

HEN HEAVEN

For egg farmer Chelsey Schlosnagle, home really is where the heart is



Chelsey's Eggs started as an after-school and weekend job for Chelsey and her brother, Jared, who co-owns the company, to pay for college.

By Robin Roenker
Photography courtesy of Chelsey Schlosnagle

Chelsey Schlosnagle has fond memories of the earliest days of her business, Chelsey's Eggs, a pasture-raised egg company in Pleasureville, Ky.

As a 6- and 7-year-old making weekly deliveries, she'd shuffle over plastic crates of eggs into the back of her parents' minivan, bundled up in winter wear even in the height of summer to brave the air conditioning blast required to keep the eggs from spoiling.

Begun by her parents, Doug and Susan, on the family's Dutch Creek Farm, the Chelsey's Eggs brand started as an after-school and weekend job for Chelsey and her brother, Jared, who co-owns the company.

"We originally just looked at it as a way to pay for college," says Chelsey, who, 20 years later, now farms full-time and oversees the operation that sells more than 60,000 dozen eggs a year. She also handles the farm's brand marketing.

Jared is a full-time firefighter, who, along with Chelsey, also helps with the family's meat chickens and grass-fed beef production.

"The two of them would sit at the dinner table and wash 60 dozen eggs by hand every night while singing," says Susan. "It was nice to see them working together for a common goal."

Chelsey's FFA experience helped her hone the Chelsey's Eggs business model, and while in college in 2013, she was named the first-ever female recipient of the National FFA Association's American Star in Agribusiness award — given to the FFA student business deemed the best in the nation in a given year.

Even with that success, though, there was a time when she thought her future career might not involve eggs; Chelsey enrolled in college intending to become an agriculture teacher.

But something kept pulling her back home.

"I realized that another degree would require me to leave Pleasureville and this farm. I'm a sixth-generation farmer. And for me, one of the best parts of this job is getting to stay in this place that I love," she says.

Since earning a degree in sustainable agriculture from the University of Kentucky in 2015, Chelsey has been working to put her own mark on the Chelsey's Eggs brand. She's expanded her flock to roughly 6,000 hens and purchased 54 acres of her own, adjoining her parents' 350 acres, where she's built a new pullet barn to add to the operation's two laying barns.

She's also focusing on fine-tuning her farm management skills.

"One of the things I'm most proud of is that we still had pasture outside of the barns last June. And I know that sounds funny, but on a lot of farms, by mid-summer there's no grass left," says Chelsey, who is so passionate about the humane care of her hens that she's also installed shading and enrichment crops, such as turnips and radishes, for them.

We get our chickens out to forage so they can get filled with beta-carotene and omega-3s and all that good stuff that makes the eggs special.

“In addition to the non-GMO grains we feed them, we get our chickens out to forage so they can get filled with beta-carotene and omega-3s and all that good stuff that makes the eggs special,” Chelsey says. “I think people who buy our eggs can tell that they taste different.”

Chelsey’s Eggs can be found at Whole Foods and other local markets and restaurants in Louisville and Lexington, Ky. Growth beyond those markets is not Chelsey’s main goal.

“We’re hyper-local. We’re a small producer, and our eggs only travel about 40 to 45 minutes total to get where’s they’re going,” she says. “That’s a big thing to us and to our customers.”



Thinking about her customers helps keep her energized even on the rare bad days on the farm, such as one day last spring when she faced an unexpected glut of eggs.

“It’s in those moments I remember, I’m not just picking eggs, I’m helping feed someone’s family,” she says. “And that keeps me going.” ★

Robin Roenker is a Lexington, Ky., writer.



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