

The fun and easy way[®] to
set up the small-scale farm of your dreams

Hobby Farming

FOR

DUMMIES[®]



Theresa A. Husarik

A Reference for the Rest of Us![®]



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Theresa A. Husarik is a writer, photographer, crafter, fiber person, and animal lover who lives on a small plot far away from the heart of the city. When she is not tending to her brood (which includes llamas, alpacas, angora goats, cats, dogs, peacocks, and chickens), she can usually be found either behind the computer writing something or in the craft room making something.

Dedication

To Max, for shining his light in my life if only for too short a time.

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Introduction

So many people dream of moving into the country and away from the hustle and bustle of city life. Everyone gets tired of traffic and smog and long lines and crowds. Getting back to the simpler life so often seems like a dream that you wonder why you didn't do it sooner.

If you have preconceived notions of what farming is like today, you may be surprised. Rural families don't necessarily spend all day in overalls on the back of a tractor or in the kitchen donning an apron and baking pies. Every farming operation is different — in size, products, use of technology, and so on. Farmers fill a variety of roles (mechanic, veterinarian, carpenter, gardening expert, and accountant), and although taking on so many mini careers at once may seem daunting, you can pick up experience on the job. The topics covered in this book can get you started.

My husband and I moved to a farm from the city about ten years ago. Yes, we've had some hard times (such as dealing with blizzards and droughts and numerous power outages), but the whole experience has been so wonderful for both of us. Our animals are a daily delight — each time we go out to feed, one of us announces, "I got a kiss from Alex!" or "Oggie let me pet and hug him!" And in the summertime, when we go out to harvest, it's such a joy to cut up a tomato or zucchini and know that we made that.

If you likewise delight in an accomplishment such as growing the biggest tomato in the county or seeing the birth of a calf or making a salad using the wonderfully tasty veggies you grew yourself, then this is the life for you. If you *like* to get your hands dirty and put in some hard work, hobby farming is very likely going to be all you dreamed of and more. We learned a lot in the first few years of playing with this new toy (the farm with animals), and as I share some of my experiences with you, I hope to encourage and inform you so you're more prepared to go for your dream.

About This Book

These days, you can go to any online search engine, type in a phrase such as “basic animal care,” and get tons of Web sites that'll potentially give you answers. Or you can always do your research the old-fashioned way by going to the library and poring over multiple books. But sorting through all that information can be a bit like looking for the proverbial needle in a haystack. I hope that in all my research and personal anecdotes, you find that this book is a one-stop place for all you need to know about deciding whether to take the plunge into the rural life.

Farming today is diverse, and I can't cover all the intricacies of alpaca diet and chile pepper varieties and windmill construction. But with *Hobby Farming For Dummies*, you can get the foundation for everything you need and lots of pointers to other, more-intensive

resources, along with some personal stories that can help you understand what you need to succeed in this lifestyle. The info you find here, along with many of the other books and resources I recommend, can help you (and all those who jump, with reckless abandon, into this really fun and rewarding hobby) to realize this dream — or at least give you the skills to keep your head above water and your heart fluttering with joy about your decision to head this way.

The book is organized in standalone chapters. You can start with Chapter 1 and read all the way through, or you can skip to Chapter 11 just to find out what to do with animals. Each chapter is ready and waiting for the day you're interested in the topic covered. Inside each chapter are tips and information about how you can deal with the particular topic as well as directions to other resources to give you all the help you need.

Conventions Used in This Book

Although I've tried to give you a good overview of each topic selected in this book, I've also included many Web sites or books to give you a more extensive look at each topic presented. Web addresses appear in monofont .

When this book was printed, some Web addresses may have needed to break across two lines of text. If that

happened, rest assured that I haven't put in any extra characters (such as hyphens) to indicate the break. So when using one of these Web addresses, just type exactly what you see in this book, pretending as though the line break didn't exist.

Farming also has its own lingo, so any new terms that I present appear in *italics*, immediately followed by a plain-English definition.

Also, all temperatures appear in degrees Fahrenheit.

What You're Not to Read

This book includes many sidebars — little gray boxes of additional information. Sidebars provide either a more extensive, scientific look at a topic or a personal anecdote on how a certain topic affected my farm and family. They can give you additional insight, but they're beyond the basics, so feel free to skip them if you have to make a feed store run or want to take a look at the used tractor you found in the classifieds.

You can also gloss over anything marked with a Technical Stuff icon, which marks info that's interesting but isn't quite need-to-know.

Foolish Assumptions

In order to make this book as helpful (and relevant and easily readable) as possible, I've presented all the ideas in a friendly, informal, conversational style — as though we were sitting out on the porch with a glass of cold lemonade and watching the clouds go by. Here are some assumptions I've made about you:

- ✓ You're intelligent and may know a great deal about a lot of things (perhaps in your current life you're a doctor, lawyer, business executive, or college professor), but life on the farm is new to you.
- ✓ You want a good idea ahead of time (before you jump in with both feet) of what this lifestyle has in store for you.
- ✓ You want to know how to do things right and how to choose the operations that'll work best for you. You're looking for a good reference for those times when you're starting something new.
- ✓ You have some basic carpentry, gardening, and animal-raising skills — or you're willing to put in the time and effort to develop them.

How This Book Is Organized

This book is divided into seven parts that group related chapters and appendixes. Here's a preview of what you can find in each part.

Part I: Hobby Farms 101

In this part, I point out the basics of life on the farm to help you decide whether rural life is a good fit for you. I discuss farming challenges, cultural differences, and utilities — such as water and sewage — that you may have to provide for yourself. I also help you evaluate properties and give you advice for fitting in with your new neighbors.

Part II: Down on the Farm: Getting Your Property in Order

In Part II, I talk about the tools that can help you develop a relationship with the land. You discover outbuildings that provide shelter and storage, machines that help you with farm labor, and power sources to keep your equipment up and running. I also talk about the property itself — water sources, hills, pastures, and so on — and how you can access and care for it.

Part III: Calling In the Critters: What's a Farm without Animals?

Whether as pets, food sources, laborers, or sources of fun, animals are a farm institution. In this part, you discover types of animals available, where you can buy your livestock, how to provide critters' basic needs, and what to do when an animal gets sick or injured.

Part IV: Choosing and Growing Plants and Crops

Plants take a starring role on many farms — from potted herbs to acres of corn, from food for your table to food for the market, and from salad trimmings to nutrient-rich pastures for your four-legged friends. In this part, I help you decide how big you want to go with your growing operation, advise you on garden plans, and give you some info on basic plant care.