



## **Down on the Farm: Back Forty Acres marking nearly 150 years in agriculture (with video)**

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Nestled in the rolling countryside of Sylvan Township is Back Forty Acres, a 180-acre farm that has been in the Doll family since 1864.

Brothers Larry and Kevin Doll grew up doing chores around the farm for Simeon Weber, their great-, great-grandfather.

But instead of housing horses and oxen, the fifth generation on the farm concentrates its operations on meat, eggs and poultry.

The Dolls raise pork, lamb, goats, rabbits, chickens, turkeys, ducks and geese, and sell the meat and eggs to a number of different markets.

Kevin Doll and his wife, DeAnn, as well their sons, Nick and Ben, join Larry Doll and his wife, Stephanie, in keeping the family farming heritage going.

Their eggs are sold to consumers at the New Chelsea Market in Chelsea and The Produce Station in Ann Arbor, as well as farmers' markets in Chelsea and Plymouth.

The Dolls also sell duck and chicken eggs to The Grange Kitchen and Bar, and the Jolly Pumpkin Brewery and Café, both in Ann Arbor.

In addition, people place orders for turkey, geese, pork, lamb, goat, chicken, duck, rabbit and stewing hens, and then pick them up at the farm on designated days.

Kevin Doll says no chemicals, antibiotics or growth hormones are given to their animals.

Both the poultry and livestock are pasture raised.

### **Tamworth hogs**

Kevin Doll says he chose the Tamworth hog, an Old World breed, because he likes red-colored pigs.

He says this Heritage breed is docile. It's originally from Ireland and traveled through England and Canada before arriving in the United States.

Tamworth pigs are known as "bacon pigs" because they have a long and lean body type.

They are a slow-growing breed, and in addition to sows and piglets, Back Forty Acres is home to two boar hogs -- 700-pound Humphrey, described as "the Garfield of hogs," and is so large he needs his own living area.

And there's Delbert, 8 months old, weighing about 300 pounds. He will be the sire of tomorrow for the farm's next generations of piglets.

### **Goats and sheep**

The Dolls raise two breeds of goats, Boer and Kiko, which live on about 15 acres of pasture along with a flock of sheep that includes both Suffock, known for their black faces, and Katahdin, another meat breed.

Katahdin sheep, another Heritage breed, are on the American Livestock Breed Conservancy list as a breed that's recovering in its numbers.

The Boer goats originally came from South Africa and arrived in the United States in 1993. Since then, Stephanie Doll says, the breed has gained in popularity.

Both the goats and sheep raised by the Dolls are described as easy-to-care-for meat breeds.

### **Turkeys, ducks and chickens**

The Dolls raise several types of turkeys, including the board-breasted white and another Heritage breed, the Blue Slate.

Heritage turkeys grow slowly, which allows for the development of muscle mass and healthy organs, Stephanie Doll says.

They live outdoors in pastures in portable pens that are moved around daily so the turkeys can eat grass and insects while enjoying fresh air.

By living in large pens, they are protected from predators, Kevin Doll says.

There are also white Pekin ducks, which are commonly raised throughout the country, as well as Silver Appleyard ducks, another Heritage Breed.

"I thought they (the Appleyard ducks) were cool looking," Kevin Doll says, adding they were bigger and had

some color on them.

They sell free-range broiler chickens, as well as fresh brown, blue, white and sometimes even pink eggs from their free-roaming, pasture-raised laying hens. The color of the egg shell depends on the breed of chicken.

They raise Black Australorp, Rhode Island Red, Silver Laced, Columbian Wyandotte, Buff Orpington and Barred Rock.

They also sell duck eggs, which are terrific for baking, Stephanie Doll says.

The chickens and ducks winter in a large barn, but spend the warmer weather outside to scratch for their own bugs.

The Dolls sell eggs year-round.

"Our eggs literally fly off the shelves," says Kevin Doll.

Currently, the Dolls are taking orders for Thanksgiving turkeys, Christmas goose, ducks, lamb and rabbit.

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### **Fast Facts**

What: Back Forty Acres is a centennial farm in Sylvan Township.

Products sold: pork, lamb, goat, rabbit, chickens, turkeys, ducks and geese, as well as chicken and duck eggs.

Where: Chelsea and Plymouth farmers' market, the New Chelsea Market and the Produce Station in Ann Arbor.

Website: [www.backfortyacres.com](http://www.backfortyacres.com)