



## #FridaysOnTheFarm: Homestead Healing

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 week meet Mollie and Tobin Krell, co-directors of [Homestead 1839](#) in West Burlington, Iowa. Through farming projects, the non-profit works to rehabilitate youth and adults. The organization raises poultry and grows specialty organic produce to promote agricultural education and a love of the land.

### Path to the Homestead

Mollie was a gardening teacher in Portland, Oregon, where she began using her small community garden to help at-risk students and kids with behavior issues. Having success with this, the Krells decided to take their knowledge and experience back to Iowa in 2015.

They created Homestead 1839, adopting sustainable agricultural practices. Their use of horticulture therapy helps put community members with legal and mental health issues on the path to recovery. The farm sits on 30 acres, which was originally the homestead of Mollie's ancestors, dating back to 1839.

The Krells now work with juvenile court services, probation services, and mental health resource organizations to help rehabilitate youths and adults in southeast Iowa. One of their core programs provides vocational rehabilitation.

"A project might be something like picking cucumbers, pickling, and canning them, and then they can take them home," said Mollie.

### Growing Sustainably

The Krells use a permaculture farming system that uses nature for maximum production, which benefits people and the land.

Companion planting is an example of their permaculture system, where they strategically plant vegetables and flowers next to each other to repel unwanted pests and attract beneficial insects.

They also build special birdhouses to attract birds that prey on the Japanese beetle – a known scourge of plants and flowers.

The Krells grow traditional Iowa produce, such as tomatoes, squash, and peppers. They focus



on lesser-known heirloom varieties that are more difficult to find locally, including okra, tomatillos, edible flowers, and fresh herbs.

The Krells sell produce to the public at their roadside market and at local farmers markets.

They distributed about 3,600 pounds of fruits and vegetables by the end of the 2018 growing season. At the end of the farmers market season, they donate produce to federally subsidized housing communities and a food bank.

## **USDA Assistance**

In spring 2018, Homestead 1839 seeded 14 acres of pollinator habitat through the [Conservation Reserve Program](#), a program offered by USDA's [Farm Service Agency](#).

"We've been able to grow just about everything outside of citrus fruit," said Tobin.

USDA's [Natural Resources Conservation Service](#) also helps Homestead 1839 to better protect their natural resources through the [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#), which provides planning and financial assistance for erosion control and soil health improvements. The Krells have used cover crops, crop rotations, and pest management systems on their land.

They also use worm castings to help improve soil health. "It revitalizes the bacteria and all the other good stuff in the soil," said Tobin.

NRCS also assisted with a high tunnel system to help extend the growing season and provide a more environmentally-friendly setting for growing produce. The high tunnel includes a water catchment that filters water to two 1,000-gallon tanks for irrigation.

This year, they installed a cistern container to collect water from their barn that will be used to irrigate field crops and are in the stages of creating a seed-saving program for 2020.

"We wouldn't have been able to do this without USDA programs in place," said Tobin. "It's allowed us to do something innovative that we've also been able to turn other folks to."

## **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](#).



For more information about USDA programs and services, [contact your local USDA service center](#).

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*Photo Credit: USDA*