

BEYOND THE FENCE

VERMONT FARM BUREAU NEWSLETTER



APRIL 2023



From City Life to Farm Life: Couple Restores 200-year-old Family Farm

For years, David Rosso commuted daily from his home in Connecticut to New York City to work in a bustling high-rise building. Today, his commute looks a lot different – he walks to his barn to milk two Jersey cows, does chores, and heads back to work at his home office.

“My daughter comes out almost every morning to milk with me, and it’s really neat. It’s this thing that started as a small hobby and continues to grow, and our love for agriculture and the land continues to grow with it,” Rosso said.

Rosso still works full-time in corporate finance, now from East Dover, Vermont, in a hybrid model from his home office and a local office. The flexibility allowed him to add “accidental farmer” to the list of roles he plays.

“Bringing this farm back to life is good for my soul,” Rosso shared.

In 2018, Rosso and his wife, Lindsey Brown-Rosso, both originally from Vermont, moved back to the Green Mountain State from Connecticut to restore Brown-Rosso’s great-grandparent’s family farmhouse and the 170-acre farm. Brown-Rosso, a teacher, found a job as a preschool educator in Dover.

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“Everyone always says you are nuts; how do you do it? I think of it like this: Some people like to get up and work out in the morning, some people like to play golf in the morning, and I like to go milk cows,” Rosso described. “There are hard days, and there are less hard days, and we’ve really fallen in love with it. Seeing our kids grow up here is amazing, especially knowing they are the ninth generation.”

Fairview Farm was established in the late 1700s and lay abandoned for over 30 years before the Rosso family returned to breathe new life into it. They gutted and restored the house on weekends, driving up from Connecticut, until they were able to move in. Their three-year-old daughter Emerson and one-year-old son Benjamin were born after the farmhouse was restored and now know no other life than one filled with animals and pastures.

“When we moved in, it didn’t seem right not to have critters, so we started with chickens, and we found beehive equipment in the attic from my wife’s grandfather, so we got bees,” Rosso said. Today, the farm produces certified tier-one raw milk, chicken, beef, eggs, and honey.

“It’s kind of shifted from this hobby to actually being a farm. By slowly adding things, our passion for it continued to grow,” Rosso said, “and then I got really into learning about soil health, and we’re doing rotational grazing now...and focusing on bringing our pastures back to life.”

Their beef cattle come from Lindsey Brown-Rosso’s grandfather, Sonny Brown, who, at 91 years old, still operates a beef farm, logging operation, and a maple sugarhouse in East Dover.

Sonny’s late wife, Elizabeth “Rozey” Brown, grew up on Fairview Farm. Her parents were the last to farm the land. Before Rozey died in 2015, the Rossos purchased the farmhouse and the land from her brother.



Since then, Sonny has been their unofficial farming mentor.

“Sonny is what got me into cows; he’s still out there on his tractor every day, he cuts trees every day...he’s hope for the future,” Rosso said.

At Sonny’s urging, Rosso joined Vermont Farm Bureau in 2021. Rosso says Farm Bureau has been a critical resource in keeping his operation afloat and he was elected president of the Windham County chapter in 2023.

“Having connections to other local farms has been key to our success, and getting over hurdles and continuing to do this passion we have. With Farm Bureau, their passion for connecting and bringing people together drew me in,” Rosso said. “My focus for this year is making sure people know that Farm Bureau isn’t just an organization looking for a membership fee; it’s a family of people that can come together to bring their concerns, bring what’s working for them, and connect with other people in agriculture.”

Rosso says this is especially important as farming becomes increasingly challenging.

“You hear more about farms closing, people not being able to do it, people needing multiple jobs to get by,” Rosso said. “I knew I wanted to get involved and be able to connect and network with other people passionate about agriculture and come up with ways we can all support one another, especially in Windham County.”

Like most farmers, Rosso says he’s not farming to get rich. He’s happy if he covers his costs and says that it’s been rewarding to see the support from the local community as demand increases for the farm’s products.

“Anyone who has a large farm, a small farm, a hobby farm, or any kind of farm...you question it sometimes, but we couldn’t imagine doing anything different,” Rosso said. “My wife and I always say to people, we’ve been back for six years, and this is home, and this will be the place I die.”

Follow along with the journey of Fairview Farm on Instagram via [@fairviewfarmvt](https://www.instagram.com/fairviewfarmvt).

By Laura Hardie

President's Report: The American Farm Bureau Meeting in Arizona

By Joe Tisbert, Vermont Farm Bureau President

During the last couple of months, though we have been extremely busy, it's been enjoyable. Hopefully, you all have had a great winter.

On March 5th, I attended an American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) board meeting in Arizona. Along with all of the normal board reports we made a very important vote for the right to repair. After discussions, the board accepted the MOU with New Holland and Case IH. This MOU follows very closely to the MOU that we approved in January with John Deere. These MOU'S give our nations Farmers and Ranchers agreements with nearly 60 percent of the equipment. Your team in the statehouse testified on these MOU's and requested that the bill be sidelined while FB works on the national solution that is good for the farmer and the entire industry. Stay tuned for an update while our AFBF staff is working with other leading manufacturers.

I was very excited for the board meeting in Arizona. As part of the meeting we had a chance to go to Yuma and visited with farmers on the border to see how immigration both legal and illegal affected our farms on the border. We also visited the Trump wall. It was a very eye-opening experience.

The volume of produce is simply staggering. Eighty percent of the world's lettuce comes from Yuma County Arizona from Thanksgiving to Easter. Just think about that. Eighty percent comes out of the desert. These farmers take food safety very seriously, and each of these farms has a food safety officer. Their job is to make sure the crop is safe for public consumption. As we watched pickers and weeders work, it was plain to see that everyone was conscious of the importance of food safety

The farmers all work with water rights from the Colorado River. It was very interesting to listen to how they work with the water districts and how the rights are shared. The annual rainfall is three inches per year. I was standing in a field of parsley that was ready to pick. It was 80 acres. Other crops that were grown included broccoli, cauliflower, and kale. As those crops were finished, the second rotation was wheat which was mostly exported. Most farms rotated alfalfa. Dairy farmers: Think of straight alfalfa, 18 inches high with 9 to 11 cuts per year. Big square bales stacked on the edge of the field and not worrying about rain.

Taking part in the farm worker mile was incredible. At three a.m. we visited the border crossing where the farm workers crossed the border. Fifteen to eighteen thousand workers per day cross. It can take them as long as three hours to cross. The workers can travel upwards of 90 minutes to get to the farm they would be working on. Just imagine music playing as food trucks make breakfast burritos for these workers. To get the workers to the farms, individuals have contracts with farms to supply labor. Each of the labor bosses owns buses that are set up with a portalet and a wash station for the workers, towed behind the bus.

It is their responsibility to get as many workers as possible, usually between 30 and 48. As one of the farmers told us, there is fierce competition for workers. The crews are weeders and pickers.

One of the issues is that workers want cash every day, and farms may have different workers every day.

I was standing at the end of the wall looking across into Mexico, and there was nothing to stop folks from coming into the U.S. In speaking with the border patrol, they cannot stop everyone. Farmer Jon told us that 85 percent of the folks crossing were seeking asylum. But the other 15 percent was another story. Dangerous! There was also concern about immigrants getting across the border and bathing in the water that is meant for irrigation. We met with immigration officials who told us that the wall really works; it channels all the folks to set up checkpoints. It is clear the need for immigration reform should be a high priority.

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Beyond the Fence is published by the Vermont
Farm Bureau. The editor welcomes
contributions on agricultural topics and news
about Farm Bureau activities and members.

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Addison County Legislative Breakfast Recap

The Addison County Farm Bureau has done a fantastic job bringing the community together at their successful 2023 Legislative Breakfast Series. On every other Monday morning, snow or shine, crowds gather in locations throughout Addison County to meet with their legislators and discuss the issues that matter over breakfast.

Thanks to volunteers, recognized below, the morning starts off at 7am with a delicious mix of pastries, pancakes, fruit, orange juice, bacon, sausage, tea, and coffee by donation. As community members enter the room, they are met with the smell of breakfast and the sounds of conversation as neighbors and friends catch up. At 7:30, the group settles in to listen to the attending legislators give an overview of what they are working on in the State House. As each legislator takes the microphone, they have the opportunity to give updates for an allotted period of time, and then they take their seats. Once all legislators have given their brief updates, the guests have the opportunity to ask questions.

This year, several central topics have encouraged the crowds to come out and discuss. Throughout the series, the 'Affordable Heat Act', health care, 'Right to Repair,' housing, and childcare starred the show, drawing in guests from many groups, including farmers, foresters, fuel business owners, and an assortment of community members with a variety of backgrounds including healthcare, military, education, and more. Even in the early morning, guests are lively and engaged.

Tim Buskey moderated several of the events. He remarks, "These sessions offer all voters in the district an excellent opportunity to interact with their representatives, discuss important issues and get information about proposed legislation. It's a win-win for both constituents and their representatives."

Legislative Breakfasts have been a great opportunity for the Addison County Community to gather, share ideas with their representatives, ask questions, and stay informed in

rotating locations throughout the county.

Thank you to the Bridport Grange, St. Peter's Parish, the Bristol American Legion, Salisbury Congregational Church, Shoreham Congregational Church, and the Orwell Fire Station for their help with this great, engaging series. Special thanks to Bill Scott of the ACFB and Jim Morse of the Bridport Grange for cooking breakfasts.



Above: Sonny Brown and his granddaughter.
Below: Sunset at Fairview Farm in East Dover.
See story on page 1.





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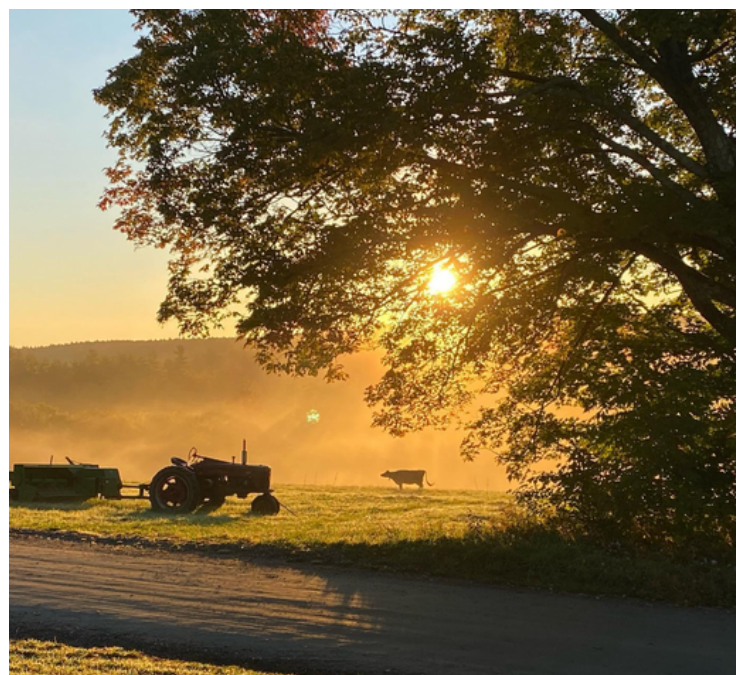









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Prioritizing Our Farm State of Mind: May is Mental Health Awareness Month

A Letter from Farm Bureau President Zippy Duvall

Across farm country, folks show up for one another. No need is too big and no task too small for us to pitch in and help our neighbors in rural America. Even when we are surrounded by a loving community, however, it can be hard to admit when we need help. Especially when we need a little extra help regarding our stress and mental health. But as we like to say at Farm Bureau, a healthy farm or ranch begins with a healthy you. That's why we are committed to ensuring that the dedicated men and women who grow the nutritious food for our tables also have the resources they need for their well-being.

Farmers and ranchers are resilient people—we are known for our quiet strength. But our instinct to press on can also hold us back from getting the help we need. We all need to remember that it's OK not to be OK. The longer we walk the road of life, the more certain it is that we will face our share of tough times. Often what we need most in those times is a friend to simply be there and listen. I don't know how I would have made it through my own darkest days without someone simply asking me, "How are you doing?"—and then, listening.

We all need to remember that it's OK not to be OK.

May is Mental Health Month, and a good reminder for all of us to check in with our family, friends and neighbors. Through our [Farm State of Mind](#) campaign, Farm Bureau has been working to raise awareness, reduce stigma and connect farmers, ranchers and their rural communities with stress and mental health resources. Our online, interactive [directory](#) connects you to resources in all 50 states and Puerto Rico, and provides a great starting point if you, or someone you know, needs support. We have also partnered with Farm Credit and National Farmers Union to provide free, on-demand [training](#) to help people understand the causes of stress, reduce the stigma around mental health and learn the warning signs of stress and suicide.

Our team at American Farm Bureau works closely with state Farm Bureau members and staff and we are excited to see many states leading the way in addressing stress and mental health needs for farmers and ranchers in their regions.

These state-led initiatives address roadblocks like financial and access barriers by providing mental health vouchers to connect farmers with free counseling services, including virtual options for those in remote areas. Others are reducing the stigma around mental health through social media campaigns that encourage farmers to share their stories and messages of support.



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Mental Health

Continued from previous page

Thanks to our work across the Farm Bureau family, we are making a difference, but there is still work to be done. According to a national AFBF survey at the beginning of this year, there is still a stigma around mental health and seeking help or treatment. But that feeling has decreased by nearly 10% among farmers and farm employees.

What I was most encouraged to see from this survey is that more farmers and farm employees—92%—feel comfortable talking to friends and family about stress and mental health solutions than they were just a couple years ago. That number is up 22% from April 2019!

We also found that half of farmers and their employees are more aware of resources to help manage stress and mental health conditions than they were a year ago. Just imagine how many lives may have been saved because more people are having these important conversations. Even small interactions can make a big difference.

We've all heard the saying that "Tough times don't last, but tough people do." Well, I don't think that gets it quite right. We cannot go it alone in this life by toughing it out, and we weren't meant to either. Everyone needs someone to help pick them up or sit alongside them in the hard times. If you think you might need help, reach out to a friend or family member. And if someone comes to you, take the time to listen. You never know how much of an impact those few minutes may have. We become much stronger when we stand together.

Vincent "Zippy" Duvall, a poultry, cattle and hay producer from Greene County, Georgia, is the 12th president of the American Farm Bureau Federation.



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