



Greenhorns: 50 Dispatches from the New Farmers' Movement

Paula Manalo (Editor) , Brad Halm

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A community of more than 5000 young farmers and activists, the Greenhorns are committed to producing and advocating for food grown with vision and respect for the earth. This book, edited by three of the group's leading members, comprises 50 original essays by new farmers who write about their experiences in the field from a wide range of angles, both practical and inspirational. Funny, sad, serious, and light-hearted, these essays touch on everything from financing and machinery to family, community building, and social change.

Greenhorns: 50 Dispatches from the New Farmers' Movement Details

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Joy says

I learned of this book through Jenna Woginrich's blog where she chronicles her life on her own Cold Antler Farm in upstate New York. This book is filled with short essays from a variety of young and new farmers across the country, covering a range of topics and organized roughly by topic. Weather, vegetables, livestock, finances, physical work, and so on are all covered in honest, interesting, touching, and usually funny stories by many good writers. All of the stories were well written and edited well, which is not always the case with anthologies, so that was excellent.

This book will give you a varied and vivid picture of the state of small farms in the USA as they stand today. It's not all bleak, although there are lots of challenges, and some of the more interesting stories were written by farmers who are not in the typically progressive states where the locavore movement has taken hold. I definitely feel that I learned a lot from reading this book, and while I'm not planning to farm any time soon, I am certainly going to continue my support of local farms and the farmers who grow food for me there.

Evan says

"Even though we might dress like liberals, have been educated like liberals, create products generally bought by liberals, or come from liberal families or communities, at heart and in deed we are quite conservative. I do not want to attempt a takeover of conservative ideals, but...once we recognize that we have the same goals, we can unify our means." Vince Booth in "Coming Full Circle: The Conservatism of the Agrarian Left"

Piper Mount says

A really awesome organization and fantastic book. About half the stories are awesome and insightful and most of the rest are only flawed in that they are just written by young people that try too hard to convey something powerful in too few words. It was inspiring to read before I spent a season working on a farm, but rereading it is also a hefty dose of realism now that I have.

Rachel says

This book is full of short reflections on starting farms. I would recommend it to anyone who is looking for guidance or inspiration regarding beginning to farm. It is a collection of very short essays and is not in any way in depth. To really learn skills you'll have to look elsewhere but I found it to be an encouraging read which gave me ideas about how one would go about starting a farm and the types of difficulties and opportunities that one might face when engaging in such a venture.

Jennybeast says

There were a lot of interesting points of view represented in this collection of essays, and a few memorable moments, but ultimately I fear that quite a few of the farmers featured are more excited about farming than they are about writing – as they should be. So, it's a great resource if you're looking to sample some of the better farm writers out there and maybe as a name recognition tool, but not so great as literary feat.

Karen Snyder says

This was a good book as an introduction for those considering organic farming, or just interested in farmer memoirs! It did not disappoint, with overall optimistic outlooks despite challenges, stress and frustrations one might encounter. It approached the movement with humor and insight, it is worth checking out!

Sarah says

Nice in the hand and on the eye. But like the single, miraculous, gem of a beet that works against all odds during the greenhorn's first season, Ben James' "Worth" is worthy and stands alone in acres of otherwise feeble crops in poorly prepped soil.

A good first effort, as is that first eager year on the farm. May it culminate next time in savvier writers and better yield for all.

Sarah says

As a beginning farmer, I found some of the stories relatable. However, there were quite a few that I felt were extremely novice.

Jessica says

Greenhorns is a collection of essays from new farmers. Some have been farming for a few years and some are in their first year. The book is divided into subject area sections like Money, Land, Purpose, etc. and each section has an introduction written by one of the editors of the book. It was very uplifting to read of all these new farmers who are determined to make a go of farming even when it seems discouraging. They know they won't make millions farming, but it's important enough that they keep going anyway. I love talking to the farmers at my local farmer's market and having a year-round market where I can buy fresh, local vegetables and meat - this book shows that the same thing is happening all over the country. It reminds me of what Joel Salatin says in *The Omnivore's Dilemma* - you don't have to legislate changes to the food industry to get better food, when people know more about where their food comes from and choose to buy from their local farmers you make the industrial food system irrelevant in your own life. That's my goal and this book shows that as well.

Some quotes I particularly liked:

"The best things in life - growing your own food, living and working with your neighbors, being outside in an open space - are being lost." (p.113)

"It's a foregone conclusion in the big poultry industry that, as the University of Georgia's broiler information web page bluntly puts it, 'Having an independent broiler-growing operation is no longer feasible.' In fact, according to the site, there is actually no such thing as an independent chicken farmer anymore; 'approximately 99 percent of all broilers are produced under contract, with the remaining production occurring on integrator-owned farms [those that are owned by the same vertically integrated company that owns every stage of production, including the processing facility and the retail brand].' The argument is that small-scale production can't compete with the low prices of the ultra-efficient industrial operations...There are still independent chicken farmers in the world, and they've proved that it can pencil out. In 2010, three Massachusetts producers utilized a mobile poultry-processing unit to legally process their chickens. Each raised, hand-processed, and sold between eight hundred and twelve hundred, all grown on pasture. Through farmers' markets, restaurants, and presales directly to consumers, these birds fetched from four dollars and fifty cents to six dollars per pound...Compare that to contract chicken farmers. They get paid between 3.8 and 4.6 cents per pound of live weight. That means that a particularly efficient producer might gross a whopping twenty-five cents for each bird. During the ten to fifteen years it takes a contract producer to pay off the hundred thousand dollars in up-front cost of building and outfitting a poultry house that meets Tryon's and Perdue's standards, the farmer needs to grow well over a hundred thousand birds a year just to net five thousand dollars." (p. 149-151)

H Grimes says

I think this is an important book if you're looking to start a small farm. It's a collection of essays written by new farmers on their experience starting a farm. Some are wonderful, insightful, and inspiring. Others are downright tedious and in desperate need of an editor. All and all though, it's well worth your time to peruse these essays. The essays contain honest experiences with no sugar-coating, and does a good job at giving you an idea of what to realistically expect in your first few years and what hurdles you can expect to face. It is hard work and you're bound to hit roadblocks on the way, but farming is not an impossible dream.

I felt the book was particularly heavy on CSA vegetable farms and wish there was a bit more livestock farming representation and non-CSAs. I also felt most of the essays were merely reflections, and lacking in any practical information - How did these farmers become farmers? How did they find land? How did they start a CSA? What possessed them to farm? How did they fund everything? I would have liked to read some essays on new farmers' full experience, from start to finish. Maybe my issue is that the essays were simply too short, and left me wanting more details, including the gritty boring details. I did appreciate the large number of female farmers included in this collection though.

The resources at the very end of the book are extensive and invaluable!

Deanna says

I loved this little book. It's a collection of 50 short pieces from new farmers, mostly those doing CSAs or

other small market or truck farms. It makes farming seem both doable and daunting at the same time. I learned plenty, just like you do when you're talking to someone about their area of expertise, though none of these people feel like experts. Farming is absorbing, important and exhausting work. If you'd like a peek into the world your CSA farmer inhabits or might be thinking of picking up a shovel yourself, I highly recommend it.

Karen Mahtin says

This book is a collection of short essays by beginning farmers (I eat this kind of thing up). It includes people who grow everything from veggies to animals. Some people will find the farmers' stories depressing, while others will find them inspiring. I mostly found them to be too brief. The book is a quick read, because it really doesn't have that much content- there's a lot of blank space and cute drawings. Better than the podcast by far, but I'm not sure if I should give it a 4-star rating. There are a few very thoughtful pieces, and a few nice stories about connecting with neighbors and local customer bases. I'm partial to the piece by a local farmer who I interviewed for a class last year ;).

Daniel Brown says

This contained a lot of good perspectives based on the experience of all the farmers. It was very interesting and helpful.

Sarah says

This collection of essays by new and young farmers touched on the difficulties of farming--expensive land, no money, long hours, crop-destroying weather. On the surface, it all seemed rather hopeless, but the book also touched on the magic of farming, the nameless reasons why so many people are leaving cities to grow food. It was heavy on medium-acreage CSA vegetable farms, so I would have liked to see more variety in the types of farms, but otherwise it was a lovely read.

Carolyn says

This was interesting reading and I think it will really appeal to people entertaining the idea of starting to farm as well as struggling new farmers. I enjoy reading about farming, though I have no plans to till the land! I think it reads better in snippets, rather than reading in one or two long sittings.
