

Farm & Ranch



Making Money with a Hobby Farm

A full-time farming operation isn't the right move for many Americans with limited space or capital. Starting a hobby project, however, can help familiarize someone with the industry and lead to a profitable venture.

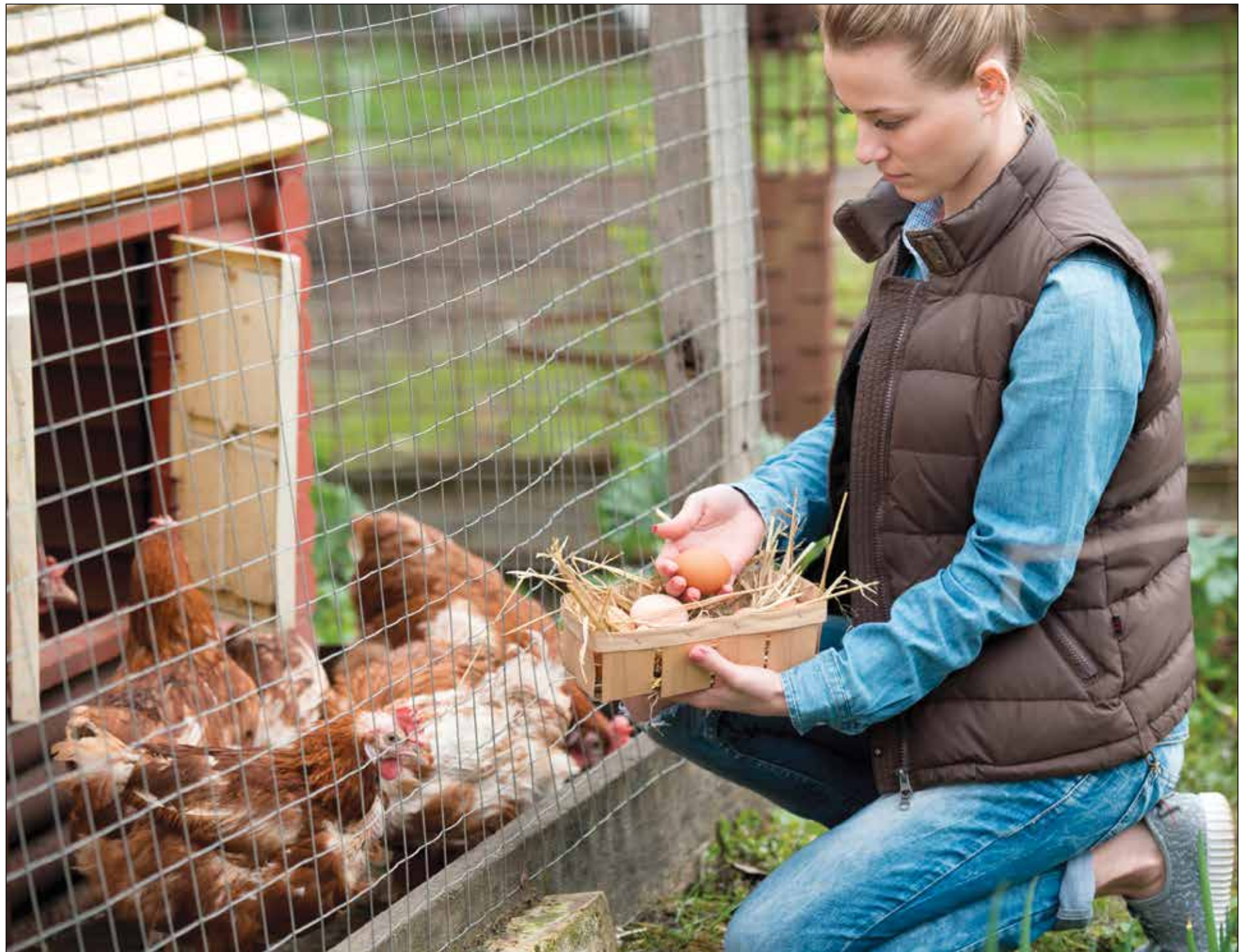
Whether you decide to harvest fruits and vegetables or raise animals, this part-time journey may eventually lead to an even more prosperous opportunity.

For those interested in growing foods but are hesitant because of a lack of land, consider investing in a hydroponic setup. The Sustainable Food Trust says that using this method means plants are grown in water or an inorganic fabricated substrate.

When searching for a building to house your hobby farm, look for places that offer natural light or low ceilings to hang lighting devices. Here are some other small investments you can make that can create a handsome secondary income.

RAISE CHICKENS

Your livestock farm doesn't have to include expensive cattle or other large animals. Consider getting started with a smaller creature like broiler



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chickens. According to the experts at Hobby Farms, these chicks are typically ready for market in as little as six to nine weeks. The quick turnaround can be compared to the longer timeframe of egg-laying hens, which usually require about nine months before they're ready for sale. The broiler

chicken breed also takes up little room and can be raised on the pasture or small land area.

The quickest way to get started is by buying chicks. If they're unavailable, consider incubating them from an egg. One thing to keep in mind is that the small birds quickly become prey to cats or coy-

otes. When possible, try to invest in a sturdy coop to keep predators away.

GROW FLOWERS

A greenhouse or properly prepared bed can be a high growing ground for beautiful flowers. Ask an expert at your local nursery for plants that

are in demand in your area and grow heartily in your location. With a little practice and a green thumb, bring your harvest to a farmer's market or market to your region's bouquet shops. Use your return on investment to purchase more bulbs and an exotic variety of blooms.

Evaluating a Land Purchase

Whether you're a seasoned farmer or just breaking into the industry, deciding to invest in land is a serious decision.

Choosing the wrong plot or buying at an inopportune time can cripple your operation going forward. Find out what to look for in the market and how to get the best deal when considering extending your farmland.

When you don't have the liquid capital to make a purchase of land in cash, governmental programs offer exceptional benefits for farmers. Consider applying for an FSA Direct Farm Ownership loan. According to the United States Department of Agriculture, this opportunity offers up to 100% financing for:

- Enlarging family farms.
- Improving or expanding operations.
- Increasing agricultural productivity.
- Assisting with land tenure to save farmland for future generations.

You can find out more information by visiting with a Farm Loan Program staff member at your local lending institution.

FINDING FARMLAND

After you have financial backing, finding suitable farmland is another significant decision. The Noble Research Institute suggests



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that farmers analyze factors like soil conditions, irrigation availability, the local climate and location before purchasing a plot of land.

Form a thorough strategy to decide how much ground you require and the steps to make it profitable. Take inventory of your equipment to determine if a more significant operation will need more expensive

machines to maintain, as they can be a considerable investment.

BUYING THE LAND

Much like most property transactions, you should be prepared to negotiate when finding the best value. You may consider hiring a real estate agent proficient in agricultural deals to give yourself

an advantage.

Once you have a few pieces of land in mind, buyers often benefit from obtaining a property boundary survey. An expert will ensure that the seller's potential investment is legally owned to avoid problems with competing farmers in the area.

Ensuring the boundaries are ironclad alleviates the risk

of adverse possession. This legality is common in farming and means that if the land is occupied, effectively use and controlled by someone without ownership, that the law will eventually consider them to be the owner.

While an attorney can help resolve the issue, the costs can be a burden during an investment.

Must-Have Equipment

After a successful harvest, farmers use a portion of their profits to enhance their equipment inventory. When considering new machines or implements to invest in, consider your needs and struggles you noticed in the past.

Could you use help in harvesting quicker, or would you benefit from planting at a faster pace?

The needs for farmers will vary dramatically depending on the type of operation and its size. Fortunately, for smaller farms, there is beneficial equipment available that's scaled to meet small-scale agriculture projects' needs.

UTV

A UTV or ATV makes traveling around tough terrain seamless and is more cost-efficient than driving a full-size pickup. While you may not have the same cargo space, these lightweight vehicles are exceptional for analyzing your fence perimeter, tending to distant crops and checking in on livestock.

Consider a vehicle with a sizable cargo box so you can bring along the tools you need to complete jobs. Some may be equipped with a hitch that couples to a wagon or



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trailer for more room.

COMPACT TRACTOR

Suppose your farm requires more heavy-duty equipment than a UTV but isn't extensive enough to compensate for a large tractor's investment. In that case, a compact machine can be an excellent fit. Find

one equipped with a quick hitch on the front and rear to accept multiple Category One implements.

With a compact tractor, you can attach things like front buckets, mowing blades, a mulch finisher or aerator to enhance your performance and profitability.

POST-HOLE DIGGER

You will need to repair fence posts while tending to your farm. Whether livestock or weather cause the damage, a post-hole digger takes care of the back-breaking labor. A post-hole digger is also a great companion for odd jobs around the property like

building a pole barn, deck or shed as your equipment expands.

While you can typically borrow this equipment from a local rental outlet, ensuring one is on hand is great for quick fixes and to avoid an animal escaping due to a downed fence.

Cattle and the Environment

Ranchers across America manage profitable operations where wildlife and livestock co-exist. Those in charge of ensuring that the land is suitable for growth face challenges from an ever-changing environment.

As the property is managed for long-term success, the local climate receives exceptional positive effects.

If you have a cattle or dude ranch in your area, try to support their future growth. One way owners supplement their income is by incorporating a unique agritourism program. The public is welcome to tour the property or partake in numerous activities like horseback riding, winery visits or an ultimate camping experience. Consider contributing to your local economy by taking a unique family vacation at the ranch or making financial donations.

With community support, ranchers can continue their efforts to enhance their operations and impact the ecosystem's health.

CATTLE'S IMPACT

Those who raise cattle on their pastures must participate in numerous environmental practices to remain successful.



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The National Cattlemen's Beef Association offers these benefits of ranching:

- Conducting soil samples.
- Rotation grazing.
- Water management systems.
- Conservation tillage.
- Planting trees.

While caring for their livestock, ranchers positively impact the surrounding wildlife populations on private and

public land. It is shown that their contributions to water improvement, and individual pastures and feed supplies directly increase the big game population on federal property.

CARBON SEQUESTRATION

Numerous practices required to run a farm or ranch efficiently can lead to the release of dangerous greenhouse gases. According to the Center

for Climate and Energy Solutions, agriculture operations are responsible for 11% of global emissions.

Effectively managed ranches are efficient in limiting the severity by practicing carbon sequestration.

Carbon sequestration is defined as the long-term capture and storage of carbon from the atmosphere, typically as carbon dioxide. Experts at

the Ohio State University's Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources suggest that the number of cattle grazed per acre, fertilization and prior land use will affect how much carbon is stored.

Ranchers use rotational grazing methods to ensure their beef is fully grass-fed while promoting positive conditions in the soil.



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Sustainable Ranching

When it comes to protecting our wildlife while also incentivizing farmers to engage in more sustainable farming practices, there are many organizations focused on making a difference.

The World Wildlife Fund is one such group, as it developed the Sustainable Ranching Initiative in 2011. But what is this initiative and how does it specifically help our ranchers and farmers in their daily work lives?

The versatile project works with

landowners, corporations, governmental agencies and industry groups to protect native grasslands. One of the primary benefactors is private ranchers who preserve open space and wildlife habitats.

The Northern Great Plains — a region spanning more than 180 million acres, five states and two Canadian provinces — is one of four remaining temperate grasslands globally. The WWF states that more than 94 million of these acres are privately managed and necessary for the re-emergence of bird species in a steep decline. Ensuring these grasslands are managed properly promotes cleaner streams, less fertilizer runoff, more plant pollinators and carbon in the soil.

Check out how the relationship between the Sustainable Ranching Initiative and American ranchers is impacting the preservation and recovery of grasslands.

1. The WWF's goal is to reach no net loss of grasslands through restoration and decreased plow-up.

2. In 2014, the Great Plains lost more acres to conversion than the Brazilian Amazon.

3. Between 2009-2015, plow-ups resulted in 3.2 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions being released into the atmosphere. This is the equivalent of 670 million extra cars on the road.

4. Trillions of gallons of water are filtered through the plains, providing drinking sources for millions of peo-

ple and supporting healthy fisheries.

5. Each unplowed acre of water in the Great Plains can store thousands of gallons of water.

6. Pollinators are responsible for one out of every three bites of food that is produced.

7. One of four species of the North American bumble bees is at risk for extinction.

8. Nearly 6,000 acres of potential Monarch and pollinator habitat is lost each day in the United States due to development.

9. Grassland songbirds have declined 80% since the 1960s, primarily due to habitat loss.

10. Between 2014-2015, the Great Plains lost 3.7 million acres to conversion.

Keeping Busy after Harvest

After working through the blistering heat of summer, many farming operations benefit as autumn rolls in.

The cooler temperatures offer a more comfortable environment to complete the tasks you may have put off. Not only are the fall-time months important for making outdoor tasks more tolerable, but they are critical to knocking some administrative tasks off your list, as well.

Take advantage of the fall temperatures to promote maximum productivity for your operation.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, almost all heat-related deaths occur between May and September. Consider clearing heavy areas of brush or trimming trees growing over your home or farm structures as fall brings cooler weather.

MAINTAINING EQUIPMENT

According to the Western Illinois University School of Agriculture, late September to early December is when farmers see the growing season's reward. The autumn months are also an excellent time to service machinery before it sits dormant throughout the winter, as the maintenance you do now can prevent bigger issues down the road.

With the busy harvest season



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at bay, it's beneficial to use your extra time making repairs to equipment that failed and was put aside. If you're knowledgeable about the unit, use troubleshooting methods to find the issue and resolve it. However, when the repair is too far from your comfort zone, don't hesitate to hire an agricultural mechanic. Finding a

seasoned expert during the autumn is typically easy, as their busy season is coming to an end.

LOOK FOR NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES

Farmers will benefit from attending conventions and agriculture meetings in the local area. Experts provide edu-

cated predictions of market trends, pricing structures and offer financial assistance information. Absorb the keynote speakers who are tasked with giving advice and discussing oncoming problems throughout the industry. It's also imperative to network with your peers, review local problems, and brainstorm how to

overcome them.

ENJOY YOUR FREE TIME

The role of a farmer is excruciatingly challenging throughout the year. Don't forget to take a break and enjoy yourself. Reconnect with family and friends, take a relaxing vacation or spend some time indulging in your favorite hobby.

Finding a Farm Dog

While dogs are often considered family pets, hard-working canines are quality companions for farm and ranching operations.

These dogs are bred specifically for herding or guarding the property. Work dogs can play many roles on your property, including being a pest control solution.

If you're considering adding a new four-legged friend and coworker to your business, consider finding a reputable breeder who uses socially acceptable ethics. If possible, try to adopt the canine as a puppy to help familiarize him with family members and those who will frequent the property. Due to their protective nature, farm dogs may become aggressive when they feel someone is a threat.

HERDING BREEDS

According to the American Kennel Club, of the 196 registered breeds, 31 are herding group members. Here is a closer look at a few of the breeds that make excellent working dogs.

AKITA

The courageous breed originated in Japan in the 17th century. Early history shows that the dogs were hunters used to take on big game like deer and bears. The dogs'



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strength and dignity were so well regarded that only the imperial family and its courts could have them as pets.

BOXER

The boxer is an energetic breed with plenty to offer farm and ranch operations. They were initially bred in Germany in the late 1800s and

were produced down from dogs used to run after, catch and hold down predators. In modern times, boxers are a versatile breed who are excellent companions for farmers, police officers, the military and guide dogs for the blind.

GREAT DANE

Often called the "gentle

giant," the Great Dane is known as a loyal protector and for their tall stature.

Their size makes them exceptional guard dogs, as many predators or other threats find them intimidating.

The breed was originally created in Germany, and dogs were tasked with hunting wild

boar alongside noblemen.

LEONBERGER

Interestingly, the Leonberger was bred to serve as a companion for European royalty in the 19th century. However, since their inception, they prove to be excellent working dog candidates because of their prodigious strength.