

SHERWOOD ACRES FARM

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Raising cattle the right way includes best management practices for caring for the cattle and the land.



Belted Galloway is a cattle breed from the Scottish Highlands with a long, curly coat.

Jon Bednarski worked in the timber-framing/log home industry, and his wife, Sylvia, was an elementary and middle school teacher. They had no plans to change careers. But when their daughter was into riding and won a saddle, they decided that the saddle needed a horse and the horse needed a place to live. So in 2001, Jon and Sylvia bought 35 acres on Harrods Creek in Oldham County and named the land Sherwood Acres Farm. In 2005, they purchased an adjoining 15 acres and recently acquired 55 acres in Mercer County.

Jon and Sylvia's original plans were to build a house and horse barn on their property, but then they decided also to raise cattle to provide natural beef to the area's local food movement. No chemicals, such as steroids or hormones, would be used on the cattle, so no chemical residue would be present in the beef.

Neither Jon nor Sylvia had a farming background, but they decided that "if you are going to farm, you should do it right." The Bednarskis considered "farming the right

way" to be practicing conservation and protecting the resources on their land. They consulted with state and local agencies, such as a county conservation agent and Kentucky fish and wildlife biologist. They wanted to learn best management practices for the land and raising beef cattle and then developed a natural resource conservation service plan.

The land they bought was tired, unproductive and overgrown with invasive trees and vines. The couple began removing the undesirable species and planting a better quality of grasses that would be healthier for their cattle and horses. They planted a wide variety of native trees, such as oak, walnut and hickory, with the help of the Kentucky Division of Forestry.

A pond was created to control excess runoff and provide emergency water for the animals. City water was run to each pasture to service the automatic waterers. Clean water is healthier for the animals than water where the cattle have released their waste. Jon and Sylvia are passionate about water quality, so



they fenced the livestock away from the creeks and ponds, and maintained woodland and vegetative buffer areas near surface water. They take water samples on the farm on a regular basis through the local watershed alliance.

Jon and Sylvia chose to raise the Scottish Heritage breed, Belted Galloway cattle, an ancient breed from the Scottish Highlands, which provides tender beef that is lower in saturated fat and higher in protein than most other grain- or grass-fed beef.

The Bednarskis keep between 35–50 head of steers, which are 90 percent grass-fed, with a supplement of soy hulls, corn and hay. Although their rotational grazing practices provide fresh grass, winters in Kentucky are not mild enough

to grow grass year round to feed the cattle 100 percent of the time.

Mud can cause health issues in cattle, such as hoof rot, so Jon places gravel and geotextile fabric in areas that are prone to become muddy. Walking through mud requires more energy, which decreases the mass of an animal. When the cattle eat the supplemental hay or grain, they stand on concrete feeding pads to stay out of any mud.

Jon walks in the fields, moving through the herd, to make the cattle feel more at ease with him, which makes them easier to handle and content. Young cattle are kept in pastures that are separated by a buffer from older cattle. These are two ways Jon tries to keep the cattle's stress level low and produce better beef.

A typical weight for a finished Belted Galloway steer is 1,200 pounds. The breed colors are black, dun and red. They have a long, curly coat and a wide white belt around their midsection.

Each cow is kept at the farm for two years before being processed. Their beef is then sold to regional restaurants, stores, to the public at farmers' markets and at their own retail store. Selling locally decreases the carbon footprint.

Jon is active in community and state organizations, including the Cooperative Extension Council and the Oldham County Conservation District and Ky. Cattlemen's Association.

The efforts of the Bednarskis to be good environmental stewards have paid off. The farm is organic without being certified, and the overgrown land has healed, providing a habitat for cattle and wildlife.

Besides membership in KY EXCEL Farm, Sherwood Acres Farm received the Oldham County Master Conservationist Award. In 2013, the farm received the Leopold Conservation Award, which recognizes extraordinary achievement in voluntary conservation, inspires others by example and helps the public understand the vital role private landowners play in conservation success.



The cattle drink city water from a fountain that has a ball in it to prevent freezing and keep insects out.



Native trees were planted to provide shade for the cattle and as stream buffers.