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That epiphany led Natasha into a conversation with her parents, Brian and Nancy Wilson, about coming back to the farm. With a husband and children in tow, what would that future look like? How could the farm support them? After more than a year of contemplation, Natasha took the leap, moving her family in with her parents at the farm in 2020.

COVID extended that temporary housing situation longer than expected, but it gave the Wilsons a chance to refine their needs and values.

Brian and Nancy knew they wanted animals back on the land; they had a few, but those were just for their own food supply. Natasha wondered if those animals they were raising for themselves formed a good model for a sustainable business; if they wanted pastured meat, eggs, and honey, was it possible others in the community did as well?

The answer appears to be yes, and the Wilsons are in the middle of building that enterprise. The farm's transformation is a work in progress.

Field Stop 1: Swine

The field day attendees trekked out of the barn and into the heat and humidity, armed with umbrellas, sunscreen, and bottled water. Their first stop was at a temporary set-up of Cargill structures where heritage breeds of pigs, most notably Berkshire, were hiding from the sun.

Brian shared how he first discovered Berkshire meat at a fine restaurant: "I had never tasted it before, but I was immediately enraptured with it when I tried it, because it is very, very delicious," he said.

"Our next project will be a new home for them on pasture," Natasha explained, adding that they plan to finish about 70 swine this year.

The tricky bit is that pigs tend to ruin pasture.

"Pigs are notorious for rooting," Brian said. "We don't want to disrupt them from doing what's part of their nature, but I also don't like the holes everywhere. So, we're figuring that out. We will get there. Right now, this is our best option."

Field Stop 2: Cattle and Chicken Pasture

The group walked on until they found themselves surrounded by 60 acres of permanent perennial pasture, land that had been home to corn and soybeans until the Wilsons received funding from the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service to convert it.

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

helps farmers and ranchers integrate conservation into working lands. Funding from that program "really made this possible for us," Natasha said.

The Wilsons planted hundreds of trees and ran water lines out for their 65 head of cattle so they don't have to haul water daily. The cattle, of a variety of breeds, are rotated through the pasture.

The 300 broiler chickens are contained in a 20 x20 DIY chicken shed that Brian designed and constructed from old confinement buildings for about \$2,000, a fraction of the \$10,000 it costs to purchase something similar. Every morning the Wilsons pull the shelter with a skidloader to a fresh patch of pasture.

Heavy weights and rubber flaps keep the structure flush with the earth; even a crack underneath would put the Freedom Ranger Color Yield chickens at risk of predation, a serious issue on the farmstead. A previous set of structures left room for raccoons to reach under and chew legs off, leaving the Wilsons to find so many dead chickens in the morning, they thought there must be a disease.

"It was terrible," Natasha said, but the new structure has offered adequate protection against raccoons, owls, and foxes. Unfortunately, "Everybody likes to eat chicken," she said.

A second challenge the Wilsons face with their broiler chickens is the lack of a proximal poultry processor. They drive 300 miles round-trip to Brummel Poultry Processing in Rock Falls, Illinois, a drive they must repeat the next day to retrieve the meat.

Field Stop 3: Laying Hens

The farmers and farming-curious (several of the field day attendees were farmstead customers) traveled on across the property to their third stop, the laying hens, which are based out of livestock trailers and moved once a week depending on pasture conditions.

"Literally every inch of them [the livestock trailers] has to be covered with chicken wire," Natasha said, again due to predator pressure.

The Wilsons collect the brown eggs with rich yellow yolks three times a day.

When they first started, they weren't sure how to sell the eggs, so Natasha created a Facebook post. That drew responses; today, Natasha and Nancy deliver eggs every other week to about 40 subscribers.

That direct-to-consumer model has worked for the Wilsons; "90-95% of what we do is direct to people, no grocery stores, no restaurants," Natasha said.



CHERYL ALLEN/THE NEWS

Inside the renovated warehouse, Natasha Wilson explained why they use small freezer units to store their meat and fielded questions from those present.

They also partner with the Coralville food pantry and other farmers who run CSAs.

Natasha sends out a newsletter every other Thursday through Mailchimp, and she created a website, westforkfarmstead.com, through which people can order all the farm's products.

For those who live close enough - Iowa City, Kalona, Wellman, Washington - the Wilsons will deliver; for others further out, customers may pick up.

Field Stop 4: Warehouse

The final stop on the farmstead tour was the Wilson's newly renovated warehouse space, which has been licensed and inspected by the state. Here they keep all the meat they produce in individual freezers.

Natasha explained that the reason they chose smaller freezer units instead of investing in a large walk-in was to avoid a potential catastrophe should the walk-in fail.

The Wilsons hope to move their egg washing and packaging process into an area of the warehouse eventually, but that will require more finishing work inside the space.

Attendees ended the field day back inside the barn in which they began, this time treated to a delicious lunch prepared by Nancy of foods produced on the farm. Pulled pork sandwiches with homemade sauce, a variety of salads, baked beans, and an assortment of dessert bars and cakes delighted eyes and satisfied appetites.

As folks of all ages and genders happily enjoyed their lunches, they shared with The News their reasons for attending the field day and how valuable it was to them.



Dozens of farmers gathered in the Wilsons' perennial pasture to learn about their pasture-based operation.



A variety of cattle breeds graze rotationally on the pasture.

The farmers' concerns varied; some were transitioning their farms from one generation to the next and wanted to see an example of how that could be done. Others ran similar pastured-based operations and valued the opportunity to socialize with others who shared the same lifestyle and concerns. One farmer wanted ideas about how he could improve his marketing; another pair of farmers needed insight on how to scale up. All of those asked said they had learned things they could use and were uplifted by the experience.

Practical Farmers of Iowa has many field days, workshops, and resources that beginning and experienced farmers can take advantage of: visit practicalfarmers.org, call 515-232-5661 or email info@practicalfarmers.org to learn more. West Fork Farmstead, located in West Chester, sells pasture-based meat, eggs, and honey direct to consumer: visit westforkfarmstead.com, call 319-325-5097 or email sales@westforkfarmstead.com for more information.

Sentencing set for Meisheid

BY MARY ZIELINSKI
The News

WASHINGTON

Sentencing for Matthew James Meisheid, 41, of Kalona is set for 11:20 a.m. August 11 in Washington County District

Court, where he was found guilty of two counts of assault on Persons in Certain Occupations by Using or Displaying a Firearm. The verdict followed a two-day trial June 27-28 in district court with Judge Joshua P. Scarier presiding.

The case resulted from a call to Washington County Communications July 9, 2022, that fireworks were being fired from the Meisheid residence in Kalona; county deputies Nolan Burke and Noah Schlabaugh responded to warn Meisheid of the city ordinance regarding fireworks. In response, Meisheid removed a handgun and raised it in the air, causing alarm with the deputies. In their incident report, the deputies said Meisheid appeared "aggressive, swearing and upset"

with them. At that point, they reported they felt threatened, feared for their lives and drove from the scene to seek a warrant for Meisheid's arrest. Meisheid was later arrested and charged with the two counts of Assault on Persons in Certain Occupations by Using or Displaying a Firearm, each a Class D Felony. Following the execution of the warrant at the residence July 12, 2022, Meisheid's initial \$10,000 bond was increased to \$25,000 after law enforcement officers seized numerous firearms and

a large quality of ammunition at the residence; the items were seized by the authorities in the interest of public safety. Meisheid was released July 13 after posting the cash bail. His initial arraignment in Washington District Court was set for August 5 following the preliminary hearing July 22, 2022; however, the trial date was reset several times until starting June 27, 2023. Bail was continued to the time of sentencing, where he could face up to five years in prison for each count.

PUBLIC RETIREMENT AUCTION
Sat, July 29, 2023 @ 9:00 a.m.
32040 Hwy 22 • Kinross, IA
Directions: On the East Edge of Town South Side of Hwy 22. Watch for Signs.
Household Furniture • Shop Tools/Lawn & Garden
Open House: Friday, July 28th, 1:00 PM - 8:00 PM.
Auctioneers Note: Come on Out & Join Us for a Large Collection of Furniture/Household Items Along w/Shop Tools, Lawn & Garden and Supplies. As Elaine is Moving Out of the Area, We Will Sell All Items On Site at Public Auction. May be Selling w/2 Rings Part Time!! Lunch on Grounds
Owner: Elaine Bower
Auctioneers: Delmar Yoder 319-430-2711
Lonnie Miller 319-461-0019
5starauction.com

Fall Machinery Consignment Auction
Saturday, September 9th, 2023 • 8:30 am
Located at 2530 Hwy 22 • Riverside, IA
Consignments Wanted
Tractors, Skid steers, Farm Equipment, Construction Equipment, Shop Tools, Building Supplies, Livestock Equipment, Lawn & Garden, Vehicles/Trailers
Ad Deadline - Monday, August 21, 2023.
Accepting items Monday, August 28, through Thursday, September 7 • 8-5
Internet equipment items need to be in by Tuesday, September 5.
Auctioneers:
Delmar Yoder 319-430-2711
Lonnie Miller 319-461-0019
5starauction.com
See website for photos
Terms: Cash or Check w/ID • Not responsible for accidents or theft.

ARREST/Continued from Page 1A

accused of exposing themselves in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, to women tending roadside market stands and riding in buggies, and to children walking home from school. In one case, the perpetrator told police he targeted

Amish and Mennonites specifically because they don't carry cell phones, making it easy for him to get away with it. "Over the years as the investigator, that's probably one of the challenges, that timeliness of a report," Lt. Ellis said

about solving the crime in Kalona's Amish community. "You've just got to understand that that's a difference in their way of life, and you're hopeful that you get it quick enough that you can kind of go backwards" and trace a complaint back to its original source.

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Court records reveal that Westcott was charged with three counts of Indecent Exposure in 1997. He entered a guilty plea for one count, for which he was ordered 60 days in jail, all suspended, two years probation, and completion of treatment/sex offender's program. The other two counts were dismissed. Lt. Ellis expressed satisfaction with the quick work done by the two sheriff's offices. "I'm glad we got it solved," he said. Every person accused of any crime is considered innocent until proven guilty according to law.