



Larry Warnberg feeds the ducks on his farm.



Larry Warnberg pets a goat on the farm. Warnberg and Bradley keep their animals on the farm a manageable size. That means no cows or horses, they're too big.



Hens walk the grounds of Granny's Farm in Raymond, Washington.

# Living deliberately

Farmsteaders Sandy Bradley and Larry Warnberg tend 100 acres in the Willapa Hills

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Folks familiar with Pacific Northwest folklife culture, and grateful for her significant contribution to it, might be surprised to find Sandy Bradley far from Seattle nowadays, milking goats in relative and contented obscurity in the Willapa Hills of southwest Washington. How did she get here?

Sixteen years ago Larry Warnberg, himself a fugitive from an earlier, less deliberate lifestyle, rode his bike down to Astoria from his Long Beach organic oyster farm to join a community fundraising event for KMUN 91.9 FM. Bradley, the host of her own live Saturday radio show on NPR in those days, had come from Seattle to run the fundraiser auction, and Warnberg was a fan. She, taken by his portable oyster bar and northbound afterward, offered to drive him home. They've been together ever since.

Concerned, though, about herbicide and pesticide use on Willapa Bay oyster beds and about vulnerability to a tsunami, Warnberg and Bradley moved in 2008 to higher ground. They were pleased to have found, while they pondered purchasing five or 10 acres in other valleys, 100 acres of hillside in the Willapa.

In the six years since, they've proved themselves quick studies at farming skills not common to oystering. Neither was a complete neophyte. "My mom's relatives are all farmers. Enumclaw. Dairy and subsistence. I spent summers on the farm," says Bradley. Warnberg has bailed a lot of hay and done a lot of chores on family farms in Minnesota.

They keep their animals a manageable size, and all serve useful purpose. Cows are too big. "A cow raised with goats and who thinks he is one can change your life," warns Bradley. They

keep no horses, either.

"A lot of work," says Warnberg. "I never developed the affinity."

So, though the winter garden is dormant, the farm is alive with all the tidy activity a non-farmer recalls from childhood storybooks. Here, surrounded by free-range fowl, is the henhouse, carefully built from lumber milled at the barn over there. A pair of donkeys nearby keep the chickens and sheep safe from coyotes. There is the duck pond. The spring that feeds it runs a 12-volt generator. In the next pasture a couple of playful billy goats stand on stuff. Bradley, fond of the sight of black animals in bright sunshine on a green hillside, raises Welsh Black Mountain sheep. Warnberg has slaughtered a lamb and by the barn is skinning it. In the greenhouse a couple



Sandy Bradley, musician and former host of NPR's Potluck Radio Show, swings on a rope swing on Granny's Farm in Raymond, Washington. Bradley and Larry Warnberg run the farm which offers, among other things, opportunities for young farmers to learn organic farming practices.



Sacks of potatoes and jars of pickles sit in a root cellar on Granny's Farm in Raymond, Washington. The root cellar is ideal for storing things such as squash, potatoes and jarred vegetables because they don't freeze.

of stretched hides cure. Wood smoke curls from the farmhouse cook stove chimney. Hubbard squash and goat cheese hide in the root cellar.

It's not only for their own satisfaction that Warnberg and Bradley farm. They've listed their farm with the World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms and often host "WWOOFers" who, in exchange for room and board during their visit, work part time, learn practical farming skills and participate in the organic agriculture movement.

"The average farmer is quite elderly," says Warnberg. "One of our goals is to encourage young people to think about farming." Even though farming can require a big initial capital investment "there are ways

to get into it," he says, like sharecropping or apprenticing. Transitions between generations needn't be abrupt. Farmland needn't necessarily be subdivided and developed.

Of course, farming doesn't appeal to a lot of young people who don't want to be constrained every day of the year caring for animals. Warnberg has a solution for that.

"Before we bought this place we did some WWOOFing ourselves, in Oregon, Washington, also Mexico and Costa Rica. We were thinking of becoming itinerant farm-sitters, helping people to take a vacation. So we were developing a route of people who knew us and trusted us to take good care of

their place. Because that's one of the problems with a farm. You're tied to it. People who are retired, who have resources and time, could fill a need to make farming easier for younger couples."

Bradley laughs. "So now we host WWOOFers here instead of traveling around to other farms."

Their WWOOFers are mostly young people, often women, out of college and not ready yet to get a job, free still of family commitments. Often they come from the East Coast. "They want to go far away," explains Bradley.

"To explore the country," continues Warnberg, "and we're about as far west as you can go, so we get a lot of applicants from the east."

WWOOFers often have little farm experience. Newbies can squander resources like seed or feed. Equipment and animals can be dangerous. Some folks have never even planted carrots.

"We prefer to work with people who've worked with their hands before," says Bradley. She marvels at the common sense that some WWOOFers have lacked. Yet training them remains part of the couple's vision for the farm.

They've learned to anticipate problems and to address these before they happen. For example, Warnberg offers, they've learned that vegetarians — and there were plenty at first — are not a good fit. "Too many separate meals," says Bradley.

"Now we're explicit," says Warnberg.

He and Bradley also require a two-week trial period to evaluate WWOOFers before they extend an open-ended invitation. Usually the arrangement is a happy one. "We've had people stay with us over a year," says Warnberg. Bradley, though, recalls she's invited quite a few of them to move on.

"We have a different tolerance for, uh, ignorance," Warnberg concedes.

"And for poor attitudes," adds Bradley.

Both agree, though, that hosting 60 or so WWOOFers over the past six years has been a positive experience. They stay in touch with many. Some continue to work on farms, some have bought farms of their own, some return to visit. Musician friends stop by regularly. Neighbors join them for a steel-head supper. Bradley likes to cook for a full table.

"I didn't like being famous in Seattle," says Bradley. "This is much better for me." She pauses briefly. "But I'd like to have a larger community of people who are regularly around the farm, who make the farm theirs, too."

She and Warnberg are working at it.

'One of our goals is to encourage young people to think about farming.'



Sandy Bradley shows off her kitchen.



Sandy Bradley tends to the mules on the farm. According to Warnberg, the mules are kept on the farm to keep away coyotes.