

THE MARKET BULLETIN

“TELLING THE STORY OF WEST VIRGINIA AGRICULTURE”

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WAYNE'S WORLD

Braxton County Couple Carve Out Their Own Path

Having grown up in agriculture families, Sara and John Wayne have always believed in the connection between food and community.

“It was such a part of our lives growing up and the joy that we received,” said Sara, “It was hard work, but it was good work. We both saw those challenges and those rewards growing up and knew that was an opportunity we wanted to seize. We want our kids to have that same opportunity.”

Over the last few decades, with the rise of corporate chain grocery stores, consumers have opted for convenience over quality when it comes to their food. However, recently the Waynes have seen a shift in the food climate. More and more people are becoming health conscious and want to know where and how their food came to be.

“You have other generations that are coming in that don't have that connection, but there's almost a longing for it,” said Sara. “They want to have that experience or to know where their food comes from and to be able to provide. That is not something we take lightly.”

Shortly after getting married in 2008, the Waynes started out on their agriculture journey. Within the first year of establishing Wayne Cattle Company, they were able to raise and sell ten head of beef. Each year, that number grew, and by 2019, the Waynes were sending out 40 head of beef to be inspected, processed and sold.

“In 2016, we saw a trend of people who maybe didn't need a half or whole beef. We were approached about selling just cuts of meat. We didn't know the laws or legalities, so we sought that out. Sara started selling to a lot of farmers markets and individuals,” explained John. “It grew so much and was blessed so much that we had to open a store front.”

In 2019 Sara and John expanded their already successful Wayne Cattle Company to add a small, quaint store in Gassaway called The Farm to Fork Market. The store means more to them than just their own personal gain. By opening The Farm to Fork Market, the Waynes are able to not only sell their own

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Sarah and John Wayne stand outside The Farm to Fork Market in Gassaway. The store opened in 2019 and features fresh meat from Wayne Cattle Company along with WV-made products from other local farmers.

meats, but also feature products by other local vendors. You'll find everything from jams and jellies to soap, as well as a line of dog bandanas crafted by a local student that helps pay her way through college. The Farm to Fork Market takes pride in being able to serve a small community.

“We are able to serve as a hub for other local vendors throughout the state and even in our own county,” Sara said with a smile. “Being able to provide them that opportunity and chance to market their product is important to us.”

Agriculture in West Virginia isn't as straight forward as other states, according to John. He's witnessed it firsthand all his life and knows that

the key to success is to branch out and to not be afraid to try different niches and markets.

“Agriculture looks different across the country. We have friends from a lot of different states, but West Virginia is so diverse in how the landscape is, what you're close to and your markets. What works for us might not work for somebody else,” explained John. “We've not patterned ourselves after any one person. We've borrowed a lot of ideas. We put our own puzzle together to fit our lives and our geographical location.”

While the Waynes take a lot of pride in their work and share a genuine passion for it, that doesn't mean it comes easy. They say there are long days, bad weather and a lack of concern about the land from those that don't understand agriculture.

“I think the misconceptions about farmers is they're just out there to make a profit and that they don't really have a heart or concern about what happens to the land or the animals along the way. I know we care for those animals with the utmost respect and ensure that they're happy and healthy,” said Sara. “That animal's life has value. One of the reasons we handle our meat frozen is because of the small community and rural area that we're in. We don't know what foot traffic is going to be and what customer demand is going to be. By handling it frozen, we're ensuring that animal is being used fully and that it's valued and its life had meaning.”

Though much of Wayne Cattle Company's success is due in large part to John and Sara's tireless work ethic and determination, they credit their good fortune to the resources available such as the WV Farm Bureau, Conservation Service and Farm Service Agency.

“Success in agriculture takes a million things going right and failure means one thing going wrong. Being able to have those resources and utilize those resources and build a support system can sometimes make the difference between success and failure,” said Sara. “We have been blessed tremendously by God over the last several years to be able to do what we do.”

For more information on Wayne Cattle Company, you can check them out on Facebook or stop by The Farm to Fork Market at 609 Elk Street in Gassaway.