

An Agricultural Revolution AT TURNER FARM

by Arthur Bolduc

The Indian Hill section on the east side of Cincinnati, Ohio, was once dotted with small farms; today it is an area of million dollar-plus homes with great manicured lawns, white fenced horse pastures and tree-lined, curving roads and gravel lanes.

Many of the mansions date back more than a century, to the "Gay Nineties" when good, full-dimension lumber and fine craftsman were more plentiful, and like taxes, less expensive. Some, along with the smaller cottages that housed the staffs that maintained the mansions, are classic examples of nineteenth century architecture.

Bonnie Mitsui's grandparents farmed at Indian Hill and she bonded with the area, probably at first sight. Oblivious to the hard work and shortcomings of the soil that so few knew how to handle, she was always anxious to go to Grandma and Grandpa's house where she could roll on the lush, cool lawns on hot summer days, commune with the farm animals and wildlife as only a child can, and roam the meadows and woodlands where every farmhouse was a safe house for the neighborhood children.

One particular cottage on Turner Farm caught her fancy. The Welsh gave us slate roofing that adorned the mansions and great barns, and from their steel-rolling mills came lead and zinc-coated sheet steel called "turn plate" that could be worked into roof covering called "standing seam" roofing. The cottage had a standing seam roof and it was painted green. It had a south-facing front porch where one could sit after a hard day's work and watch the sun set. It also had a back, north-facing porch surrounded by a flower garden where all could take refuge from the heat of the day or sit and talk long into the summer twilight.

Eventually Bonnie went off to college, worked for a newspaper on the West Coast, learned Japanese, went to Japan, married a Japanese fellow and raised a family. Like Louis Bromfield,



Above: The front view of the original horse stables that went with the mansion.

At Right: The backside of the same stables.



the Pulitzer Prize winning novelist who traveled the world and left

France in '39 just ahead of a "second rate" adventurer, all the while he never forgot his boyhood in central Ohio and a particular farm with a great barn adorned with three cupolas. After parting company with Hitler, he returned to Pleasant Valley and on a cold day in mid-winter while driving with his family in Richland County he saw the great barn with the three cupolas that had haunted his dreams since he left home 25 years before, and he knew he was home, home to stay.

Bonnie saw the world, and she, too, eventually returned to Ohio, to Indian Hill. Unlike Bromfield who built a 32-room home across from the great barn to entertain his movie and literary friends, Bonnie had little interest

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**The cottage at
Turner Farm.**



An original barn on the farm.

An Agricultural Revolution at Turner Farm continued

in the mansion on Turner Farm that has long since burned, but was still attracted to the cottage. Bromfield, a free spender, once commented that he would probably spend his last days in a modest cottage someplace. But for the grace of a few friends, that didn't happen.

Bonnie had seen the world, was well aware of how the cheap, but stale, over-processed diet of the western world caused chronic illness wherever it was welcomed in the industrialized nations. She had seen the Orient, the "Farmers of Forty

Centuries," and places like Guam where, up until the American occupation followed by cheap junk food, cigarettes and unlimited beer, the population was noted for its longevity and good health.

She saw how the money lenders encouraged farmers to compete, compete, compete, compete. Farmers who once cooperated by buying expensive harvesting equipment in common and forming harvesting and silage filling rings were urged to get rich, "Get big or get out," "Plow fence row to fence row." Borrow huge amounts of money from the loan sharks, buy out your neighbor, go into debt for expensive equipment and when your neighbors were gone and the countryside depopulated with nobody to turn to for help, the money lenders turned up the interest rates and owned you.

Earl Butz (Secretary of

Agriculture under Nixon & Ford) and his crowd were able to get rid of 90% of the American small farmers. Now, through money lending, they own outright or have a controlling interest in the consolidated farms that were left, thus controlling markets and our food supply. But without abundant, cheap petroleum, industrial agriculture is a house of cards. The sudden wave of food and animal safety regulations is nothing more than a means of keeping their failing grip on our food supply in the face of the coming sustainable agriculture revolution as the remaining independent farmers try to rebuild their local food infrastructures and recreate free markets.

Bonnie has faith in Thomas Jefferson's dream of a nation of independent, land owning farmers serving a free, local market and asking only enough to support their own simple lifestyles and leaving something for the other guy, instead of the



The brooder house. Note the different ages of the chickens and the duck to the right. They do things differently at Turner Farm.



Cornish Cross broilers on pasture.

Vanessa Caruso doing her thing.



More visitors.



Bonnie in the field with visitors.



Above: Greenhouses and row tunnels.



Left: They have an artist on the farm.

corporate oligarchy we now have.

General MacArthur, with an eye on the White House, at the end of WW II, saw the wisdom in Jefferson's dream and went against his own kind by seizing huge tracts of land owned by the Japanese aristocracy and distributing it to small farmers. He took over a burned-out, starving, rat-infested nation, and if he could put it back on its feet, not only would history treat him well, but he could beat the younger Eisenhower to the '52 Republican Presidential nomination. The independent Japanese farmers did not let him down and did more than their part in helping Japan make a remarkable post WW II rebuilding recovery. Unfortunately MacArthur lost his grip on his ego and the Republican nomination.

In the century since Fritz Haber developed urea to free Germany from dependence on imported Chilean nitrates and go to war, American farmers have been sold on agricultural chemicals and have forgotten how to farm. (Haber also developed poison gas, personally directed its use against Allied troops in 1915 and was awarded the Nobel Prize in Chemistry for his efforts in 1918.)

Bonnie would like to see the land on Indian Hill—at least those horse pastures and hay fields adjacent the manicured lawns—once again in the hands of yeomen farmers feeding the city of Cincinnati and surrounding towns and villages with fresh fruits and vegetables; and poultry, pork, dairy and beef grown free of hormones, antibiotics and other drugs. Unfortunately, too many of the Land Grant Colleges are no longer educating blue collar farmers, but programming white collar agribusinessmen. Bonnie's "If you can't find a leader, be one" attitude has led her into staffing her farm with people knowledge-

able in sustainable agriculture and opening the gates to those interested in exchanging sweat equity for farming experience and knowledge on a non-profit, educational farm.

Her farm manager, Mike Steele, has a background in management with Proctor and Gamble, but you would never guess that to see him working around animals on the farm. At about 6'-2" and maybe 220 pounds, he looks in better shape than some of those guys suiting up on Sunday afternoons. A dead ringer for Mark Harmon, once a pretty good college quarterback, Mike could stand in for Mark on TV and few would probably notice the difference.

No animal scientist, you learn right away that Mike is well grounded in the essence and not just the semblance of animal husbandry. Little things like the height of a poultry feeder from the floor to prevent feed waste catch his eye. And the well-ventilated poultry-laying house with an outside run did not reek of ammonia where the litter is stirred regularly. Keep an animal as stress-free as possible and the energy lost dealing with stress will be used for growth and production, he will tell you.

Six-week-old batches of Cornish Cross broilers on pasture were a pleasing sight to behold, as we stopped to check water and feed. Fanned out around a mobile shelter and feed troughs, most were busy



Mike is quite fond of his hogs.

scratching and foraging in the grass but came running when they saw Mike. Surprisingly athletic on good, well-formed legs, they were a far cry from the lethargic birds—from the same hatchery—I have seen raised in confinement. Mike commented that they could also fly quite well when it was time to round them up for shipment.

At the sound of Mike's voice, the hogs come running, even the nursing piglets. He takes a few liberties with them that I wouldn't, especially with the boar. But they are well fed and content with a couple of acres of brush or woodlot and pasture to roam and a clean, straw bedded shelter, so they have no quarrel with anybody, especially the guy that feeds them and scratches their backs.

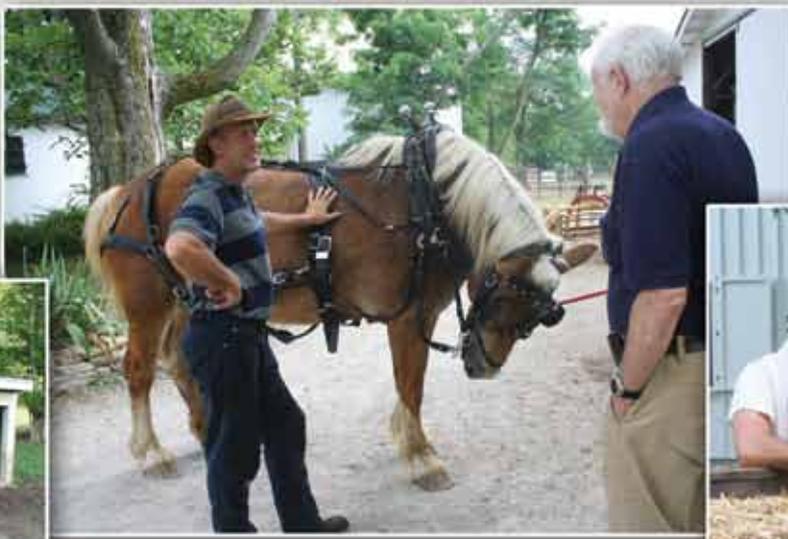
The hog operation also defies scientific confinement hog rearing techniques. There are no chemically sterilized cages or pens, just simple shelters on plots of grass, rotated pastures drenched in sunshine, fresh air and occasional rain. A rough piece of mar-

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Below: Where the boar is pastured. Note the solar fence charger.



An Agricultural Revolution at Turner Farm continued



Left: Jim Marshal and a visitor who once farmed with horses.

Below: Vanessa Caruso and David Lehman both love horses.



ginal land is especially well-suited for hogs—the rougher the better. They'll root around in it, turn it over, eat all kinds of roots, weeds and herbs, and return it better than they found it.

However, they don't spread their droppings like other livestock. They prefer a toilet area that may have to be scraped or disced in occasionally. On healthy soils the microbial population, the dung beetles, will make

short work of it before it becomes a nuisance. After all, all animals do it in the woods. There were no noticeable odors. But the hogs will have their wallows, get covered with mud in warm weather and rob the veterinarian of a living.

A single strand of wire charged with a solar panel keeps hogs from roaming. The wire and support posts are easily moved to rotate pastures.

Since the 60-acre farm is in one parcel, it's convenient to use draft horses for power. Bonnie does have a

couple of tractors for front end loading, the three-point hitch and other hydraulics, but much of the work can be done at the 3 mph pace of the horse. They can grow feed for the horses, and they will return two-thirds or more of it in manure for fertilizer. They will repair and also replace themselves.

Bonnie loves horses, their quiet nature—no tractor noise to shout over or gas fumes to inhale—and their response to "get up" and "whoa" is like having an extra hand working with you.

He will be at the Great Lakes Sale's stallion presentation, February 9, 2012!

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With sheep wool cheaper than dirt, they used it to mulch plants with some surprising results.

At present they have two teams of Belgians, and they are the responsibility of Jim Marshal. Jim is from South Africa where he worked as an equine practitioner, a position we don't have in the U.S. He is also well versed in sustainable farming, and can use all the horse-drawn farm tools that he has assembled in two barns and a shed—not just rusty iron, but tools in working order.

Jim's passion is working with draft horses and sharing his knowledge by teaching others with the same patience he has with animals. Horses are very sensitive to touch and gentle pressure. I heard David Kline remark that a horse can tell the difference between a slap on the butt for a job well done and a whack for misbehaving. Jim has good hands, both with the lines and at halter. Vanessa Caruso, a girl from suburbia with no previous experience with horses, but loved the big drafters at first sight, was intimidated by their size until Jim started showing her how to handle them. With a little know-how and patience, she is fast becoming proficient in many phases of draft horse work, and she loves it. Give her a bonnet and a team and she could pass for Amish.

The old soils at Turner Farm in the southern part of the state are not as fertile as the glaciated soils at Bromfield's Malabar Farm further north. Eroded and worn out from chemical fertilizers, pesticides and herbicide abuse, what organic matter and minerals they did contain is long gone. That was probably as great a cause of farming failure in the area as others combined. Bonnie read Bromfield's farm books well, and knew she had a greater challenge on her hands restoring the soils at Turner Farm than he had at Malabar. At least

he had good subsoils to build on.

Aside from manure, cover crops and plant waste, they welcome city trucks with leaves in autumn, wood chips, grass clippings and other organic waste the rest of the year and maintain a composting yard.

The composting yard is David's domain. I'm sure that Jim could design some sort of horse-drawn compost turner if he had to, but since they have all that money invested in a tractor with a front-end loader, David gets their money's worth out of it turning and spreading compost.

With plenty of lime, other minerals and organic fertilizers from Larry Ringer's Earth Foods, an organic fertilizer supplier in Hartsville, Ohio, they have rebuilt their soils and are certified organic.

They sell their farm production through a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) on the farm and at farmer's markets. But Bonnie and her staff all wanted more. They have such a wonderful farm and with only two other farms operating at Indian Hill, they need company. There are a lot of people in Cincinnati looking for organic quality food. Turner Farm can't feed them all.

With their farm open to all who would like to see how animals are raised on grass pastures, fed unmedicated feed grown either on the farm or locally and are humanely treated, and how fruit and vegetables are grown without petroleum-based fertilizers and rescue chemicals, many return for hands-on experience working on the farm.

Two Guernseys that supply the farm are milked twice daily, seven days a week by a different person. That is: they have fourteen part-time



The CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) market on the farm.

volunteers on deck learning skills in caring for and milking cows by hand. That is a good size class. How many students in a year does OSU teach to milk a cow, and at what price to the taxpayer? Volunteers at Turner Farm can become acquainted with any number of skills in animal husbandry, fruit and vegetable production, draft horse skills and many others. And with all the books and CDs available to augment hands-on experience, one can acquire a practical agricultural education in a short time.

Human energy is one of our greatest resources, so is education. Melinda O' Briant, a lady who wears many hats at Turner Farm, is busy refining ways to get people—some underemployed—and instruction together to better prepare them to feed themselves, their families and perhaps one day their community.

According to Bill Burgett's law: Get good people, give them good tools and materials and expect great things. Bonnie has great people, the land, the horses, the tools and she saw what one Japanese farmer, Masanobu Fukuoka, did in Japan with his One Straw Revolution. Now she is part of the Sustainable Farming Revolution that is picking up momentum everyday. At this sad hour in our history we are fortunate to have leaders like Bonnie Matsui. 🐾