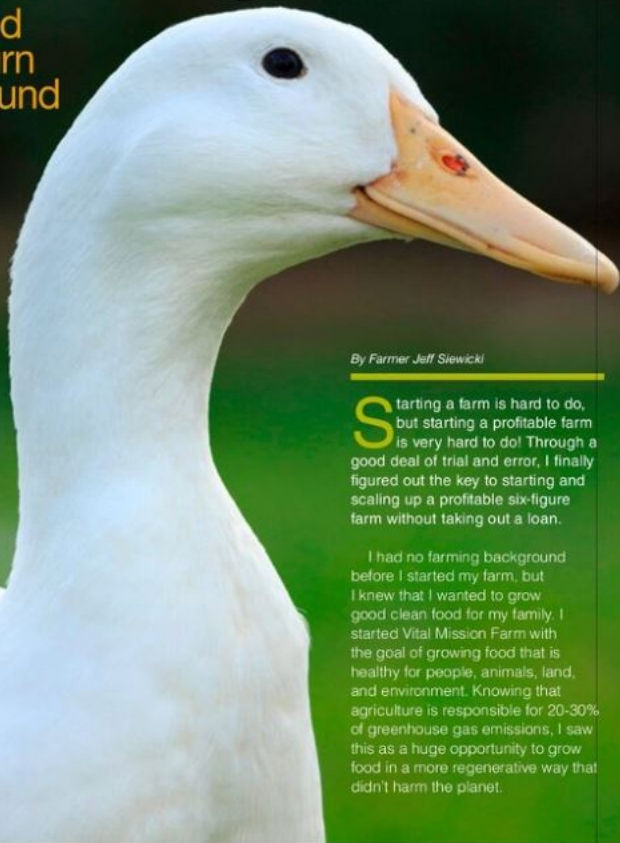


When New Farming Fails

Poultry and 3 pillars turn things around



By Farmer Jeff Siewicki

Starting a farm is hard to do, but starting a profitable farm is very hard to do! Through a good deal of trial and error, I finally figured out the key to starting and scaling up a profitable six-figure farm without taking out a loan.

I had no farming background before I started my farm, but I knew that I wanted to grow good clean food for my family. I started Vital Mission Farm with the goal of growing food that is healthy for people, animals, land, and environment. Knowing that agriculture is responsible for 20-30% of greenhouse gas emissions, I saw this as a huge opportunity to grow food in a more regenerative way that didn't harm the planet.



Finding the win/win

In 2017, I bought 20 chickens and moved them around every day in a chicken tractor that I built. I raised the chickens until they were big enough to harvest. When I gave some to friends and family, they all said it was the best chicken that they ever had. It got me thinking that there must be something to this pastured poultry thing.

In addition to the great flavor from healthy birds, I loved the positive impact the birds made on our soil health, fertility, and organic content. This was a win, win, win scenario.

I became obsessed with regenerative agriculture and started watching youtube videos and reading every book that I could get my hands on. I knew that pastured poultry was the way that I was going to do what I loved, working outside, growing clean food while also helping the planet.

The books and videos that I read helped me learn how to get started. However, whenever I would run into hurdles or try to scale up my farm, I always ended up trying to piecemeal information together. I would take this tactic from one person and this advice from another and it never seemed to work for me. There was so much that I didn't know and I had no plan and no direction.

Determined to make the farm a success, I tried everything: I raised pigs, chickens, ducks, mushrooms, turkeys, eggs, geese, grew vegetables and even tried farrowing pigs for other farmers. The latest shiny tool or farming opportunity would always pull me in different directions. Like a drag racing car before a race, I was spinning my wheels full speed, burning up all of my time and finances, but going nowhere.

Welcome to burnout

The result was that I spent \$80,000 on my credit card and didn't have much to show for it. In addition, I was working full-time off the farm and then spending every free minute that I had running around on the farm putting out fires and trying to make it successful.

I had little to no time available for my wife and kids and pretty soon I was burned out physically, mentally, and emotionally. Something had to give.

Fortunately, I finally started to figure out some things that were working. I approached some local chefs and convinced them to try my birds. They loved them! I also figured out how to scale up affordably without adding any more debt by building out my own infrastructure as the farm grew.

Before long, I had worked with 50 restaurants and chefs and business was going great! I was having fun and making a little money too.

Then COVID-19 hit and all the restaurants shut down. I was left with a freezer full of ducks and no one to sell them to. It was like once I started hitting my stride, all the wind was let out of my sails. Once again, I was determined not to give up.

A lift from ducks

I picked myself up and knew that I had to pivot to direct-to-consumer marketing. I started to do a weekend farmers market and it was really great. Knowing that duck was a highly niche product, I figured out how to add value to my products and offer more options. With the additional product options, I figured out how to make \$70 net profit per bird!

Once restaurants came back online, we really started ramping up production and got on track to gross \$200,000/year on only 7 acres of land. I hired some help and was able to leave my full time job with the farm supporting me and my family. I was profitable and got my sanity back, but most importantly my relationship with my wife is better than ever and I have so much more time for my family.

I eventually came to the realization that no matter how grand my vision was of building this regenerative farm with perfectly grazing chickens and awesome wildlife habitat, none of it mattered, if I couldn't be profitable and keep the farm going.



The last and most crucial *Key Pillar of Success* is **your sales strategy**. After working with over 50 restaurants and chefs, I learned exactly how to approach chefs and what to say and do to make them say "Yes!" Wholesaling to restaurants ensures recurring large volume sales to fund your farm and help you grow. If your marketing direct to consumer, figure out how to add value to your products. Doing this increased our net profit by 700% per bird! Adding value will allow you to be more profitable so that you can farm successfully even if you only have access to a few acres of land.

Farm without loans

If you are interested in learning more details about how to start up and scale a profitable 6-figure pastured poultry farm without taking out a loan, head over to farmingtribe.com (<https://farmingtribe.com/chickenwhisperer>) for my recommendations of the Top Chicken and Duck Breeds for Meat and Egg Production.

About me:

www.instagram.com/farmerjeffs
www.youtube.com
www.vitalmissionfarm.com

About the author

Jeff Siewicki (pronounced suh-WICK-EE) is a farmer and coach. He teaches other farmers how to start and scale up a successful regenerative farm so they can become profitable doing what they love. Jeff is passionate about regenerative agriculture and believes that small regenerative farms are the key to improving human health, farmer success, and environmental sustainability.



The 3 Key Pillars of Success

I sat down and thought hard about my journey and what the deciding factors were between utter failure and success. I came up with 3 *Key Pillars of Success*.

The first is that you need a **proven plan**. A strict plan without all the distractions means you can focus on one thing and make it successful without wasting my time and energy elsewhere. With a proven plan, you will successfully establish your farm, finish your first batch of pastured poultry and have the foundation in place to continue raising more birds and growing at a steady pace. Most importantly, you'll no longer have to figure everything out on your own by piecemealing tidbits of information that you learned from youtube.com or from this article or that book.

The second factor to being successful raising pastured poultry is **building your own infrastructure**. When trying to scale up a small commercial farm, items like feeders, waterers, or shelters can be very hard to find at the right size for several hundred birds. If you do find these items, they are usually expensive. Building your own infrastructure can save you thousands of dollars versus buying commercially available options so that you can scale up your farm as you grow without needing a loan. This way you can get started even if you don't have any savings. To this day, I still don't own a tractor.

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