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Show-Me Sustainable Agriculture ...

THE GOOD LIFE FAMILY FARM

Welcome to the Good Life Family Farm near the town of Friendly Corners. Come and explore the sustainable practices that the DoWell family uses on their farm. These innovative methods (shown on the cover) help the family do three things: 1) Be good neighbors, 2) Make a good living, and 3) Keep their farm healthy generation after generation. Sustainable practices vary from state to state and even farm to farm. To ensure a "good life," each farm family chooses the practices that match their farm best. For instance, on the Good Life Family Farm, the DoWell family uses soil and water conservation practices, and they attract beneficial insects and rotate crops to keep pests and diseases under control. As you read more about the Good Life Farm, see if you can find the practices.

The Good Life Family Farm is **diversified**—they grow a wide variety of crops, trees, and animals. Diversification also helps the DoWells develop new skills for producing and selling their products. Plus, the family gets to enjoy eating many different foods fresh from their own farm.

The DoWell family uses **rotational grazing** for their livestock. They move their cows, sheep, pigs, and goats every few days from one small pasture to another to give the grass and other forages time to rest and grow before the animals graze that pasture again. Their pastures are healthier because the manure from the animals is spread out more evenly on the land. This also keeps their water cleaner because manure doesn't wash into the streams.

The Good Life Family Farm is proud of their **clean water**. Over time, they have improved their water resources by adding stock tanks to water their

livestock, and fencing to keep livestock from damaging ponds and streams. They planted trees and bushes along the banks of the stream to prevent erosion during flooding.

The DoWells **protect their soil** from erosion by planting crops in strips and using techniques that let them till the soil less often. This reduces the amount of soil they lose from water and wind erosion. Several years ago the DoWell family planted walnut and pecan trees. Now these trees are producing nut crops that they sell at the Friendly Corners Farmers' Market. While the trees grow, cows and other animals graze on the grass between them, which is an **agroforestry** practice called **silvopasture**. The trees also give shelter, protecting the animals from the hot sun in summer and providing a windbreak during winter. Windbreaks also provide shelter for wildlife. Diverse crops and edges help to provide food for wildlife. In some places, the family left wide spaces between trees so they could plant crops like wheat between the rows, a practice called **alley cropping**.

The DoWell kids started a 4-H project growing vegetables one summer. They had a lot of fun and the family really enjoyed the fresh vegetables from the garden. One project led to another and their garden got bigger and bigger. Soon the family was raising enough sweet corn, tomatoes, melons, and other vegetables to sell at the farmers' market in town and a **farm stand** at their farm. The garden and the farm created so much interest that now, the Bright Future School in town organizes annual field days to visit the Good Life Farm.

A few years ago, the family experimented with a **pick-your-own** strawberry patch and then a flower garden.

“Sustainable” is a word we hear all the timethese days: sustainable farming, sustainable communities, sustainable living. What does it mean? Sustainable means making things last, for you, for your children, for your children's children, on and on as far as you can imagine. It means that all the children of the future will have a world that's as good as or better than what you have today. A world where you will have a healthy environment, make a good living, and grow up in a strong and healthy community of caring people.

They were pleased to find that customers wanted to drive out to the farm from town to pick berries and flowers. Customers often ask the family questions about how they grow their food. The DoWells proudly show off their gardens and explain how they use crop rotations, cover crops, mulches, and other techniques to prevent disease, weed, and insect problems, a practice known as **integrated pest management**. They point out the **greenhouse** where they start plants and show how they **compost** their garden waste, and return the “black gold” to the soil as a wonderful fertilizer. Their customers are pleased to see the environmentally friendly practices that are used to grow their food.

When a neighboring farmer moved his **chickens** to a nearby pasture, one of the customers at the Good Life Farm asked if they could buy their farm fresh eggs. They asked the DoWells what else they could buy from the area's farms and discovered that cheese, butter, ground beef, steaks, lamb, and pork were all available within a short distance from town.

The residents of Friendly Corners decided to have a festival to celebrate all of the food produced within their community. They also asked local businesses to carry food from the neighboring farms. Before long, the Eat Well Diner and Good 4 U Snacks started serving local meats, fruits, and vegetables. The grocery store started stocking vegetables, fruit, eggs, and meats from the farms. The town grew stronger as more and more people started buying locally produced foods. As a result, more and more families raise food to sell, which means that more families in town and on the farm will live happily ever after.

Resources for more information:

ATTRA, the National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service, P.O. Box 3838, Butte, MT 59702, www.attra.nrcat.org, 1-800-346-9140
Contact ATTRA for information packets on a wide variety of sustainable and organic agriculture topics.

The Alternative Farming Systems Information Center (AFSIC), National Agricultural Library, USDA, 10301 Baltimore Ave, Room 123, Beltsville, MD 20705-2351, 301-504-6559, <https://afsic.nal.usda.gov/>
Contact AFSIC to talk to information specialists who specialize in locating, collecting, and providing information about sustainable agriculture.

North Central Region - Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (NCR-SARE), University of Minnesota, 120 BioAgEng Bldg, 1390 Eckles Ave, St. Paul, MN 55108, 612-626-3113, ncrsare@umn.edu, www.northcentralsare.org.
Contact the NCR-SARE office or your NCR-SARE State Coordinator for information about SARE grant programs and sustainable agriculture education materials.
See: <http://www.northcentralsare.org/State-Programs> for a listing of state coordinator contact information.

