



Owens Farm: Against the Grain

Film by Mayowa Alli



BACKGROUND

Owens Farm is owned and operated by David and Caroline Owens with their three children Kyle, Kevin, and Melissa. The farm boasts 112 acres of rolling pasture, with lovely views in all directions. A traditional red Pennsylvania Bank barn, pond, and classic white farmhouse complete the picture.

Owens Farm started on 13 acres in New Hampshire. The family raised livestock for their own needs, tending their animals in a natural setting and avoiding chemicals and growth stimulants. It was only a matter of time before neighbors approached them, asking if they could raise and sell some extra animals. People were learning about the pitfalls of industrial agriculture, and seeking pasture-raised meat for their families. A business was born. By 2007, the Owens family was ready for a larger farm. A two-year search led to the state of Pennsylvania and the town of Sunbury.

PURPOSE AND HYPOTHESIS

This Ethnography will be observing Owen's Farm examining not only the operational system but the history and community hoping to explain its impact on its sustainability. I am expecting to find why/how the Owen's farm has become so successful since its existence. This business is set up in a culture dominated heavily by the industrial market and sees almost hopeless (from outsider's perspective) in competing against such a powerful force. Owen's Farm is an organic that producing all its goods locally, selling lamb, chicken, pork, wool, and honey all through natural means without the aid of chemicals and maltreatment of animals which puts them at a huge disadvantage against industrial farms who sell to grocery stores and are able to sell their products in a larger market for cheaper.

Although I have visited the place and got a general feel for the values and operational patterns (i.e. sheep camp, meeting with other farmers, trading livestock locally). However, as an observer/ director of the events happening in front of me I can't be biased when creating this film. If the information does not match up with this argument I must still follow the story provided, even if I may find that Owen's Farm may not be doing so well and the community has no impact on its growth at all. By the end of this film I hope to not only tell the story of Owen's farm but also speak on the larger issue of local and industrial farming.

Throughout the film I hope to evoke these themes constantly having those watching the film reflect on how these choices affect their personal lives. We don't often think of the origins of our food, but putting it in front of the audience creates an opportunity for them to compare and form their own opinion on the topic of local and industrial.

FIELDNOTES FROM OWENS FARM

My trip to Owens farm last week was a very pleasant experience. Living in Lewisburg over the past four years I had always seen the region as agricultural. Yet, I did not see much of the land used for livestock but instead primarily for crops. With that said, this trip helped to introduce some the popular livestock in the area.

When we first arrived I found it quite amusing that the layout was set up as one would image a farm, with a small white house 20 yards away from a the typical red barn with the livestock nearby and acres of land fading off into the distant. We were met by Caroline Owens our tour guide and part owner of the farm. She began by taking us to the red barn which she described as the storage room, explaining this is where the hay (feed) was stored and explained that the origins of the farm.

However, once we left the barn we began to truly explore the ranch and learn the ins and outs of the business. The first group of animals she introduced was the sheep which were separated into two different groups based on breeds. The first was cupulas the breed used for producing wool and meat while the Katab) were used just for their meat. I found this interesting because it shows how society's dependency on sheep wool has faded. She claimed that people used to avoid sheep that couldn't provide them wool because they felt they weren't getting the most for their money, however in today's society we don't have this strong dependency on wool and therefore can afford to raise sheep without wool. Another method I found interesting was the swapping of animals amongst other local farmers in order to bring in more males of the specific species to produce more animals. Although it wasn't mentioned I saw this as a form of community building, farmers using this method showed the dependency they have on each other in the region. On top of that she mentioned a sheep camp program that occurred I the summer where children would aid in the farming process which also highlighted community.

This routine was done with the sheep but also the pigs which were our next destination. She explained that the pigs and sheep were both raised naturally with no chemicals with the sheep eating grass (moving around to conserve the grass) and the pigs eating a blend of feeds because they frequently overgrazed. Caroline states that because of this they are not able to grow these animals to the same size as industrial animals. Yet this method seems to be more beneficial not only for the animals but the consumers as well because they are producing healthier animals that are rarely exposed to many of the diseases industrial animals acquire.

After observing the sheep and pigs we looked at the horses and were met by David Owens, second owner and bee keeper of the farm. This was perhaps the most surprising part of the farm because I tend to separate insects and livestock because bugs aren't typically seen as a food source. He took us to his honey bees and described the mating process of the queen bee and describing the massive number of bees produced in order to create pollen for the surrounding plant as well as honey to consume. Interestingly enough the industrial aspect appeared again as David spoke about how industrial beekeepers used artificial sweeteners to keep the bees alive in order to pollinate plants.

This trip to Owens farm allowed me to get a firsthand look at the agricultural process, which is typically looked over because everything has gone industrial. It provides perspective on how local (small) farmers are able to produce organically without depending on chemicals and harmful fertilizers. Through my film I hope to look at this dynamic more and study how these industries affect Owens Farm specially



HOW DO THEY SURVIVE?

Owens Farm success is based primarily through their community support. Caroline claims that about 95% of their customers are local. They don't want their products to be viewed as a commodity; therefore they do not sell to restaurant (excluding Emma's) or large companies. They also gain revenue and aid through programs aimed at the surrounding community. There are sheep camps, tours, and adapt-a-sheep programs which bring in extra money but allows the community be one step closer to the food production process.



OWENS FARM PRODUCT

- Grass-fed Lamb
- Pastured Tamworth Pork
- Pastured Chicken
- Pastured Turkey
- Beef
- Honey

