



#FridaysOnTheFarm: Growing New Roots

Each Friday, visit local farms, ranches, forests, and resource areas through our [#FridaysOnTheFarm](#) stories. Meet farmers, producers, and landowners who are working to improve their operations with

This Friday meet Trout and Jennifer Gaskins of Farming 101 in Newtown, Connecticut. Transplants by way of New York, life took an unexpected turn when the couple purchased an abandoned homestead in Connecticut.

Gravitational Pull

Originally intending to grow tomatoes for friends in the summer, it wasn't long before Trout and Jennifer started to feel an "undeniable gravitational pull" to turn their backyard garden into something more.

"We're not sure if we chose farming or if farming chose us," Trout said.

They jumped into their new life with sheep, chickens, seeds, and a dream. After a few years, they decided to focus on growing organically.

While they don't raise sheep anymore, Farming 101 is now a three-acre organic operation that supplies the community with certified-organic peppers, eggplant, herbs, salad greens, fruit, several varieties of heirloom tomatoes, and more. Aside from selling at farmer's markets, they have found their niche in supplying produce for high-end, small-scale restaurants.

Trout and Jennifer searched for help for new farmers and they found it with USDA's [Natural Resources Conservation Service](#). Trout found the nearest service center in Hamden and made a call.

District Conservationist Diane Blais answered that call and arranged a meeting at the farm. They told her their goals, and Diane explained how NRCS could help accomplish them.

"Thanks to our efforts and much assistance from NRCS, we have reclaimed the land and added an infrastructure for farming for potentially many years to come," said Trout. "We're very proud of that."

Building a Stronger Operation

The couple applied for assistance through the [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#), which enabled them to install three seasonal high tunnels, in turn, adding considerable time before and after their normal growing season, when the weather is typically too cold for crops. EQIP also helped with integrated pest management and prescribed grazing.

Through the [Agricultural Management Assistance Program](#), they installed an irrigation system for their fields that improved water conservation.

"Things didn't really begin until we started working with NRCS," said Trout. "We had been working on the farm for three years and called Diane at just the right time."



To further strengthen their operation, Trout and Jennifer have a [Conservation Stewardship Program](#) contract with the agency. CSP helps farmers build on their existing conservation efforts while strengthening their operation. They have switched to no-till and have converted noxious weed areas to native, food-producing trees and shrubs.

Growing What They Love

After farming for 11 years, the couple is coming into their own. They've been approached by several beginning farmers asking for their advice. Trout's advice?

"You should think of your customer base, but also grow things you love," Trout said.

They try to grow crops that usually can't be found at supermarkets. Trout produced his eighth season of New England okra, which sells out at every farmers market. According to Trout, it's hard to find organic, locally grown okra in Connecticut. He planted it not only because he is from the south and familiar with how it grows, but also because he loves it.

"The authenticity of the lifestyle is genuine. Anticipating each season, managing our expectations, gratitude for the rewards of our efforts, all provide us with the desire to press on," Trout said. "As a farmer, it's humbling and awe inspiring to approach the grandeur and complexity of nature every day."

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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