

# Dane County Success from the Field

## New Farmers Revive Old Cropland

### Background

For Brit and Matt McCoy, their 55-acre farm just outside of Belleville, Wisconsin, is a lifelong pipe dream come to life. "I've known I wanted to be a farmer since I was born," says Brit, who did not grow up in a farming household. The couple, who both studied landscape architecture, became more serious about starting a farm operation during their senior year of college after learning about the effects that industrialized meat production can have on the animals, land and farmers involved. "Our own necessity for knowing how our meat was raised grew into a burning passion to make a bigger impact," explained Brit. The McCoy's knew that they wanted to raise cattle and sheep that were 100% grass-fed; their backgrounds in sustainability drew them to rotational grazing.

### Program Successes

Just after purchasing their farm in August of 2017, Brit attended Soil Sisters of Wisconsin—a three-day educational outreach event organized by women farmers—where she met Marie Raboin, a soil conservationist with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) at the time. "Working with Marie was amazing. She's a great source of information and she'll be getting an email from me the next time I run into a project," said Brit.

Marie informed Brit about the funding available through the NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) pastureland practices and they set to work on a plan to re-seed and fence in the lower pasture of the farm. Getting this retired crop field ready for grazing cattle was no small task—the soil showed symptoms of nutrient depletion and erosion resulting from decades of mismanagement. But with the help of NRCS funding and planning, the McCoy's were able to transform their pasture and grow their business, Homestead Wisconsin, earlier than they had anticipated. Fencing went up, grasses grew and the McCoy's brought in steers for their first grazing season in spring of 2019.

### Future Plans

After two years stuffed to the brim with building construction, land rehabilitation, business development, home renovation and all the unexpected setbacks along the way, the McCoy's are looking forward to slowing things down a bit. They will continue



The Homestead Wisconsin Logo, modeled by Brit and Matt, is the rough outline of a very special feature on the McCoy's property—the largest black walnut tree in the state.

to fulfill their mission of providing people with quality, sustainable, humanely-raised meat.

Their business, which also offers leather goods and flower arrangements, is their focus now. Brit also continues to update the Homestead Wisconsin blog in order to educate the public on responsible meat production and to provide insight to other first-time or prospective farmers. The bottom line: it's been a difficult last couple of years, "but, the ability to farm together, to work towards something together and to put our name on this place together, is still worth it all."



Brit with her happily grazing steers in the finished pasture

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