

Farmer Profile
Robin & Mark Way
Rumbleway Farm

Rumbleway Farm, owned by Robin and Mark Way, is a 62 - acre farm near the Susquehanna River at the headwaters of the Chesapeake Bay. The Way family purchased the farm in 1992, which was originally established by Scott-Irish settlers in the 1800s, and since then they have been working together as a family to restore the farm and outbuildings. The farm name originated from “Rumble” being the last owners of the farm and “Way” as the family name. The previous owners really loved the land and wanted it to stay in agriculture, unfortunately the husband died the day of his retirement in a car accident and did not get to enjoy the fruits of his labor.

Today, Rumbleway Farm is a grass-based farm raises hay, beef cattle, goats, pastured poultry and rabbits. They wanted their farm to be sustainable and hope to meet the growing consumer demands for naturally raised food. The Ways feel being sustainable is the way of the future – to get back to the past, the way our fore fathers farmed in tune with nature and the environment.

“Our first venture was custom meat from beef cows and pigs, as well as hay grass. The cows spend their days grazing on lush grasses and vegetation, which is supplemented with alfalfa hay and ground corn meal when needed,” says Robin Way.

In 1997 they started raising chickens on grass in moveable shelters similar to Joel Salatin’s methods in Virginia. The chickens are placed on pasture at 3-4 weeks old, as it usually takes about 9 weeks for them to reach a market size of 5-6 pounds. “We start receiving chicks in March and finish our last processing in October,” says Way.

They also raise turkeys, some of which are heritage breeds, ducks and Boer goats. The goats are raised on the hedgerows around the farm, according to Robin, they enjoy the variety of weeds and vines.

The farm currently offers various products for sale year-round, including fresh poultry in spring, summer and fall. In 2005 they processed 2,500 chickens, 500 turkeys, 100 rabbits, 100 ducks and about a dozen goats, and expect about the same this year.

In addition to an on-site processing area and certified kitchen the Ways have also started opening their farm with “Dinner at the Farm” events and their yearly “Farm Day,” which began in 2000. “Both of these events are great ways to market our farming methods and products to the community,” she says.

“Dinner at the Farm” is a four-course meal, open to the public. Open seating is available December to April each year and dinners are served family style.

Anyone can make reservations for a dinner, which features meats and products from the farm and prepared in their certified kitchen. They also offer arrangements for private parties in October and November, where they will tailor the menu to the event. "Dinner at the farm came about as a way to bring extra income in during our 'off' time" says Way.

Rumbleway's annual "Farm Day" will be held the last Sunday in September. Way comments, "We started Rumbleway Farm Day after hosting our county's Family Day on the Farm and really enjoyed the experience." This event allows visitors to see farm activities like making sauerkraut and pressing apple cider. There are hayrides and a fishing tournament, as well as craft activities and local farm vendors.

For more information, contact Rumbleway Farm, 592 McCauley Road, Conowingo, MD 21918, call 410-658-9731 or visit them at www.rumblewayfarm.com.

PASA: What do you see as some of the critical issues concerning agriculture today?

Robin Way: The continual loss of farmland. We continue to move farther and farther away from the land and where our food comes from. By being detached the general public doesn't realize this loss of land and family farms.

PASA: What is unique about your farm?

RW: We live very close to the tri-state area (PA/DE/MD) and we wanted to take advantage of the market by offering poultry. In order to do this we added a processing facility that is certified by the USDA and a certified kitchen. The processing facility is for our own meat since we don't have the added staff to process for other producers. When building the facility we followed USDA specifications, applied for a writ of inspection through the USDA, wrote a HACCP plan and we have an inspector onsite during all inspected processing. It took us about 6 months to get all the paperwork completed.

In 2000 we started offering custom cuts of meat to customers rather than only freezer beef by the half or whole animal. This allowed us to branch out with our customers because not everyone has room for that much meat.

I have found that in offering cuts of meats to customers that consistency is important. Packaging and labeling also can help with sales. Your products not only should taste great but should look great too. Provide recipes for hard to use cuts or begin to think of them in other ways, for example the growing pet food market. You should try to get to know your butcher and work closely with them. Most of our advertisement comes from word of mouth, but we do hand out flyers and brochures. Our web site allows people to access us at home and view the

farm. We started the “Dinner on the Farm” events to make use of our processing area in the winter (because we are seasonal) and showcase our farm products.

PASA: How has your operation evolved over the years?

We started out with a small beef and hay operation in 1992, and have evolved to free-range chickens and turkeys, beef cattle, goats and rabbits. Mark grew up with farming in his blood. He helped at a neighbor’s farm from the time he was 10 years old. The farm came into the family about the time we got married and we purchased it from his parents. I was a city girl who loved the outdoors and the country. We met while working for DuPont doing pharmaceutical research. Mark still works a full time job with the Department of the Army as a biologist, while I manage the farm operations and children.

When we married, Mark had several beef cattle at a neighbor’s farm and it was natural to continue to raise beef. We started into poultry when our extension agent had a grant for a farmer cooperator to try a new approach “free range poultry in moveable pens.” We started in 1996 with 50 chickens and hand-plucked them the first year. We decided we could raise poultry, purchased the equipment and built a processing area.

PASA: Why did you join PASA?

We joined PASA to meet other people in our field and to learn new things. We have been attending the conference for over 5 years and have enjoyed the new pre-conference options. Mark has been to several pasture walks and has enjoyed the two-day turkey workshop offered last year. We have met so many people who are both in our business and others who show us new directions to branch out, that I always recommend PASA to others. No one does things the same way so by seeing what others do on their farms gives us ideas how to stream line our business.