



## **#FridaysOnTheFarm: Two Dogs Farm Provides Fresh, Local Food in Mississippi, Beyond**

From the kitchen table to the boardroom table, 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*.

This Friday, we're headed to Two Dogs Farm in Flora, Mississippi, where Van Killen traded in a desk job to start a small farm.

His mission – to provide fresh, local food in his community and beyond.

"I started farming five years ago," he said. "I was working a desk job as an environmental consultant, but I always wanted to start a small farm. We started small with an acre doing farmers market sales."

### **Sharing the Harvest**

These days, Killen grows about 30 different crops on 15 acres. His crops include tomatoes, squash, peppers, and melons in the summer and broccoli and cauliflower in the winter. "The farm's heirloom tomatoes and rainbow-colored carrots are the most popular," he said. He also grows and sells fresh-cut flowers.

Killen provides food to local restaurants, as well as to a community supported agriculture program, or CSA, that enables Two Dogs to reach tables across the metro area. "We pre-sell shares of our harvest," Killen said. "Individuals sign up on our website, and we guarantee they will get eight to 10 items of produce every week. The quantities will feed a household of two to four people."

Killen also sells food to 15 restaurants in nearby Jackson. "We want to provide the healthiest produce to families in the Jackson area since you are what you eat," he said. He also provides fresh produce to more than 30 restaurants in New Orleans.

### **Growing for Good**



As Killen and his wife Dorothy expanded their operation, they always looked for best conservation practices. That's when they found USDA's [Natural Resources Conservation Service](#) (NRCS) online.

Killen stopped by his local USDA service center to find out more about available programs. District Conservationist Phillip Archie, was one of the folks who worked with Killen to plan and implement a variety of conservation practices. "Through our assistance, we were able to help him grow his operation and show others that it is possible to farm on a full-time basis and provide a sustainable income for the family," Archie said.

Over the years, Killen has used the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, a Farm Bill-funded program, to make improvements to his farm, which are good both for natural resources and his operation.

"Our local USDA service center has helped to provide funding with drip irrigation and plastic mulching, along with obtaining cover crop seeds and a high tunnel," said Killen. "The practices have improved our operation by preventing soil erosion, providing more precise irrigation, and assisting us with weed control."

[High tunnels](#) protect plants from severe weather and allow farmers to extend their growing seasons-earlier in the spring and later into the fall.

In the high tunnel, Killen grows baby greens, such as arugula, baby kale, mesclun mix, and other salad greens.

The Killen family gets a high sense of satisfaction from their operation, while the community consumes healthy produce when they enjoy delicious meals at restaurants close to home. "It really is a family and community form of farming that we're doing," said Killen.

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