



## #FridaysOnTheFarm: Farming Regeneratively to Leave a Legacy

Each Friday meet farmers, producers, and landowners through our [#FridaysOnTheFarm](#) stories. Visit local farms, ranches, forests, and resource areas where USDA customers and partners *do right and feed everyone*.

This Friday meet Mark and Lucy Doudlah, farmers in Cooksville, Wisconsin, who produce 20 different crops and raise free-range, grass-fed meat using one guiding principle – being regenerative.

### Path to Sustainability

Mark grew up in a farming family. When he was a sophomore in high school, Mark rented a farm from his father, land he and Lucy would later purchase.

Mark had an off-farm career for years while managing that farm. It wasn't until 2008, when his father was diagnosed with cancer, that Mark and Lucy decided to farm full time.

"With news my dad had contracted cancer, I knew I wanted to make a healthy change on the farm," said Mark. "When he passed away, I decided to transition 40 acres to organic in his honor. This was a paradigm shift for me; I wanted to be a part of the solution."

Mark hasn't looked back. He and Lucy have grown their operation to 1,750 acres, all managed through organic standards.

### Healthy Soil, Healthy Farm

Regenerative farming involves practices that rebuild organic matter in the soil, improve biodiversity, and promote [soil health](#). Today, farming regeneratively is a way of life for Mark and Lucy. Owners of Doudlah Farms and FarmRite Organics, the couple currently grows over 20 different varieties of crops including black beans, pinto beans, dark red kidney beans, corn, seed corn, rye, winter wheat, winter barley, soybeans, forage peas, flint corn, sunflowers, buckwheat, oats, mustards, clovers, and sorghum.

They also raise free-range, organic poultry and eggs, grass-fed pork, and grass-fed beef. The Doudlahs attribute much of their success – both in building an operation and being sustainable – to organic farming with the use of cover crops.

"The really cool part is how the [Natural Resources Conservation Service](#) has actually helped and allowed us to do conservation practices, like cover crops," said Mark. "Organic is all about cover crops for me."



In 2014, Mark decided to plant cereal rye during the organic transition phase of his operation with the help of the NRCS [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#).

“We planted cereal rye on all our corn acres. I knew I needed to transition to organic, but I am farming one third highly erodible land. After learning about crimped cereal rye, I thought we could do it,” said Mark. “The cereal rye provides a nice, thick mat, which armors the soil from further erosion the rest of year, conserves the moisture, and feeds the biology a slow feed of carbon long-term. The root system of the rye is what typically feeds the soybean that year. The biomass above ground feeds the soil as it decomposes.”

### **Moving Forward**

Beyond being a farmer, Mark is also a mentor and a key note speaker. He and Lucy hold annual farm field days promoting organic production – they have currently reached over 1,000 farmers.

“When I go somewhere as an organic producer, we are a community trying to help everyone move forward,” said Mark.

Mark and Lucy have plans to continue building on their passion for [organic agriculture](#). “Our vision long term is to create a holistic wellness center to include organic food and Community Supported Agriculture, hold field days and events there, and more,” said Lucy. “Our daughter, Emily, is studying chiropractic and holistic medicine. We can incorporate her studies into the center and our son, Jason, plans to incorporate his studies in agriculture and agronomy.”

Leaving a legacy and something their children can be proud of is important to the Doudlahs. “We wouldn’t have been able to do cover crops on all our acres without the help of NRCS or add monarch and pollinator habitat.” Lucy adds, “NRCS makes us feel good about doing the right thing for our land.”

### **More Information**

USDA offers a variety of risk management, disaster assistance, loan, and conservation programs to help agricultural producers in the United States weather ups and downs in the market and recover from natural disasters as well as invest in improvements to their operations. [Learn about additional programs](#).



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