

GROWING HIS CHILDHOOD DREAM

When John McClintic was 12 years old, he wrote in his diary that he wanted to be a beef farmer when he grew up. He wasn't raised on a farm — at the time he lived in Virginia Beach — but summers helping his grandfather in North Carolina planted the idea, and there it waited for the right conditions to flourish...and evolve.



Learning by Doing

In 2005, John started raising hay, primarily to support his wife's burgeoning equine operation: teaching hunt seat riding lessons with a stable of 30 horses. He'd been working with her grandfather on his Loudoun County property, which holds the horse barns and facilities, beginning his education in what it takes to raise high quality hay to feed high-value animals.

Making good use of an operating note from Farm Credit of the Virginias, where he also financed his home, he bought the haying equipment and inputs he needed to raise hay to supply their own horses, selling any extra to nearby neighbors.

"The operating line has to be managed and maintained, but it enables you to accomplish more," says John. "If you have good credit and pay your bills, you can use an operating note like a vehicle to scale as you need throughout your growing cycle."

Getting Bigger and Better

The couple soon leased additional acreage and, with his youngest brother as a partner, they established Thousand Hills Farm in Philomont, Virginia. After John's brother left the business, the McClintic's found a way forward, adding cattle, which can flourish on fodder and pastureland a horse cannot. But John's 80-head herd of Red Angus are no second-class citizens: while any hay unsuitable for the horses finds its way into the cow trough, John works to enhance his herd's health and nutrition while focusing on getting the better forages to the growing stock.

"In order to maintain the growth on the animals, and because philosophically we wanted to go grass-fed rather than grains, we started adding alfalfa, oatlage, and sorghum-sudangrass to supplement the mix," says John.

His efforts have certainly paid off in the quality of, and appreciation for, his products: sold to a local audience by whole, half or quarter

shares, John's beef — and his advice on how to make the best use of it — is in high demand with a growing waiting list.

Working Double Time

All farmers know that the lifestyle leaves very little time to relax: fields, animals, equipment, buildings, fencing all need constant attention. With a full-time job in the public sector, John knows this better than many, especially as he needs to fit all his farming chores into half the time. At times his stringent off-farm schedule means he has to be off-site for several days at a time, so he has to plan for the care of his animals and fields well ahead of time. Vacations are, of course, rare treats.

Fortunately, he has a willing wife and children, all of whom pitch in. As an example, during vaccination season his 13-year-old son runs the cattle into the chute — possible in part because the Red Angus he's selected tend to be more

docile than their Black Angus cousins — while his 11-year-old daughter draws vaccines and records, and John and wife, Jackie, work at the headgate.

Committed to Conservation

As carefully as John cares for his animals and his fields, it's no surprise that he's also concerned for the environment. On the first farm he managed, he installed stream exclusion fencing and livestock watering systems working with a conservation grant. On the newest acreage, he's building stream exclusion fencing to the same specifications without any grant support.

He's also a strong proponent of no-tilling, which John says has pretty much become an industry standard. His goal is to run the sprayer once and the drill once, planting among the stubble of the previous harvest.

"You always want to avoid unnecessary trips across the field, or putting down something the soil and plants don't need," says John. "The roots left behind also help keep the soil in place, and the organisms that live in the dirt stay alive and working for you."

Hard Work Pays Off

Last year, John had his efforts rewarded at the 2020 Southeastern Hay Contest during the American Forage and Grassland Council Annual Meeting. He received third place recognition in the Mixed/Annual Grass or Other Hays category, which had 80+ entries. There were nearly 400 samples from thirteen states tested, with John's hay testing at 20.9% Crude Protein (CP), 62.9% Total Digestible Nutrients (TDN), and 152 Relative Forage Quality (RFQ). He was close to placing second, and looks forward to future years' judging as one indication of the quality of his hay.



Helping the Next Generation

John believes strongly in the importance of agriculture to the future of Loudoun County and regionally in Virginia. Several years ago, he put some of his scarce free time to establishing a local 4H Forage Club. The club was active for five years, after which John's multiple demands forced him to pull back from volunteer work with both 4H and the county fair. He's proud of how the members of the club have moved forward in their careers, many studying agriculture in college and even starting their own ag businesses.

"Most of those kids are running their own operations or are in college and envision owning and operating their own farms or related businesses in the future," John says. "One graduate is a successful fencing contractor who even hired my brother, who used to be involved in our operation!"

His Own Path Forward

Buying an 89-acre farm in October, again with FCV financing, was one step in John's road to the future, and he's already working to improve

the property. Building fence and installing waterers, though not part of any conservation grants or programs, has already begun, and over a weekend in early March, he and his son ditched channels for the initial watering system. The watering system will support his long-term strategy to shift away from primary reliance on hay and more toward grazing for his cattle, though the horses will of course still need the high quality hay John's proven he can raise.

"John is a really good manager of credit and been a very responsible borrower," says FCV relationship manager Jessica Baker. "He views an operating loan as another piece of equipment, and cares for and manages it appropriately. His financial management makes him a great borrower-owner and a successful farmer."

John still has that childhood diary, so he can literally point to the day he defined his life's path. Today, he can be rightly proud of the thriving farming operation he's built with his wife and family, the neighbors he's helping to feed, and the environment and community he's helping to protect.

