



STUDENT VOICES [3 Stories]

Talk for the Big Pig Gig

EMMA LEWIS, PROGRAM FOR VISITING SCHOOLS '04

JUNE 7, 2015

When I was ten, I visited The Farm School for the first time. I remember so much the sound of everything stirring at dawn and the sleepy warmth of the barn where we sang together at night. In between, my days felt full and good. It was my first time being away from home; I felt that anything was possible.

After three days at the Farm, days that had both the molasses quality of my best dreams and the wonderful speed of all my favorite adventure books, I felt changed. I felt that, as I moved through life, I had a place I could come back to, a place that marked a crucial moment in my growing up. I can stand here now and feel, inside of myself, the particular richness of the farm air at dusk and the deepness of my breathing there. I felt a new kind of strength after those days, a strength that remains and remains.

The Farm School gave me, and so many others, the chance to exercise trust in possibility and in imagination. Work in the fields becomes an opportunity to connect with many unseen moments of growth, change, and activity. Still, it strikes me: how incredible that the carrot grows!

The results of work on the farm often seem like magic. When we begin to notice the beauty and surprises

of the land, it becomes natural to appreciate the magic in ourselves and in other people. We too are constantly growing, unendingly revealing new facets and wonders. To me, this is the work of life: finding ways to wonder at, recognize, and cultivate natural joy. As I move through this life,

I am constantly finding new ways that we can work to nurture our human environment and the land upon which we live. It's seems to me all about paying attention.

Here, now, I am carrying the Farm with me: the laughter, the sweat, the moments of silence, my first calluses, the taste of a good green bean, and the sense that that the world will open itself up to you again and again, if you're patient and if you let it.

These are just some of the gifts the Farm School has offered me. Now, I'm reaching out to you, and to myself at ten, lying on the ground by the barn with hay in my hair, and sun on my skin. I hope so many others can feel that particular breed of freedom, that so many others can put both palms to the earth, touch for a moment their lips to the soil and say, yes, absolutely yes. Thank you to the Farm School and thank all of you for your compassion and support.

EMMA
CAME TO THE
FARM SCHOOL WITH HER
CLASS IN THE 5TH AND 6TH
GRADES, AND THEN DIDN'T RETURN
FOR A VISIT UNTIL AFTER COLLEGE
IN 2014. SHE GAVE THIS TALK AT THE
2015 BIG PIG GIG. SHE NOW WORKS
AT THE TIBETAN BUDDHIST
RESOURCE CENTER IN
CAMBRIDGE, MA

The Little Red Coop

ALYSSA LASALLE, CHICKEN COOP SCHOOL '16

JUNE 2, 2015

When I first saw the Chicken Coop I thought, how is this a school? It doesn't even look like it could fit 10 people. Then I walked in. I was surprised to see so many smiling faces. They were all looking at me. I knew no one and was so shy. I didn't say much and when we went out for recess I just stood there feeling completely awkward and out of place. I had visited before but there was only a teacher there at that time. Although I didn't feel comfortable when I first visited with all the students there, I knew that this was a place I would like to go. It seemed better than the place I was at and I just wanted to join them right then. I knew that if I could, I would go there the next year.

Now I know everyone and we all talk. We laugh and smile just being around each other. It was nothing like I expected. I am talking way more than I did at my old school. I finally feel like I belong somewhere.

Something has changed for me when I go to school. I feel like I can express my feelings and be openly honest because I feel like I'm with family but not family. It's like having 10 best friends that are like family but not related to you. I am so grateful that we got to all be here. I can't imagine not being here. That's how much I love it here.

The Chicken Coop is like an ice cream cone. It has sprinkles, chocolate and vanilla ice cream, a sugar cone, cherries and Oreo cookies. Social studies is like the chocolate and vanilla ice cream because it gets down to the facts, it's the base.

Working on my utopia project made me realize that not everything is perfect and it will never really be. That you have to try your best to make the best out of what we have. It really made me think. Literature is like the sugar cone, it's the main core of everything. In Literature we work on reading and our discussions. It's fun to just be able to express our opinions on serious things and strange things. Math is like the sprinkles, it is colorful and full of new things. Writing is like the Oreo cookies, it is sweet yet hard. Science is like the cherries, it is full of fun and new experiences. Farm Life is like the chocolate syrup, it makes the whole ice cream "dirty". Art is like the strawberry syrup, it is colorful and fun. Physical education is like the whipped cream on top of everything.

Being at the Chicken Coop and Maggie's Farm community takes time and practice. When you're on the farm you have to think about everyone else, not just yourself. You have the idea of if someone needs help you should help them.

Now I walk into the classroom like I would at my old school, but with a radiant smile. I used to not want to tell people the name of my school and just say it's a private school/home school type deal. Now I would scream it to the world and tell everyone how much I love it. I don't care what people think of the name, I mean, if I'm happy what does it matter what others think. I can't wait until next year to have more fun memories and adventures like we had this year.



Chase the Dream and Grind it Out

BRIAN MASSEY, LEARN TO FARM '14

MARCH 1, 2015

When I met Nicholas Phillip Utter, it was our first night at The Farm School, and we were chatting with a quirky local mycologist about the carcinogenic effects of uncooked mushrooms. You know, the kind you find on every salad bar and in every veggie-and-dip platter in the country. I looked across the table to this young dude with long blonde hair that I didn't know, and I think I actually saw his mind being blown. After a moment to compose himself, he re-engaged in the conversation with a fiery look of curiosity and excitement.

It was a look I got quite used to during our twelve months together in central Massachusetts.

I had come to The Farm School with years of thought and discernment behind me, and with a clear-eyed sense of what I wanted to get from the place and where I wanted to go. Nick, as he'll tell you below, had stumbled into the place through some combination of persuasion and openness to the serendipity of the universe. He wasn't sure what he was getting into, but he was going to dive into it with his full self. That much I could tell from the start.

Twelve months later, after endless sessions in the classroom and forest and field, Nick had a look of hardened clarity to him. The fire and curiosity weren't gone, of course, but they had become trained on one incredible, daunting, life-defining task: starting a farm on the property of a beloved summer camp in the White Mountains of New Hampshire.

One of the many unexpected joys of The Farm School was watching people embrace and embark on journeys that were both similar and different from your own, watching them develop and refine the passions around which they'd structure their existence.

The following is a lightly edited conversation between Nick and me, conducted through email, over the course of a few months.

Brian: So, why farming?

Nick: I love the pertinence of farming. We, as humans, eat food. There are so many of us because of the Neolithic Revolution 10,000 years ago, when people started farming, and the domestication of large quantities of animals 5,000 years ago by the Sumerians, and hence the available proteins and disease tolerance for more of us to live and to live in proximity, and the utilization of winds and sails...

And I'm here in New Hampshire due to the wild successes of Eurasian agriculture in the temperate zones across the oceans and far from the 'Old World.' I love connecting with how we got to this point, for better and worse, and considering where and how we go from here. I feel an undeniable sense of importance, genuine interest, and purpose in considering the sustainable creation of food on a daily basis. That's my macro-reasoning.

On a micro-scale, I love that it's complicated and the decisions are constant. To grow food, there is a manic balance of knowledge, wisdom, grunt work, and timing, and the difficulty of the balancing act exponentializes when considering the financial side of things and the undeniably unpredictable 'people' side of things.

What is The Farm on Cragged Mountain?

The Farm on Cragged Mountain is a Limited Liability Company registered in the state of New Hampshire. Just kidding. Well, not really, but it's much more than that. I promise. It's the dream I developed over this past year with my cousin, Will Nissen, while studying sustainable agriculture and community at The Farm School.

I ended up in Athol seemingly randomly after meeting Ben Holmes, the founder, at a cousin's wedding and, long story short, I'd been struck by lightning the previous weekend - literally, via a lightning strike outside of the building where I was washing dishes, which shocked me through the current traveling up the plumbing to the sink

where I was scrubbing away—and knew the stars were aligning for a change.

Upon being recommended the idea of studying at The Farm School, I went for it and maintained a mandate of non-committal enthusiasm through February. After February I got committal. My family owns a 180 acre property in the foothills of the White Mountains in Freedom, New Hampshire where we run a sleepaway co-ed summer camp that focuses on hiking and canoeing. It's called Cragged Mountain Farm. My great-grandfather bought the land in 1927 and planted the majority of the open farmland to white and red pine trees in the early 1930s.

Like many classic summer camps, Cragged is struggling to make the financial numbers work in the modern day. Difficult issues include the need to market in a modern way to differentiate from the trend of shorter-term specialized summer camps. Parents are becoming reluctant to send their child away for four weeks at a time given the norms of being in constant contact with one's child.

I come from a family with seven cousins who very much love Cragged Mountain Farm and want it to continue. We have been talking for years about the need to revitalize and remarket our wonderful place in the world, but without anyone taking action. My idea had been a vague one that involved adding a working farm to the landscape of the place—inspired by my cousin, Charlie. By the end of February it became obvious that I had the opportunity to take action and that I needed to commit. So commit I did and here I am.

Utilizing the skills, knowledge, and large skills/knowledge resource bank that exists at The Farm School, Will and I came up with an outline for our vision of a 'farm on Cragged Mountain.' Our mission is to run a farm on the Cragged Mountain property that is environmentally, financially, and socially sustainable and which partners with the summer camp operation. Small-scale and diversified are two adjectives that best describe the sort of farm enterprises we are pursuing to keep in accord with our mission

The Farm School is a non-profit educational farm in Athol, Massachusetts that offers three programs: the Program for Visiting Schools, a three day program for middle-school students and their teachers throughout the school year and a camp in summer; the Chicken Coop School, a full-time middle school for local children; and the Learn to Farm program, a year-long immersion program for adults. The work and care of the farm in the dairy and fields and

What have you learned from the beginning of this journey? What has attending The Farm School and starting The Farm on Cragged Mountain taught you so far?

The best thing The Farm School taught me was the process of assessing a project and believing in my capacity to understand what needs to be done and executing it, regardless of whether there are new skills that must be learned to execute said project. I am far less constrained by fear than ever before

What does "living the dream" mean to you?

"Living the Dream." What a great thing. A paradox? I'm pursuing the current version of my dreams, while still creating new dreams to work towards. I own hogs. They are awesome.

They party in the woods and eat as much food as they want – which is lots. I'm from Exeter, NH. You don't grow up in Exeter and own hogs at age 25 unless you follow some sort of dream, however wayward.

Chase the dream, catch it, and grind it out. Our mission is to run a farm on the Cragged Mountain property that is environmentally, financially, and socially sustainable and which partners with the summer camp operation. There's plenty of room on this mountain to see the dreams and catch the dreams. The living part sets in when you wake up every day and grind in the reality of a captured dream. It's a process. It's happening.

BRIAN MASSEY AND NICK UTTER ARE 2014 GRADUATES OF THE LEARN TO FARM PROGRAM AT THE FARM SCHOOL. YOU CAN READ MORE OF THIS INTERVIEW ON THE "INTERVIEW" PAGE ON BRIAN'S BLOG—DIRTEATERS.ORG—AND YOU CAN FOLLOW THE CONTINUING STORY OF THE FARM ON CRAGGED MOUNTAIN AT FARMONCRAGGEDMT.COM

in the garden and in the forest is the mainstay of the programs. The Farm School does not discriminate on the basis of race, creed, religion, sex, sexual orientation, age, disability or national or ethnic origin in any of its school administered policies or programs. Contributions to The Farm School are tax-deductible and can be made online at www.farmschool.org or by sending your gift to our land address.