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We decided to go into the archives and found historical material that is still true and relevant. Most of our CSA customers have not been with us long enough to remember these origin stories, and the rest have undoubtedly forgotten it all by now.

Farming in Loudoun in the 1980s

by Hana Newcomb

About forty years ago, there were six traffic lights on Route 7 between the farm on Leesburg Pike in Vienna and the turn-off to Route 9 heading for Hillsboro. There were no lights from there all the way to the farm in Loudoun. As we headed west, we drove past miles and miles of open fields with herds of black cows. In the early morning, there was often a thick fog from Sterling all the way to Leesburg. The Waterford Texaco was a landmark just as we got off the highway and started on the last five miles of the trip on the narrow two lane road.

I mention all this because in those days when we were farming in Loudoun, we were commuting there. We spent the day and came home at the end, often in the dark. And we weren't driving out there in small cars with a radio and air conditioning. Usually we were hauling something, towing something, or driving something

that was only marginally roadworthy. It is hard to describe what it was like to make that trip, but as a result of all those hours of hauling and towing and avoiding disaster, I have reflexive memories that come to me every time I head out to the Loudoun farm. And I am not alone - I learned from conversations with my sister Lani and our former worker Paul Benton that they also have clear memories of equipment breakdowns, poor judgment, and experiences on the road that would never happen today.

The two farms are 30 miles apart and we often drove equipment from one farm to the other. During baling season in May and June, when we were baling on both fronts, we kept one baler in Fairfax County and towed one out to Loudoun. But inevitably there would be days when the reliable smaller machine, Ol'Whammy, would have a broken knotter and the weather window was tight, so we had to bring the newer



Our new cash crop, replacing sweet corn.

and less dogged baler, Julia, out to take over. Towing a baler is a stressful enterprise. When it is all folded up for travel, it still sticks out quite a bit on the right side. So there you are in a pickup truck toodling down the highway, riding the white line on the edge of the road, hoping no one will be stopped on the shoulder. All three of us have independent stories

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The First Years in Wheatland



Four Charles' in April 2025 with Chip bottom left.
by Chip Planck

When we first started farming in Loudoun, in 1974, the bumper stickers read: "Don't Fairfax Loudoun!" As time went by, there appeared, "Don't Loudoun Clarke!" [The next county west.] While a complete phase change from pristine rural to large-lot suburbia didn't take place, the county does have a far different feel 35 years later.

Driving out Route 7 to do field work in the first seasons, houses and stores ceased almost completely after passing Herndon Junction and Sterling Park. A marker for me on that drive was an old farmhouse not far over the border from Fairfax of the sort no longer housing a farm family, but not yet flattened for a sub-division or renovated by a commuter. Sitting on its porch, instead, were the fellows who ran the collection point we took our trash to farther east in Great Falls. Ratty former farmhouses = affordable rentals for blue collar workers in the neighborhood. That option is gone. Indeed, the vacant house on the Loudoun farm where we sometimes parked had only recently served that function.

Before our purchase, Bob Fletcher, even then one of only a handful of remaining dairy farmers in the county, who milked in nearby Morrisonville, had been running his replacement heifers on the 400 acres and renting the former tenant house to ne'er do wells. (Lest this seem unkind, I cite vulgar graffiti scratched on basement doors and trash thrown out the various first floor windows. Not your classic poor but respectable farm-hands.) There were feral dogs about, too, scavenging after this occupancy.

One dismal day I left the blue Ford pickup door



Current day Wheatland.

ajar, and disked for several hours. I came back to find my lunch eaten up. Characteristic of the time, I went hungry, having never been to Lovettsville with its convenience store (a High's, now 7-11), five miles north, or Purcellville, a real little town, five miles south. The PVF ethos of keep-at-it frugality also had influence: I would never have taken an exploratory country drive looking for a sandwich.

At what is now PVF "East", or the original farm near Tyson's Corner, rented sweet corn patches were the largest we had, running from 5 to 10 acres. Suburban roads ran to them, and suburban houses flanked them. Loudoun was 400 acres in one rectangular block, 1 mile by 1/2 mile, a shed and shop on one end, accessed by a couple dirt lanes. It was huge, it was the moon. All but about 40 acres on the SW corner was in grass so tall it exhausted you exploring it. The 40 SW acres had been in Bob Fletcher's corn, and we proceeded to disk that stubble for field and sweet corn during our first full season of ownership. I started around it one morning with a Farmall M and a 6' offset disk, and at the end of the day could still not see my work on the opposing pass. We were not in Vienna anymore, if not yet in Kansas. Susan learned to cultivate corn on those long, long rows.

A 200 acre farm might need 3-4 tractors. Once subdivided, it might require 20-30 riding lawn mowers. As farmland was converted, and the Browning showroom was taken up with these lawn mowers and other tools of suburban production, many farm tractor parts were stored in open bins. If the lines at the parts desk were too long, we would sometimes just abscond with the part we needed and pay later.

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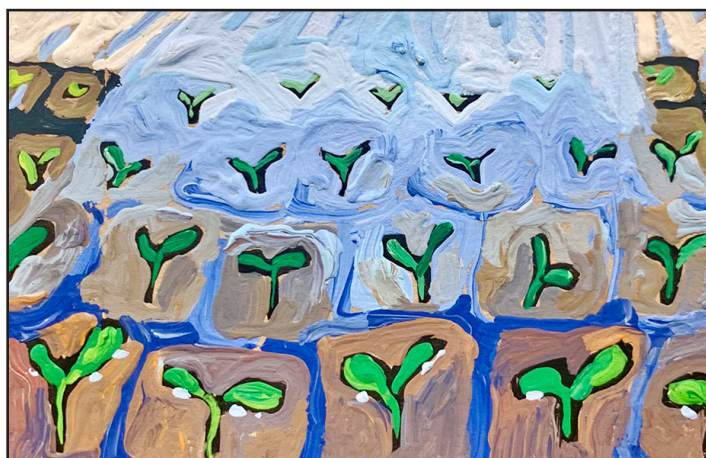
"Loudoun," from page 1

to tell of towing balers through Leesburg and we all remember that stone wall on the side of the road just after you get out of town. Harrowing. My dad did hit that wall once, I believe, and the baler survived but not without some damage. Lani and I had to abandon a baler on the side of the road once when it got a flat tire.

Paul told stories about going into Leesburg with the nitrogen sprayer so he could get filled up at Southern States. Once the hoses came loose and were dragging on the pavement. He got stopped by the police

who were naturally concerned about the trail that he was leaving on the road. In those years, we all had that wide-eyed polite farmer expression that gave the police the comfort they needed to let us continue on. Amazingly, we never had an accident or damaged any vehicles while commuting between the farms.

Once we got to Loudoun, the adventures continued. Things broke constantly. Paul remembers that the baler instruction manual was tucked into the compartment with the bales of twine, and it was a lifeline. Time after time, he and Lani would pull out the manual,

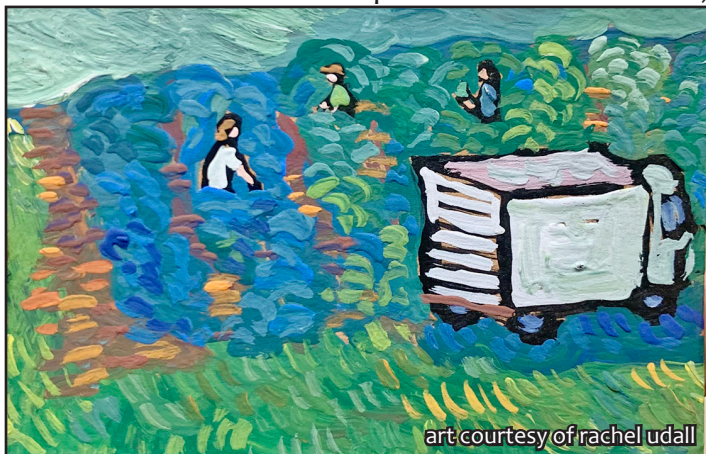


black with dust, and study the diagrams, trying to reset the timing chain or get the knotter to actually finish its cycle. Later in the season, they discovered that the ancient corn binder, used to bind together cornstalks to sell in the fall, had a knotter that was similar to the one in the baler so they used the same book for that too. Paul says that they found that if they just polished up the billhook really well so it wouldn't snag, most of the time they were good to go again.

At the end of the day, depending on the season, there were often loads to haul back to Fairfax County. With our

biggest rig, we hauled up to 300 bales of straw on the dump truck and trailer, and we never made a trip back with an empty vehicle. My father was a transportation economist in his former office life – as a result of that mindset, we always used fuel and equipment with great awareness and intention.

Many people might not know this, but if you leave western Loudoun County just at dark on July 4th, you will see firework displays on all horizons the whole way home. We made that trip with a parade of vehicles hauling bales for many years and it was always a treat to watch the skies as we rumbled home.

*"Wheatland," from page 2*

An attraction of the Loudoun land to former pilot Tony was the half mile flat straight field that made a perfect runway for small planes. Tony no longer had a plane, but Lani's friend Paul Benton did. He once landed on the field when Susan was picking cucumbers and took her up to view the farm.

So, Vienna had small fields and big crews; Loudoun, big fields and small crews. No 267 toll road to Leesburg, no Leesburg by-pass, no stop lights at the Waterford

Texaco, 704, or 287. My favorite sign was the hand-painted one in some bushes at 704, for the county animal rescue site: "Human Society."

But for all its relative emptiness, and our workday isolation, Loudoun had even then ceased being a predominately rural economy. Thirty to forty per cent of people commuted to work in Fairfax and DC. The high school in drowsy Purcellville had its AP courses. In the 1940's, long before the first wave of suburbanization, preservationists had enacted the

first sign ordinance and established a planning commission. When the Sterling Park subdivision of affordable, small lot houses leaped over the Fairfax boundary to take advantage of Loudoun's lax residential zoning in the early 1960's, there began in earnest the long-standing political struggle between conservation and growth. Delightfully, the three housing models in Sterling Park, from modest to really teeny, were the Middleburg, the Leesburg, and the Wheatland. Keeps you humble, this setting.

The Joy of Pigs

by Hana Newcomb

When we were growing up on the farm, we had lots of farm pets. There was always a pen in the front yard – sometimes it had box turtles in it, sometimes a family of skunks (my father was partial to skunks), and one year there were ducks and a bathtub. In addition there was our goose, Rhody, who wandered freely and acted as a guard dog. But we never had pigs. Dad didn't want pigs because it offended his senses to have a being that intelligent in captivity.

Many years later, long after Dad was gone, we got three little pigs as a barnyard attraction for the October school groups. We borrowed them from a local farmer and returned them at the end of the month. This routine went on for a bunch of Octobers. There was the occasional pig escape, which taught us that we can only manage small pigs. Catching and carrying pigs is a slippery and athletic exercise. It eventually dawned on me that pigs are extremely entertaining and fun to have around – and we didn't have to limit our pig time to one month a year.

So about 12 years ago we expanded our pig horizons and welcomed three really friendly little brown ones for a few months at the spa. We borrowed them from Mike and Ansa at Lost Corner Farm – Mike delivered them in the back of his Subaru station wagon. These pigs had such a great time, eating loads of vegetables every day. We got spoiled with Athena and Juanita and Big Willie, unusually scratchable pigs, bottlefed as babies. Our friend Bev Eggleston of EcoFriendly Foods made huge fun of me because the pigs got so fat from constant eating. The pigs are here for rest and relaxation and also to keep us from dumping our surpluses in the compost pile. They are so delighted to run around in their pen,



rooting in the mud, looking for hidden treats.

Over the years, we have stopped naming the pigs because they come and go so quickly. Now our mission is to raise pigs that are sociable enough to be allowed to become the breeder pigs – nice ones that will be good mama pigs.

If we had enough food to keep them happy all winter, we would love to have pigs around the year. They are such an integral part of our system now. Nothing goes to waste and it is so much fun to bring them joy in the form of squishy tomatoes and rotten pumpkins.

