

Heritage Hollow Farms

by Lorin Fairweather



Photography by
Molly Peterson

Meet Your Meat Farmers

Organic, free-range, eco-ganic – in the attempt to make sense of a dizzying array of grocery store labels, local farmers Mike and Molly Peterson offer some food advice: eat from people you trust.

This simplistic approach is reflected in every aspect of the Petersons' lives, from how they raise their cattle on approximately 600 acres of farmland in Rappahannock County to where they buy their own groceries. *(continued)*



Mike and Molly Peterson

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Last fall, Mike and Molly founded Heritage Hollow Farms, taking over the operations of Mount Vernon Grassfed, the farm where Mike has worked since 2009, and entering into a long-term lease on the land.

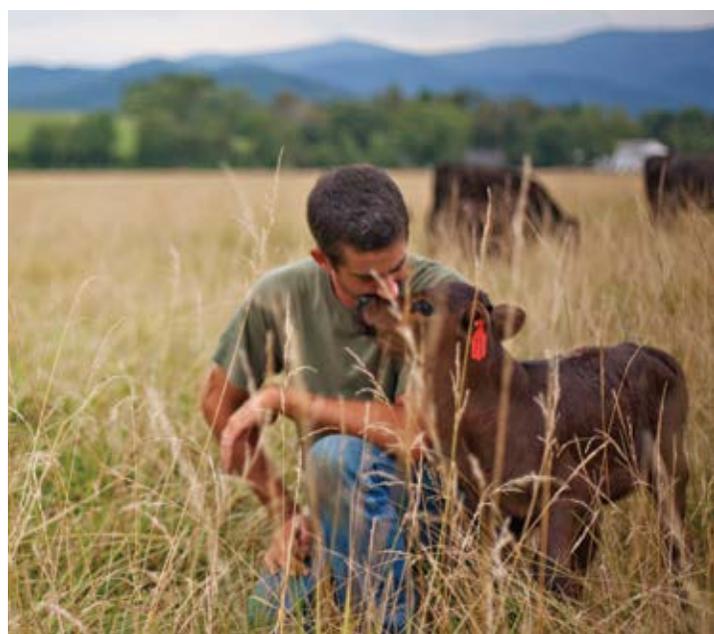
Carrying on the intentional grassfed methods of Mount Vernon Grassfed, the Petersons use high-density, planned grazing to provide nutrients and the necessary sustenance to their 275-plus cattle and pigs. “It’s about cultivating the health and diversity of the soil to provide your animals with high-quality forage to feed on,” which, explains Mike, creates a strong nutritional profile in the meat.

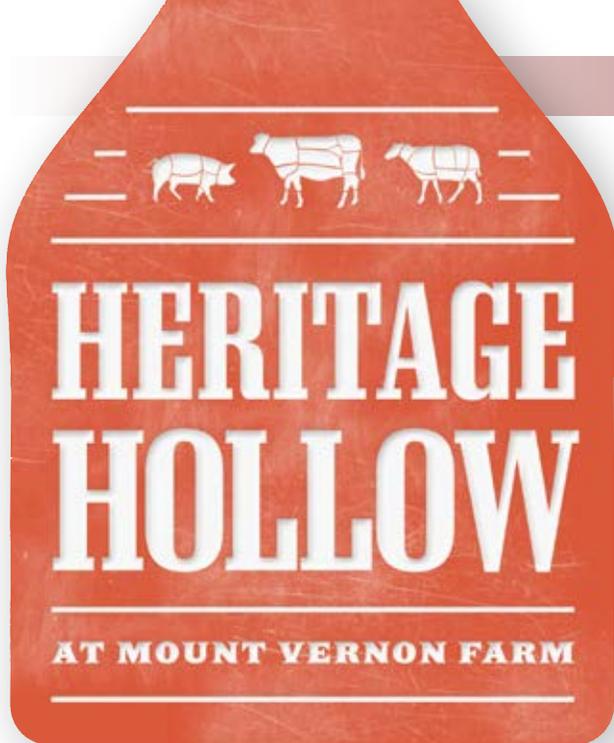
High-quality meat often means better tasting meat, as well, which is important to Mike as a formally trained chef with 7 years of experience, which culminated in a kitchen staff position at The Inn at Little Washington. Menu planning and sourcing led him to an opportunity to be on the other side of the meat as an intern with Mount Vernon Grassfed Farm in 2009. “I started doing research and self-education on sustainable farming methods,” says Mike. “As a chef, I thought I would like to see what was going into the meat I was using.”

The one-year long stint was extended when the farm’s manager decided to move out of state and recommended

Mike to fill his shoes. “The internship evolved into a passion for agriculture and feeding people, but just on a different platform.”

The lifestyle approach to eating, working and living led them to these intentions for their farming: “To be responsible stewards of the land, promote diversity through ecologically sound practices and to raise food with integrity.”





To deliver on those intentions, Mike and Molly play to their strengths. Mike handles much of the physical labor and farm planning, and Molly handles the business aspects, such as marketing, which her additional business as a professional photographer has prepared her for. Her images appear regularly on the pages of *Inspired*, including the ones in this article.

“To make a farm viable,” Mike says, “it can’t be just about the farm. You have to treat it as a business.”

One approach Molly took was to comb social media for what people were talking about when it came to food and nutrition. “I didn’t know what ‘Paleo’ was,” she said, referring to the trendy Paleo Diet, “but it turns out what we sell fits it perfectly.”

That led to a distribution innovation – putting freezers in Crossfit gyms (major proponents of the Paleo Diet), where members can pick up their meat order at their next workout.

They’ve also opened a farm store next to the schoolhouse in Sperryville, turning an abandoned deli into a store/office/photo gallery. Clustered with other local vendors, the site affords great visibility and is already a destination in the small town.

Finally, they sell their meat at local farm stands, such as Willowsford’s, to put it in closer reach of people in the metro area.

Molly recognizes cost can be a deterring factor for some who consider eating locally, and says it was no different for them. “At first we thought, ‘We can’t afford to eat that way,’” says Molly. “I think that’s what a lot of people think. But you do it little by little. Once you make one little change, it inspires you to make the next little change. We found that it was natural for us and we just changed our priorities monetarily.”

By selling their top-quality meats and an array of locally produced goods, the Petersons hope to encourage personal interaction between consumers and the people who are feeding them.

“We’re not in this alone,” says Mike. “There’s a lot of people to feed.” 🌿

Visit HeritageHollowFarms.net to learn more about the Petersons and ordering your own locally raised, grassfed meats. *Bon appétit!*

