they can fill their CSA customer orders which the customers come to pick up on that afternoon.

When asked what he enjoyed most about his job, Andrew, who previously worked at a fruit farm, answered, "I just enjoy interacting with the people. The volunteers often say, 'Hey, it was nice to meet you!' I like this farm because our top priority is not making a profit. Instead, it is supporting others in a self-sustaining way. Management doesn't have to drive every penny out of every minute." Then Kelly added that "Here, at this farm, we just believe in love and kindness. The seeds of love were planted when they purchased this property 30 years ago."

A Community of Farm Supporters



"It takes a community to run this farm," Kelly remarked. "We enjoy having a lot of dedicated volunteers; most months they supply 100 - 200 hours of labor. The farm holds a lot of "Talks in the Field" events for volunteers and the community. In the spring we have a campfire open-house to welcome the volunteers. This fall we will hold Homefields 26th Annual Fall Classic Golf Tournament. This golf fundraiser is for all of Homefields, not just the Care Farm. It goes a long way to cover extra costs. These events are a great way to form relationships."

"Now that COVID is behind us, school groups are starting to come back. We are grateful to have a group of dedicated volunteers from the Friendship Community (<https://www.friendshipcommunity.net/>) along with other local service providers and organizations. The Friendship Community runs a gallery downtown. Additionally, we look forward to a possible partnership with Lancaster Farm Fresh, a local food bank, to distribute our excess food."

Markets and CSAs



Kelly remarked, "Our CSA is designed to have the community be involved. CSA membership comes with "Pick-Your-Own Field". Volunteers are able to help with the CSA Process. The quarter-acre open to our CSA members offers flowers, cherry tomatoes, hot peppers, and herbs. While we grow some unique varieties you can't buy in the store, our focus is on organic, sustainable agriculture and growing good, nutritious food."

The CSA uses an online application system that allows shareholders to specify the size, frequency and makeup for their share. Pickup times are Thursday 3 pm - 7 pm, Friday 11 - 7pm, and Saturday morning. Homefields uses the software CSAware which really helps simplify the operation. Small, medium and large shares are offered for the 24-week-long season which usually starts after Memorial Day.

"We go to the local farmers' market once a month." Kelly added. Our customers see this as community outreach. They are eager to support us. We have a friend farm "Lancaster Farmacy" that also sells

flowers and herbs. They grow everything on their farm and create their own products. For example, they sell teas and herbal tinctures of oils and vinegars made from farm produce."

One-Stop Shopping



Kelly went on to explain how easy it is to shop at Homefields. "Our customer arrives with a bag. As they say their name, our hostess prints out a ticket sheet with their CSA order specifications. Then they select bags, cartons, or bundles of produce according to the number of items they are entitled to. We offer 'add-on items' like eggs, bread, handmade cheese, and kombucha. These are supplied by our partner vendors, that way we reduce people's need to go to the grocery store. Check out is just verifying the number of items because they have paid up front at the beginning of the season."

Homefields' Next Steps

When asked what her plans were for Homefields in 2022, Kelly explained. "We are working on certifying organic. That way we can participate more fully in the local coop. Our customers value that. We also

want to get more of our staff trained in behavioral health. That way we can serve our farmhands in the best way possible. Their smiles of accomplishment help confirm to us that this farm is truly what they call their home."

Author: Farmer Karl

#carefarming #farmingwithasocialmission #meetingneeds #farmerscoop

#communitysupportedagriculture #CSA #jobsatisfaction #developmentalbarriers

#specialneedsfarming