

***The Hobby Farmer***

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## Preface

**H**uman beings tend to take up unusual hobbies. Why would someone raise chickens to produce eggs that cost nearly as much as they would pay for at the supermarket? Why would a person, who earns \$100 per hour, spend a few hours each week weeding and cultivating a plot of vegetables, when the same amount of value for time could purchase several times that amount of produce. Why would a surgeon, who lives a predominately aseptic life, want to get covered in grease to repair a worn out tractor?

I can think of dozens of reasons, but ask any farmer or rancher, even after disease has wiped out a herd, a hurricane destroyed their crops, or torrential rainfalls washed away the topsoil after being tilled, and you'll come up with a few common denominators.

The most common is from respect. Respect for the gifts they've received. Yes, even after bad weather and disease, the land, crops, and livestock are considered gifts that will always be treasured.

A higher quality of life. No, you won't find many penthouse apartments and BMWs in the neighborhood, but you will find contentment. There is a unique gratification from becoming closer to the soil, even humbling, when "pulling" (assist in birthing process) a calf at 2:00 A.M. in the freezing rain. Such a life tends to bring out the best in people. But quality of life doesn't always come from activities, but from friends and neighbors, as well.

Those good folks, who are down the road from you, and in all directions, are probably enjoying the same lifestyle which you are enjoying. They are learning, just as you are learning. Their values are similar to yours. They are just as swollen with pride of what they produced as you may be. You have a lot in common with your neighbors. Who better to socialize with?

Education ranks right up there, as well. From soil fertility to antibiotics in a sick goat, hobby farmers are engaging in biology, botany, biochemistry, forestry, organic chemistry, physiology, crop science, animal husbandry, accounting, etc. All are very fascinating and enlightening fields. Did you know that these very same subjects are taught to 4-H children and the FFA (previously known as the "Future Farmers of America")?

Responsibility, especially if children are involved. Farm chores tend to add maturity, discipline, and fond memories from the experiences. Those values are never forgotten, but are brought into adulthood. Feeding pigs before watching television will develop not only a conscientious adolescent, but a strong work ethic, as well.

Yet, it all boils down to pleasure. No, it's not the pleasure obtained from an ocean cruise or a vacation in the Bahamas, but a delight from the rewards of your efforts, even after a dismal harvest. For even with each failure, there is the progress of learning how to do something better, and to achieve that next milestone. To be able to serve that sweet corn on the dinner table, knowing "I raised that corn", will make those cobs the sweetest, most scrumptious corn you've ever tasted in your entire life, in spite of its nearly embarrassing, diminutive size.

Welcome to a new world of respect, responsibility, education, leisure, and the creation of many fond memories.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Section I – Getting Started .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1. What is a “Hobby Farmer”? .....	2
2. Getting Help .....	21
3. What Should I Grow or Raise? .....	31
4. Location, Location, Location .....	41
5. Market Identification & Products .....	51
<b>Section II – Soil.....</b>	<b>75</b>
6. Soil Types .....	76
7. Soil Testing .....	101
8. Fertilizing .....	126
9. Moisture and Irrigation .....	151
10. Soil Conservation .....	176
<b>Section III – Pasture .....</b>	<b>200</b>
11. Management.....	201
12. Rotation.....	226
13. Weeding .....	251
14. Harrowing .....	276
15. Inter-seeding .....	301
<b>Section IV - Crops .....</b>	<b>325</b>
16. Forages.....	326
17. Row Crops .....	351
18. Non-Row Crops .....	376
19. Orchards, Groves, and Vineyards .....	401
20. Pesticides.....	426
21. Herbicides .....	451
22. Weeds.....	476
23. Toxic Plants .....	501
<b>Section V - Livestock .....</b>	<b>525</b>
24. Beef Cattle .....	526
25. Dairy Cattle.....	551
26. Small Ruminants.....	576
27. Horses .....	601
28. Poultry.....	626
29. Exotics.....	651
30. Ration Balancing.....	676

31. Supplements.....	701
32. Animal I.D. ....	726
33. Insecticides.....	751
34. Auctions & Sale Barns.....	776
35. Predator Control.....	801
<b>Section VI – Organic Farming .....</b>	<b>825</b>
36. Defined.....	826
37. Insect Control.....	851
38. Weed Control.....	876
39. Certification .....	901
<b>Section VII - Buildings .....</b>	<b>926</b>
40. Barns .....	950
41. Sheds.....	951
42. Animal Housing.....	976
<b>Section VIII - Horticulture .....</b>	<b>1000</b>
43. Annuals vs. Perennials .....	1001
44. Greenhouses.....	1026
45. Plots.....	1051
<b>Section IX - Chemicals .....</b>	<b>1075</b>
46. Classes of Chemicals .....	1076
47. Insect Control.....	1101
48. Weed Control.....	1126
49. Rodent and Small Animal Control.....	1151
50. Certification .....	1176
<b>Section X - Equipment .....</b>	<b>1200</b>
51. Trucks & Trailers.....	1201
52. Tractors .....	1226
53. Implements.....	1251
54. Accessories .....	1276
55. Tools .....	1301
<b>Section XI – Business Aspects .....</b>	<b>1325</b>
56. Marketing.....	1326
57. Covenants.....	1351
58. Legal Matters & Liabilities.....	1376

58. Insurance.....	1401
59. Taxes & Deductions.....	1426
<b>Section XII – Conclusion.....</b>	<b>1450</b>
60. The End To A New Beginning.....	1451
Index.....	1476
Glossary.....	1501
References.....	1526