



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Morning mist lifts off the lake at Mitchell Farm, a haven for older horses David and Anita visited while in Connecticut. As has been typical of their encounters with people across the country, the pair had a wonderful stay with their hosts.

Connecticut's a nice place to retire

Traveling couple visits farm for horses in their twilight years

I will have to ask you to cast your minds back a couple of weeks (well before the current election fever) to when I wrote about our stay in New Hampshire, and how we met GaWaNi Pony Boy at the rather aptly named Pony Farm in Temple. The reason for that is to lead in to how we ended up staying at the wonderful Mitchell Farm Equine Retirement Centre in Salem, Conn.

You see, we had come to the end of our visit at Pony Farm and found ourselves with nowhere to go in Connecticut. We had been waiting for a friend to get in touch with who had insisted we go and visit a particular place in the state, but for technical reasons, she had been unable to contact us and we were left wondering what on earth to do next!

In desperation we went and saw Boo McDaniels (the proprietor of Pony Farm) and, with considerable embarrassment, outlined our plight. After all, here we were, these intrepid British adventurers who had planned their grand tour of America in great detail — with horses in tow, I might add — and they were asking if anyone knew of a place they could stay in the next state!

Well, we needn't have worried. Boo immediately found the number of one of her numerous contacts (she is a very well connected lady) who might be able to help us and, after only a single phone call, we had not only found a place to stay for a day or two, but we had also been invited on an organized trail ride the very next morning!

We were going to a really



DAVID AND ANITA HASBURY-SNOGLES

beautiful part of the state where there was a charity trail ride at Lord Creek Farm, Old Lyme, Conn. We didn't know at the time that this was an annual event in aid of the Equine Retirement Center, but when we eventually turned up, we met Dee Doolittle, the owner of Mitchell Farm and organizer of the trail ride. Dee has a very appropriate surname for someone who clearly loves horses and deals with animals on a daily basis, don't you think!

We had a stunning ride through some truly beautiful country at Lord Creek Farm and were collecting sealed envelopes from set locations along the route, which we had to hand in at the end of the ride. These were our Yahtzee scores, which determined who won the various prizes at the end of the day — alas, we were not amongst the winners that day.

Although we didn't win on the ride that day, we certainly did come up trumps with Dee and her husband Hank at their farm in Salem. Mitchell Farm is a center that caters to genuine retirement horses — those wonderful animals who have loyally served their time and deserve a peaceful, quiet and stress-free environment in their twilight years.

There are strict regulations controlling who can be admitted to the farm — each horse must be over 20 years of age, pasture sound, and with all the relevant vaccina-



A couple of retirees enjoy one another's company at Mitchell Farm. Horses must be 20 or older to be admitted.

tions for a start, and the charity (it is a genuine 501c 3 nonprofit) relies a great deal on donations, fundraisers, and volunteers to keep it running.

Some of these volunteers are non-riders, but just have a love of horses, such as Carol Watson who is a talented artist, journalist and novelist, and who donates not only her labor two to three times a week (as does her equally talented husband Steve), but also 10% of any sales she makes to the charity.

In the end, we spent several days at Mitchell Farm and although the temperature dropped dramatically at night during our stay, the days were still warm and sunny.

Dee's husband, Hank, not only helps around the farm as well as hold down a day job, but he is an absolute master in the kitchen, and we sampled his culinary skills that first evening we stayed at the farm at an impromptu dinner party. We had a hoot that night with great food, flowing wine and some really friendly people around the table, but even that was surpassed on Sunday morning when Hank served up an amazing buffet breakfast to all the volunteers who had come to help on the farm — it turned out

that this had actually become a bit of a tradition each week!

I could say so much about our fabulous time there, including riding out on a local tour through the woods with Dee and her slightly "eccentric" friend, Nancy, one sunny afternoon, but editorial restrictions prevent me from expanding much further on the subject!

I should point out, however, that none of the retirees at Mitchell Farm is ever ridden or driven again, whether they could be or not; Dee was riding an old mare of her own that day who was only semi-retired, and she loved it, I can tell you!

Go take a look at mitchell-farm.org and see for yourself what a great setup Dee and Hank have put together (so much so, there is a huge waiting list for any vacancies amongst the retirees), and if you can, give them some much needed assistance.

There are those in life who give more than they take and I can assure you that Dee and Hank are definitely in that category — every little bit helps and we all like to give to genuinely good people wherever they live!

See you next week.

David Snogles can be reached at david_hasbury@yahoo.com.

Hay farming can be costly

I just got off the phone with a landowner who is considering converting a grain farm to pasture and hay production. The conversion costs are significant and, along with opportunities in grain, are likely to keep the farm in crops some time to come. Let's examine some of the reasons.

Perennial grass establishment can cost \$200 per acre, but we spread this over a five-year life to pull the annual expense, without interest, down to \$40 per acre per year. Sounds affordable when you put it in these terms, but someone has to come up with the initial outlay to jump start the land conversion.

If you have 100 acres to convert from cropping to perennial forages, and your cost is \$200 per acre, \$20,000 is needed upfront to make it happen. Farming costs big money and this is only the beginning.

We know these new grass plants will not really do us much good until the next year when they begin to produce — if all goes well. While you wait, your establishment cost is beginning to compound. Remember the time value of money? And if you planted in a drought year, you could be faced with replanting, to the tune of an additional 30%.

Seems like there must be a lot of praying going on in this business. Seriously though, farmers do the best they can and try not to worry too much about what they can't control, which is easy for me to say and harder for them to do.

Once past the seeding year, the returns can begin from the hay or the livestock grazing you have created. If hay, we typically budget 3 tons per acre per year with some producers seeing double this amount from their top management.

Remember that higher production will most likely lead to a shorter stand life as well. However, if your return comes sooner, the cost of money is less and a shorter stand life is acceptable.

Annual maintenance of perennial forage stands is an important cost to keep in sight, as it can easily get lost if let go too long, can build up to break the average budget. Weed control is most commonly done through pasture mowing and/or spraying. However, a pasture can turn into a forest if left unattended for a few years, requiring heavy equipment and heavy expenses to bring it back into production.

Hay ground, on the other hand, has more frequent cutting and stands tend to have fewer weeds overall, but with well-timed sprays, broadleaf weeds can be kept in check.

What about soil fertility? If we start out equal, the hay acre should need fertilizer sooner when compared to the



CARL STAFFORD

pasture acre. A ton of hay removes \$10 to \$15 worth of fertilizer. On the other hand, when grazing pasture, livestock put back about 90% of what they take in.

The only problem is distribution, since plenty of it ends up in the shade and livestock have a hard time getting their spread pattern right.

With new pastures, new fencing can be the straw that breaks the camel's back, so to speak. It is a huge expense that Tom Stanley, Farm Management Agent in Augusta County, says will be the single most limiting factor to using pasture land in the future.

Better fences with close post spacing can be \$3 per foot and high tensile electric fencing with wide post spacing can be under \$1 per foot. Once built, we begin to maintain our investment, keeping the wire tight, the posts standing, the tree limbs off the wire and the weeds under control.

With corn, soybeans and wheat in a race for crop acres, the final tally of planted acres will be part of setting corn prices next year. Doane's market watchers see acres moving away from corn and into wheat and soybeans in an "acreage auction" between the three competing crops.

A world shortage of wheat is pushing this crop to very attractive highs that have farmers scrambling to plant every wheat seed they can get their hands on. Wheat for grain is harvested much too late for corn to be planted, but can work in the right season with double crop soybeans.

Some wheat acres in Virginia are double cropped with soybeans.

Worldwide, grain production is falling short of use, pulling carry-over stocks down. Retired economist Dave Kenyon taught me that carry over can be used to predict 90% of price movement in grains.

With a short and declining carry over, Doane's charts show that grain price trends are up for the next several years. Most crop acres are staying in crops and many acres are being found that can be converted into crops.

Hopefully, crop producers can keep escalating costs in fuel and fertilizer from outpacing their income.

Carl Stafford is Culpeper County Extension Agent, Animal Science. He can be reached at ccstaffo@vt.edu.

Ga. unveils biofuel pitch as work on new ethanol plant begins

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ATLANTA — Georgia environmental officials unveiled the state's new pitch to lure biofuel plants Tuesday as construction was set to begin on an innovative factory that will convert wood waste to fuel.

State marketers will begin using a new slogan — "The Bioenergy Corridor" — to draw alternative energy companies to Georgia, said Nathan McClure, chief forester with the Georgia Forestry Commission.

With timber prices sagging, the state hopes tree farmers can earn more revenue by sell-

ing otherwise unusable waste to alternative energy plants, McClure said.

"We're trying to establish an additional product out there to add to what landowners can receive," said

McClure. "Sixty percent of Georgia's forests are owned by families and individuals, and they have to rely on something else for income."

The announcement came as construction was set to

begin Tuesday on a \$225 million Range Fuels Inc. plant. State officials say the Colorado-based company's facility will be the first commercial wood-based ethanol plant in the nation.

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11	27	38	56	71
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