

Off the Land Luke & Hope Cline



In a Clayton County valley, just northeast of Elgin, is a graceful gravel road named Bixby. The kind of gravel road that makes you want to turn up Patsy Cline and roll the windows down.

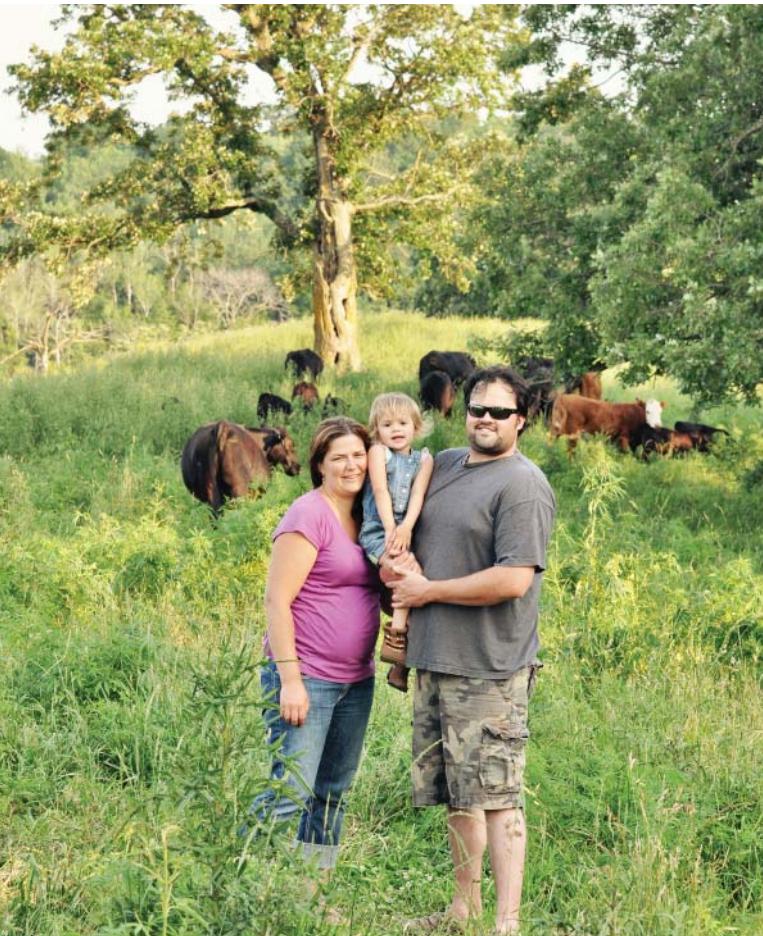
It is off this road, on a long oak savannah ridgeline, that twenty head of Angus cattle graze and roam. This 25-acre pasture, dotted with old burr oak trees, overlooks the valley. Below are rock outcroppings, two small creeks, and the other 15 acres of the farm where Luke and Hope Cline live. This year, 2013, makes for the second full-year of farmer market participation for the Clines. They call their farm "Off the Land" - a most suitable title since the couple offers not only beef, pork, eggs and vegetables, but also some of Iowa's most coveted wild treats: asparagus, morel mushrooms, blackcap raspberries, mulberries, wild plums and wild grapes.

Luke was born and raised in Fayette County, just across the Turkey River from where he and Hope live now. He works for Consolidated Grain and Barge as a grain merchandiser in addition to farming his own land. Hope grew up in the southwest part of Minnesota in a little town called Slayton. She is a Biology Instructor and Lab Coordinator at Upper Iowa University. The two actually met in Hawaii, on the island of Kauai, while both were stationed there for agricultural research work in the winter months. The farm they live on now came up for sale at the right time and both Luke and Hope continue to feel very blessed to call such a lovely place home.





"We feel it is important that our daughters grow up on a farm and in an area that is so involved in producing its own food."



The Cline's smaller scale farming model, with about 20 head of cattle and less than a dozen pigs, allows them to farm on a relatively small plot of land and to produce meat of the highest quality. Both the beef and pork are antibiotic free, hormone free, and pasture fed. The cattle are finished with corn to give the meat the best marbling and flavor. The pigs get regular servings of scraps from the vegetable garden. The Clines want the meat to be "the best you can get." They are one of the few families in Northeast Iowa that offers meat at the farmers markets - a feat made possible by their recent purchase of a large freezer trailer.

Off the Land farm also has about 40 laying hens. The "barnyard mix" - as Hope calls them - is a collection of Rhode Island Red, Black Stars, Buff Orpington, and Araucana breeds. This diversity of chickens produces a beautiful array of colored eggs, rich tans and browns, clean and cream whites, and the ever popular soft blue-green.

Luke and Hope believe in local food and are proud to be raising their daughter Lille in a place that is both beautiful and allows for her to be connected to the land. At 3 years old, Lille is already keen to help out. She likes to ride along in the red pickup truck, play in the dirt and, especially, go "check on the pigs." She tells her mother that when she is big she is going to ride them.

You can purchase the Cline's quality beef, pork, veggies, eggs and other seasonal treats at the farmers markets in Harpers Ferry (Friday evening), Elgin (Thursday evening) and Decorah, Iowa (Wed & Sat). Cuts of pork are also available at Oneota Co-op in Decorah. Off the Land farm is also on Facebook and posts regularly about their market attendance.