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## Back to the Farm

*Jennifer Polanz*



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I've spent a lot of time trying to figure out the draw of the farm and rural life. I grew up on 4 acres of land, with an acre garden and orchard at my disposal all summer from which I could pluck fresh berries, apples, Concord grapes and all manner of veggies to satisfy my appetite.

That all sounds romantic and lovely, but in the late summer, I have memories of very hot kitchens and bustling activity to can, freeze and otherwise preserve the harvest. I recall stealing strips of blanched sweet corn before they got bagged for freezing. I remember picking and cutting the ends off a MILLION green beans so those could get blanched and frozen, too. And the canning—so.much.canning. Apples were picked by the bushel-load, and ornamental corn dried and the kernels “harvested” for popcorn. We also had chickens for fresh eggs and the occasional set of turkeys (zero out of 10—did not like the turkeys).

My point is the farm is a lot of work (and we didn't even have a real farm)! So it's been a fascinating story arc to watch people go from growing a lot of their own food to avoiding all that farm work by buying most of their food at the grocery store to turning a trip out to the farm into entertainment. I just described the better part of 100 years in one sentence.

It's undeniable, though—people love going to the farm. Whether it's for tractor-pulling hayrides and pumpkin patches in the fall, berry picking in the summer or to pick up a weekly CSA share, the popularity has grown in the past 10 years, and accelerated even more during the pandemic (outside activity and fresh air!). That's why this month's cover story is about Waldoch Farm, a century farm in Lino Lake, Minnesota. It's written by industry consultant John Kennedy, who's traveling the country with his wife Souny in their specially outfitted van to support the Agritourism.Life endeavor. You can read about how the Waldoch's bring customers back to their farm, as well as more about how you might get involved in Agritourism.Life, too.

The goal of agritourism is to get people back in for multiple trips at a variety of times during the year. There are other unique ways to do that, too, and freelance writer Ann-Marie Vazzano took a look at a couple of ways to do plant subscriptions and pre-orders to shore up sales in shoulder seasons.

Just because we may embrace the farm life, it doesn't mean we should eschew technology (have you seen those new John Deere tractors?). As retail operations become more sophisticated, so do the hackers and phishers trying to break through your cyber defenses. Expert Joe Dysart explains why you should care, and provides some

resources to help keep you protected.

And, finally, I want to give a shout out to Sid Raisch, John Stanley and the rest of the team behind the Global Retail Conference for taking a leap to create the first international garden center event. There were some fascinating talks, including Ukrainian garden center owner Regina Razumovskaya's talk on customer loyalty. Keep her and her countrymen in your hearts and prayers. **GP**