

Plants, Animals, and the Land

Theme Description:

The stories in this theme focus on nature and its importance to individuals. Some topics include making a living off the land through farming, environmental concerns, and outdoor places that are special to people.

1) Joann VanVranken

File Name: 1.VanVranken_Growing_up_on_a_Farm

Interviewed: 2009

Biographical Info: *JoAnn Van Vranken was born 1959 in Cooperstown, New York. As a child she lived on a dairy farm and after graduating high school she attended SUNY Morrisville for an Associate's Degree in Secretarial Science. She married in 1979 and moved to several different states with her husband Bob, who was in the Air Force. They have two children. When he retired, they returned to New York and settled in Edmeston.*

So being on a farm, my mother had an active role in the farming, and so I was the one that had to watch my baby brother Neil, and we would go up in the woods, build forts, I mean we would be gone all day long, up in the woods and we would watch my younger siblings. My older brother was usually the one helping on the farm, but sometimes we had to help unload the hay too, so it's not like we were playing all the time. We did help unload hay, and it was not ones that were kicked in, my father had to stack them and we had to and so you know it was a flat. It was different than it is now as far as unloading hay. We had a really fun time especially in the summertime, wintertime we were in school, so, but we used to go up in the woods with my brother and I would keep them occupied and then whenever supper was ready, my mother would go out and honk the car horn and when we heard it honk three times, it was time to come home. So we were pretty free, we had like 100 acres that we could just play around on. I enjoyed growing up on a farm.

Sample question prompts:

- Have you ever been on a farm?
- Did you play outside as a child?
- Is there an outdoor place that is special to you?

2) Marion Karl

File Name: 2.Karl_Growing_Blueberries

Interviewed: 2009

Biographical Info: *Marion Karl was born in 1928 in India where her parents were working as Baptist missionaries. She and her family returned to the United States from India just as World War II started. Mrs. Karl went to Keuka College and Syracuse University, where she studied to become a nurse. She moved to Cooperstown in 1961 with her husband and young children, and she has lived here ever since. Soon after her arrival, she purchased 100 acres of land on Cornish Hill, which she has kept in a natural state at the request of the previous owner.*

I learned gardening when I first lived with my uncle and aunt in the Adirondacks, and I really enjoy gardening so when I had the space to do it myself, I did. And I decided to plant some blueberries. I have about 24 bushes. Some of them produce more than others. The biggest job is in the spring when I have to prune them, and I am pretty fastidious about the way I prune them. Sometimes it takes me at least an hour or more to do one bush. Twenty-four, that's quite a lot of bushes, quite a lot of time I mean. My biggest struggle now is to keep not the birds, but the squirrels out of it. I bought a big net, a new net, last year, pretty heavy, heavy duty net. It was hard to get it on, it was so heavy. And I thought, "I will be able to relax and we won't have any birds and we will just pick berries." When I took that netting down there was at least two dozen holes in it that had been chewed by the squirrels, and they had popped themselves in and eaten a lot of the berries. So I have to figure out something else.

Sample question prompts:

- Can you tell me about a time you tried to grow something?
- Have you ever problems with animals getting into places you don't want them?
- Where did your family get its food when you were younger, and has that changed with time?

3) Dorothy Bolton

File Name: 3.Bolton_Sheep Parade

Interviewed: 2012

Biographical Info: *Dorothy Bolton is a lifetime resident of Burlington Flats, New York. She grew up as the daughter of a maple syrup producer and married a dairy farmer. Though farming remained a major aspect of Mrs. Bolton's life, she held a career within the Edmeston school system for 32 years. She held various positions within the school from cafeteria worker to classroom aid to her final position as secretary to the guidance office. In this story, Mrs. Bolton is talking about her neighbor's father and his sheep.*

Her father, she lived with her father, he was old and he was a little bit on the cranky side. I was sort of afraid sometimes to go over there but Lila says, "Come on, he really doesn't mind. He's just sort of cranky." Well, he was sort of cranky, but I went over there and I learned how to play a lot of card games. When they moved down from up on the hill, it amazed me, they said, "The sheep were coming." And I said, "What sheep?" Well, they owned sheep, way up on the hill, and it was probably two miles. They drove them down the road. It, of course, was a dirt road. Sheep, they were driving down the road, down and put them in a barn behind the house the right there in the village. And you see sheep coming down the road, herding them like cows. It was amazing to me because I was a little girl then. I thought that was the biggest event of the year, having sheep come down the road.

Sample question prompts:

- How do you feel about animals?
- Have you ever spent time around farm animals?
- What kinds of different things do you see in the city compared to the country?

4) Raymond Key

File Name: 4.Key_Farm_Springwater_Pollution

Interviewed: 2011

Biographical Info: *Raymond Key was born in Cooperstown, NY in 1935 and died in 2015. He moved to Pierstown, New York with his family in 1944 or 1945 and acquired a dairy farm there. He lived with his parents, three brothers, a sister, and a cousin. He worked the farm for most of his life, but also had a career as a state licensed wildlife management practitioner. In this story, Mr. Key is talking about the water supply on his farm.*

Well I think something that a lot of people don't realize that they should start thinking about more is our water supply. A good water supply, we're losing it. For drinking water. Now my house, my farm is all on spring water. The farm up there, that's gravity fed, we don't even have a pump on it. The water runs freely. Three houses, the barn, and the cows. It's self-flowed, runs right to the barn. Up on my house where I live in Pierstown, that's all spring. The farm when we had it up there was all spring. I think that with this drilling and spoiling the water with doing things, building houses and stuff, we're losing a lot of our good water supply and I think that we should be thinking about it.

Sample question prompts:

- What have you used water for in your daily life, whether at home or work?
- Have you always had access to clean water?
- Do you think it is important to protect water?

5) Vicky Lentz

File Name: 5.Lentz_Erosion_Planting

Interviewed: 2014

Biographical Info: *Dr. Vicky Lentz was born in 1957, and grew up in Indiana. She studied biology and earned her PhD in immunology. She is an Assistant Professor of Biology at the State University of New York at Oneonta, and has lived in Otsego County, New York, since 2001. Dr. Lentz cares about the environment, and works on projects with the Otsego County Conservation Association (OCCA). In this story, she is talking about one of those projects, which involved planting trees at the edge of rivers and streams to keep soil from eroding into the water.*

One of the projects that we have been involved in for a number of years is replanting trees along the edges of rivers and streams. That is what riparian is, is the buffer edge. And there was a project, oh my, a mile from my house on Butternut Creek. And I've also been involved with the Butternut Valley Alliance, which is a group of people that live around Butternut Creek. So we went out on a Sunday morning and we dug holes and we put in the trees and we put in stakes and tubes so the deer wouldn't eat them. And it was kind of chilly and misty and a really yucky day, but we all had so much fun, we didn't care. It stabilizes the creek banks.

This one particular location, the creek is a very windy creek because there is silty soil in the valley. And so when we've been getting these really big floods, the water just whips around these curves and when they do they just carve out another big huge chunk of the creek bank and all of that sediment ends up going down the Susquehanna River. And that is not good for the Chesapeake Bay and the oysters and, you know, things we do up here affect them down there. And so if you plant the trees there, that helps hold the soil against, and prevents erosion. So

that's why we try to do that. We did it on the one side of the creek and shortly after that the farmer on the other side of the road, the other side of the bridge, asked if they could come do his. So, it spreads.

Sample question prompts:

- Have you lived near a river or stream?
- Have you ever been to the ocean?
- Have you ever volunteered on a trash cleanup or other activity meant to help the environment?

6) Jennifer Huntington

File Name: 6.Huntington_Farming_Conservation

Interviewed: 2015

Biographical Info: *Jennifer Huntington is the owner of the Cooperstown Holstein Corporation in Middlefield, New York. She was born in Cooperstown in 1962. She has spent her life in the Cooperstown area, apart from four years studying Dairy Science at Cornell University. She inherited her farm from her father, and has worked it for the past 25 years. In this story, Ms. Huntington talks about why it is important to farmers to protect the land.*

I can't farm if I deplete all the soils and everything like that. I can't grow. I can't grow any crops, and I can't farm. So it's all integrated. The same thing with taking care of your animals; if your animals are taken care of poorly they're not going to produce milk and you're not going to be sufficient or sustainable. So definitely. And again working with some of the government agencies on land that isn't on a steep slope—because of the number of animals I have I'm under CAFO requirements, Confined Animal Feeding Operation requirements. And the state and federal government keep track of me to be sure that I stay away from wells, I stay away from water, all sorts of things that make sense to protect water and sources and things like that. And we've put in—planted trees along the Susquehanna for erosion control, lots of different things. We have a CRP wetland area, which as I went by today the eagle was—the bald eagle, we have one now—one or two, I can't tell them apart—that come visit our area. So that's been nice to see. My dad, I don't believe my dad ever saw a bald eagle. He passed seven years ago, seven or eight years ago.

Sample question prompts:

- Have you ever seen any wild animals like eagles around places you have lived?
- Do you think it is important for farmers to care for their land and animals?
- Do you think the state and federal government should make rules about what farmers can and can't do?

7) Brian Ryther

File Name: 7.Ryther_Natural_Resources

Interviewed: 2013

Biographical Info: *Brian Ryther produces maple syrup in New Lisbon, New York, the town where he was born in 1977. Alongside his father and brother, Mr. Ryther spent his childhood collecting and boiling maple sap from the family's trees. He studied industrial construction, and used these skills when building equipment for his sugar house. In 2006, he established his own company, Mill Hollow Maple. In this story, Mr. Ryther talks about how he cares for his trees.*

Well, I make my living from a natural product; I make my living from nature. So environment's everything. Being a steward to the land and making sure that you don't impact the land adversely, from little things like which trees do you cut down to help the forest. If you cut the wrong trees, you're going to kill other trees that you don't want to. You don't drive your vehicles in the forest and hurt the root structure. You don't pollute. All those things. We have the threat in our area of natural gas drilling, specifically hydrofracking. And it really could be a negative impact on our environment. We see what they've done in Pennsylvania with chemical spill releases and contaminating our water systems. Now for me the maple sap comes from the water in the ground and the trees, what the roots of the trees eat. If our groundwater is contaminated, that kills our environment, kills our maple syrup, kills our farming; all [sacrificed] for cheap, quick energy. And those are things that we are actively against.

Sample question prompts:

- Have you ever had maple syrup? If so, what did you eat with it?
- Have you ever seen a maple tree being tapped for syrup?
- Is it important to you to live in an area with healthy trees?

8) Rodney Ingalls

File Name: 8.Ingalls_Growing_Organic_Fruit

Interviewed: 2012

Biographical Info: *The Ingalls family has been farming in Hartwick Seminary, New York, for almost a century. Mr. Ingalls was born in 1919 and died in 2013. After graduating from college and serving in the Navy during World War II, he took over the family dairy business. After Mr. Ingalls's father died, he sold off the dairy business and started growing gladiolas, sweet corn, melons, and u-pick berries. In this clip, Mr. Ingalls talks about growing food on his farm and the dangers of using pesticides.*

Rodney Ingalls [RI]: We raised a small quantity and we could see that people liked strawberries. We could see that you-pick was becoming popular. That was about the time that my oldest son was getting into it. He went to work with me and had maybe twenty acres or so of you-pick strawberries down here. The river was right over the ridge there and we took water from the river up there and put in irrigation. We could irrigate, frost protection, and everything like that. The sweet corn we got raising that too. We used to peddle that around Cooperstown to the stores and restaurants and all like that and got quite carried away with it all. . . .

Interviewer: Was it a lot of tourists like it is now, or more local people?

RI: Local people with freezers. Right now my second son I guess his mother took him you-picking over in the valley over there. He really quite liked that. The next thing I know he came back and put some blueberries in one of the pieces of our pasture. By then we had sold the cows. He's got eight acres up there now, and at the end of this year they will be organic.

Interviewer: Yes. You were saying that before.

RI: We had three cases of cancer in our family, kids. One had lymphoma when he was a little fellow, the other had bone cancer when he was in his twenties, one died. Where did it come from? Well, we're finding that the seeds that we buy are all treated with chemicals before we buy the seed. You plant the seed, the plant comes up, the chemicals that were on the seed [are] absorbed into the plant. We had the corn, we sprayed it all. We thought we were great farmers. We sprayed it all and killed all the weeds. Beautiful crops we had like that, but what did I do to my children, you know? You think about that, you know? What phase of farming are we into now, you know? Right now we put in [drip] irrigation this year, and they sold over ten ton of you-pick blueberries here. I'm enthusiastic about it. Now, at the end of this year we will be registered organically.

Sample question prompts:

- This story is about a family with multiple generations of farmers. Does your family have a trade that has been passed down?
- Have you ever harvested your own food at a “you-pick” farm or in a garden?
- Do you think farmers should try to grow organic food?