



CHANGING WITH THE TIMES

Haverhill's farms find ways to thrive

ABOUT THIS SPECIAL SECTION

Haverhill was a community of farms decades ago, with a variety of cattle and produce operations covering the landscape.

Today, a few farms remain, but they had to change to survive.

Rogers Spring Hill Farm in Ward Hill has a large gardening center that is popular with residents. Kimball Farm at the edge of Rocks Village has hosted obstacle courses and other events, and has a corn maze that people pay to visit each fall. Crescent Farm in Ward Hill plans to take organic waste from other farms and convert it to fertilizer.

And the list goes on.

This year's Haverhill Gazette Progress Edition looks at how farming in Haverhill has evolved, keeping a family tradition not only alive, but vital to the community and financially strong.

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Change at Crescent Farms aimed at keeping operation strong for next generation

Farm owner to install anaerobic digester to expand operations there

By PETER FRANCIS
STAFF WRITER

A new world of possibility is about to open up for Crescent Farms.

The Bradford farm has received approval from the City Council to begin using an anaerobic digester to turn animal and food waste into energy.

While the third-generation owners of the farm, the Davidowicz family, still has to get building permits from the city to construct the digester, the family is hopeful it will not only provide additional income, but also improve the fertilizer being used on the farm's crops.

"It's been a long time coming," said Michael Davidowicz, the farm's owner. "We started looking into getting one a couple of years ago."

While new to the United States, anaerobic digesters, are common in other parts of the world, according to



File photos

Crescent Farms has operated an ice cream and pastry stand on Willow Avenue in past years.

Davidowicz. He said there are about 9,000 of them in Germany, while Canada has about 450.

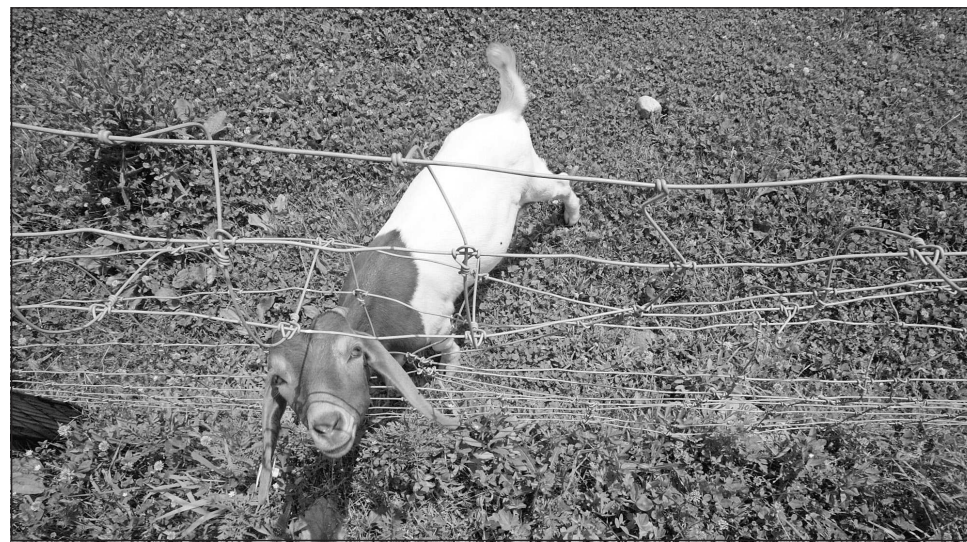
Davidowicz said the Crescent Farms digester will be the fourth in Massachusetts.

The digesters work by placing animal and food waste such as used oils and rotten vegetables, inside the digester's silo-like tank. Once all the biodegradable materials are inside, the silo is sealed off and oxygen is removed.

The methane from the waste is used to create energy, while the waste that remains can be used as fertilizer.

"We're going to be mixing animal and food waste," Davidowicz said. "The digester takes the phosphorous out of the waste, which makes for better fertilizer. It's a way of controlling the quality of our fertilizer."

Crescent Farms has about 200 acres devoted to



A small goat pokes its head through the fence.

corn and 300 acres for hay bails. The farm also sets aside 80 acres for the 185 beef cattle and cows.

While the animals will be chipping in naturally to provide material for the digester, Davidowicz said the farm is working on

notifying area restaurants about the service in hopes they will transport their biodegradable material to the farm.

It is the hope of Davidowicz and his wife, Debbie, that the digester will keep the farm strong, helping them

leave the property to their three children.

"We're still in the building phase, but we're just trying to bring in another source of income to keep the farm in the family," he said.

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Shifting from cows to garden center

Rogers Farm's focus changes from cattle to yard items

MIKE LABELLA
STAFF WRITER

The sprawling Rogers Spring Hill Farm that was once packed with a herd of more than 200 milking cows has evolved over the years.

It's still a working farm and there are still cows, but fewer of them. The Rogers family also operates a thriving garden center where locals buy everything from plants to patio blocks and decorative yard items.

The farm was started in 1902 by Randolph Rogers, who passed it down to his son Harold Rogers, who passed it down to his son Richard Rogers. He operates it now along with his children Barbara and Stephen Rogers and the next generation of Rogers family members.

Also involved in the operation are fifth generation grandchildren, who help out on the farm.

The 200-acre farm in the Ward Hill section of Haverhill is an active farm and grows corn silage, feed hay for cows and horses, pick-your-own strawberries, pumpkins, apples and butternut squash that is supplied to Market Basket stores.

"We also do school tours in the fall, which usually involves pumpkin and apple picking, hayrides and snacks and educational lessons about the farm," said Stephen Rogers.

The farm tours provide students with an understanding of the importance of food production and an appreciation of the quality of a family farm.

The farm also raises calves. When they mature and are about to give birth, they are sold to other farmers who use them for milk production and to replenish their own herds. They

stopped milking cows at Rogers Farm about 15 years ago.

"We've never not had cows," Rogers said. "We raise replacement heifers and sell them at around two years of age. We used to milk as many as 90 cows daily, and had a total herd of almost 200 head of cattle, but now we have about 40 head."

The farm is also home to two draft horses named Rocky and Rosie. They get to pull antique wagons during parades and are also used for some field work.

Cousin Harold Rogers and his parents run Rogers Spring Hill Pure Natural Water.

"When we go to farm shows, such as the National Farm Show in Louisville in the winter, they ask where we are from and then they say, 'There are farms in Massachusetts?'" Stephen Rogers said.

"You can't afford to sell wholesale as there's not enough per acre to survive unless you have a huge operation," he said. "I spoke to one farmer from the Midwest who had 15,000 acres in Montana. They make \$150 per acre in a good year growing mostly wheat and some corn. If you made that same amount of money here, you could not even pay your taxes."

As it is with many small New England farms, having a retail operation of some kind helps keep the business flourishing.

"The garden center is a tremendously important part of our operation," Rogers said. "In order to be successful and continue to be involved in agriculture, you need a retail component."

The center opened in 1991 and continues to grow.

At Rogers Spring Hill Garden and Farm Center



TIM JEAN/Staff photo

Rogers Spring Hill Farm has been in operation since 1902.

on Route 125 in Bradford, you can find just about everything you would need to landscape your property — including annuals, perennials, shrubs and trees, as well as hardscape products such as pavers, wall blocks and natural stone.

The center also carries a variety of garden accessories such as statues and birdbaths, pottery planters,

trellises, granite mailboxes and lamp posts, metal and stone outdoor fire pits, fireplaces and a variety of outdoor pizza. It also offers products from the farm, including strawberries, pumpkins, squash, apples, straw and hay.

"Outdoor kitchens are gaining in popularity," said Gary Hall, outside salesman for the garden center. "We

also carry a variety of natural stone veneer products which are used for outdoor columns and foundations, as well as indoor and outdoor fireplaces."

The shrubs and trees are cared for by nursery manager Kenneth Roth.

Some of the newer products this year include a line of low-voltage landscape lighting that a homeowner

or contractor can install.

"We're always introducing new plants," Stephen Rogers said. "This year we have Cherry Explosion, Tilt-a-Swirl and Mystical Flame Hydrangea, which are new introductions this year. And one that's really cool is Tiny Tuff Stuff, a hardy dwarf hydrangea. And of course we raise our own annuals in our greenhouse."

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Kimball Farm evolves

Moves from dairy farm to mixed operation



Gazette file photo
Josean Cintron, 2, of Haverhill gets a feel for farm life during a festival at Silsby Farm.

MIKE LABELLA
STAFF WRITER

For generations, the Kimball family made its Kimball Farm in rural East Haverhill successful by raising cattle and other animals.

A working family farm that has been in the family since 1820, it is now owned and run by ninth generation farmer Tyler Kimball with a focus on sustainable farming on 200 acres.

As generation after generation has taken over the farm, it has evolved.

The farm was run as a dairy farm until 1977 and since transformed into what it is today. Tyler Kimball raises beef cattle, buffalo, llamas, chickens, draft horses, sheep and goats.

The farm has a llama petting area where local

parents take their children. In the last couple of years, the farm began hosting obstacle courses and other events to make money.

One part of the business is Kimball Farm Feeds,

which is a leading supplier of hay, feed and bedding for horses and cattle to many farmers in New England. Kimball Farm includes a certified USDA composting. Please see **KIMBALL**, Page S7



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Srybny Farms celebrates 100 years

Traditional farming operation adopts new irrigation technique

By PETER FRANCIS
STAFF WRITER

The world was a very different place a century ago.

But since its opening in Haverhill in 1917, Srybny Farms on Hilldale Avenue has kept farming simple, although some modern technology has crept into the way the family farm cultivates its crops.

“We’re still old school, but we now use plastic drip irrigation for our plants,” said Kathy Srybny, the farm’s third-generation owner who operates the business with her brother Ed. “It works kind of like a greenhouse effect.”

Boasting 100 acres that grow a wide array of crops ranging from tomatoes, beans, peppers, to several varieties of corn, Srybny Farms is constantly expanding its offerings to provide to customers at its farm stand at 712 Hilldale Ave., not far from the city’s border with Atkinson.

“There’s pretty much nothing we don’t grow. Warmer weather would be nice right now,” Kathy Srybny said on a recent cooler-than-usual spring day.

While the farm has been in operation for a century, the farm stand did not open until 1986. It currently grows and sells perennial and annual flowers, and will soon be selling its famous butter-and-sugar corn and tomatoes.

Srybny says the tomatoes are her favorite crop at the farm.

By the end of summer, the farm will begin switching up its focus toward fall staples such as mums, corn stalks, and of course, pumpkins sold by the pound at the farm stand, Srybny said.

She is optimistic that, with more sunlight coming in the summer months, the farm will be able to increase its volume of grown crops.

Srybny’s earliest memory on the farm was around the age of 4 when she and her brother would pick



ABOVE: A cow at Srybny Farm on Hilldale Avenue.

cucumbers. From there, they would be taken to Andover to be pickled and eventually transported to be sold in Boston.

Srybny’s parents, Edward and Kathleen, handed the farm over to Kathy and her brother in 2012. And while high school-age kids provide much of the summer labor, Kathy Srybny is optimistic at least one of the 10 Srybny grandchildren will take over the farm when their time comes.

“My father has passed away, but my mother still oversees things,” said Srybny. “We’re hopeful the farm will be handed down to a fourth generation.”



LEFT: An historical photo of Ed Srybny plowing his corn fields on Hilldale Avenue.

File photos

A family affair being given to the next generation

Silsby Farm is old-fashioned, but adding some new twists

MIKE LABELLA
STAFF WRITER

For more than 200 years, Silsby Farm on Salem Street in Bradford has been providing the community with vegetables and livestock products.

The farm originally contained 250 acres that Enoch Silsby purchased from Col. Henry Hale in the 1860s. At the time, Salem Street, which passes by the farm, was the main road from Rowley to Haverhill.

For the past 15 years, Silsby Farm, which now has 139 acres, has been operated by Chris Stasinis, a third-generation sustainable farmer from Peabody, and his wife, Marlene Stasinis, a Beverly native. They've lived in Haverhill for 25 years. When Marlene isn't taking care of business on the farm, she operates her own business — Marlene's Green Carpet Cleaning.

"I tell people that I'm green from my head to my toes. I grow green, I eat green and I clean green," she joked.

The farm includes a 55-acre island that was known as Stock Island in 1885. In 1890, Hale established artesian wells on the island, which was renamed Hale's Island. He raised cows, pigs and

sheep on the island. In 1910 it became Island Park, a golf course that was destroyed in a 1936 hurricane.

Livestock is still raised at Silsby Farm, including turkeys for Thanksgiving, and chickens for eggs that are sold at the farm stand.

Stasinis family members use natural, sustainable agriculture methods to grow sweet corn, tomatoes and pumpkins. They also grow a variety of fresh vegetables that are picked daily during the growing season.

In addition to those traditional products, the farm also keeps bees to make honey and has an educational program each fall to teach children about farming.

You can find the farm's products at Chris' Farm Stand, 436 Salem St., and at the Haverhill Farmers Market next to the police station on Bailey Boulevard. And they plan to open a new Farmers Market in North Andover this year.

"We also operate a CSA, fruit and vegetable membership," Marlene Stasinis said about Community Supported Agriculture.

"When you purchase a membership in the spring, come the picking season, which is usually the end

of June, members come to the farm on a weekly basis and are handed a bag filled with a variety of fresh-picked vegetables," she said.

Early crops include beets, kale, spinach, lettuce, Swiss chard and collard greens. As the summer progresses, crops include sweet corn, tomatoes, cucumbers, zucchini, summer squash, eggplant, peppers, carrots and beans, followed in late summer by onions, potatoes, winter squash, pumpkins and apples.

"The best thing about a CSA is that you receive vegetables that were picked at their peak nutritional value," Marlene Stasinis said.

The farm has expanded its local hay crop to include both round and square bales of first and second crops. Hay can be picked up or can be delivered directly to your property. Chris and Marlene Stasinis are also working in cooperation with other local farmers to incorporate a bee keeper for local harvested honey, which is sold at their farm stand. They also work with other farmers to bring fresh, locally grown fruit to their stand.

When the leaves turn red and gold, the Stasinis



Gazette file photo

Stephen Birchmore, 11, of Haverhill picks out a pumpkin for his family at Silsby Farm.

family holds its annual October Pumpkin Festival. The event educates children and their families about the importance of growing food locally, using sustainable agricultural practices.

Generations ago, the farm was tilled by horse and plow, but now it's done mechanically with tractors.

"Way back when the Pentucket natives were here, they used to plant what is know as the three

sisters — beans, pumpkins and corn — on this farm-land," Marlene Stasinis said. "Today we still plant the three sisters — and all of their cousins."

The fourth generation of Stasinis farmers is now involved in the business. The Stasinis' son, Andrew, 21, recently graduated from UMass Amherst with a degree in sustainable farming and is farming with his father. Their daughter, Elizabeth, 18, has been

working the farm stand and the fields since she was a toddler. When she was 8 years old, she was lifting 60-pound bags of corn up and over her shoulders and onto the farm stand display tables.

"As much as she loves the farm, Elizabeth joined the Marines and will be heading to boot camp in August," Marlene Stasinis said. "She wants to defend our country and make a difference in the world."

KIMBALL

■ *Continued from Page S5* operation. Most of the compost is used for the farm's own fields, but it also sells compost and loam.

A farm stand on East Broadway opens in early June and offers a selection of all natural grass fed beef, all natural pork and fresh eggs from chickens raised at the farm.

"We were selling buffalo, but we cut back on our

herd," Tyler Kimball said. "We picked our or best breeding stock and we're starting again."

Kimball said he hopes to add some local crafts to his farm stand's offerings this year.

Produce such as garlic, onions, tomatoes, potatoes, pumpkins and gourds will be available as the growing season progresses.

The Kimball family plans to open a sugar house at the corn maze this winter. They hope to begin offering their

own maple syrup starting next February or so.

"We have maple trees all over the farm with about 2,000 taps, plus more on land we rent throughout the region," he said.

Those taps are usually installed around the first of February.

"There's a huge demand for maple syrup, and it's something we can do during the winter in addition to firewood and lumber from our small lumber mill," Kimball said.

He said it takes 40 gallons of sap to create one gallon of maple syrup.

As September rolls around, Kimball harvests sunflower seeds he sells as bird seed and also uses as feed for his animals.

"It's a great natural oil that balances the nutrition of the animals," he said.

In 2007, Tyler Kimball expanded the farm to include "agri-tainment" when the first corn maze was designed and opened.

Along with the corn

maze, which opens in early September each year, the farm also offers hay rides, as well as sleigh rides in the winter.

"We have added a few stragglers such a goats, sheep, llamas and alpacas that wait out front for visitors to come by with apples and carrots," he said.

"Our draft horses, Mark and Mike, also love apples," he said. "They also come right out to greet visitors and accept the occasional treat."

Don't worry about them getting too fat.

"They work it off when it is time for hay rides and sleigh rides," Kimball said.

Kimball is planning to hold a Farm Day event where people can get close to farm animals and learn about farming.

"We're trying to diversify and stay ahead of the curve," he said about saving the farm from development. "They aren't making any more land and everyone wants a piece."

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