



## **#FridaysOnTheFarm: Goats and Gardens in Jackson, Mississippi**

From the kitchen table to the boardroom table, the USDA brings people together across the nation for: healthier food, natural resources and people; a stronger agricultural industry; and economic growth, jobs and innovation.

Each Friday, meet those 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*.

Cindy Ayers-Elliott, Ph.D., left her career as a CEO and investment banker to become a Mississippi farmer. This Friday, meet Ayers-Elliott and learn how she works with USDA to raise goats and grow fresh vegetables on her farm in Jackson, Mississippi.

### **Trading Business Suits for Overalls**

Cindy Ayers-Elliott once worked on Wall Street. She now owns her own farm - [Foot Print Farms](#) - where she raises goats for meat and grows vegetables to feed her local community in Jackson, Mississippi.

Since moving back to Jackson, Ayers-Elliott has worked with USDA's [Natural Resources Conservation Service](#) (NRCS) to build a farm that's both productive and environmentally sustainable.

"Believe it or not, they're not making any more land," she says. "We have to be good stewards."

Ayers-Elliott worked with NRCS to install six high tunnels. Support from USDA's [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#) (EQIP) – a Farm Bill Program – has also helped her create a sustainable operation for her goats.

### **Growing Year-Round**

Last winter brought record-low temperatures in the single digits to Mississippi, along with the rare sight of two inches of snow covering the ground. Farmers were especially impacted.

With the help of USDA financial and technical support, Ayers-Elliott was prepared for the cold. [High tunnels](#), provided with financial assistance from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, protected her crops from the wintry mix.

High tunnels, commonly called "hoop houses," protect crops from cold weather to extend the growing season.



In one high tunnel, Ayers-Elliott produced parsley, cilantro, mint and other herbs. The crops benefited from the heat trapped inside the high tunnel, which was 10 to 15 degrees warmer than outside.

In another high tunnel, she grew cover crops to feed her soil.

"The beauty of the tunnels is that you have to rotate crops within the tunnel in order to rejuvenate the soil," says Ayers-Elliott. "We rotate cilantro, parsley and other families of plants."

In other high tunnels, Ayers-Elliott has prepared the soil for produce such as kale, collard greens and carrots that she grows year-round.

Ayers-Elliott is pleased with the efficiency and productivity of the high tunnels. They enabled her farm to provide a reliable produce supply for local markets regardless of the weather conditions. In addition to her bottom line, this also ensures that her local community has access to healthy, locally-grown food.

### **Raising Goats**

Ayers-Elliott also raises goats for meat on her 68-acre farm.

Through EQIP, she installed cross-fencing and two watering facilities, among other practices. The fencing allows her to create separate pastures, a necessary measure to seclude sickly goats and promote healthy forage supplies.

### **A Community Leader**

Teaching others to farm is important to Ayers-Elliott. She wants Foot Print Farms to be a place where people can learn to farm, especially single mothers and people who may be socially or economically disadvantaged.

"Women especially have to understand that it doesn't take 100 acres to make a living," Ayers-Elliott says.

"You have to look at this as a business. That's why it is so important to have great records. This is my future...I want to let the land take care of me."

### **More Information**

Contact your [local USDA service center](#) for more information about how NRCS can help you implement conservation practices across your operation.



USDA offers a variety of risk management, disaster, loan and conservation programs to help America's farmers, ranchers and foresters.

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