



HOT SPRING COUNTY'S FARM FAMILY of the YEAR

Jay & Valorie Lee

“DIVERSIFIED”

Fifth generation Bismarck farmer

By GRETCHEN RITCHEY
Editor

“Diversified,” said Jay Lee of Bismarck about a farm called JV Farms of Bismarck that he and wife, Valorie share.

Jay and Valorie Lee with JV Farms of Bismarck were named the 2016 Farm Family of the Year for Hot Spring County.

The Lees offer a variety of farm fresh items from farm raised meat, whole hog sausage to berries and eggs.

Jay is a the fifth generation of his family to farm on the current land. The Lees operate their business at a milk barn once owned and ran by Jay’s grandfather, Gilliam Thornton.

The Lees set up shop every Friday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. at the Milk Barn at 6156 Sycamore Drive, Bismarck and on Saturdays from 7 a.m. to noon at the Hot Springs Farmers’ Market in Historic Downtown Hot Springs. On Sundays they can be found at the Bernice Gardens at 1401 S Main St, Little Rock from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

The Lees met at the Hot Spring County Fair. Valorie is a 1995 graduate of Magnet Cove High School, although she is originally from North Arkansas. Jay is a 1991 graduate of Bismarck High School. They recently celebrated 20 years of marriage.

Jay said, the main thing that makes their farm diverse is the range of items they offer and the availability of those items. He also made reference to his family and friends (mom, nieces, brother and friends), who help around the farm. The Lees own 20 acres and lease an additional 30 acres from family.

“It’s a growth process,” said Jay. “There are still many fences to be built.”

The Lees market their items directly to the customer. “There’s no middle man,” said Jay. “The customer knows where it came from.”

Meat from JV Farms and other items may be found on the menu at several local Hot Springs restaurants; Superior Bathhouse Brewery, Deluca’s Pizzeria Napolitano, Little Penguin Tacos and It’s Gud Fud. Meat and eggs may also be found at the Old Country Store in Hot Springs.

Years ago, they looked in the mirror and decided they needed to loose weight and become healthier. As they looked at how their grandparents lived, they decided that living like their grandparents was the only way to be what they wanted to be.

Two days a week, the couple work at a local Bismarck feed mill, Cook’s

See Lee, page 11



Photo by Gretchen Ritchey

(Above) Valorie and Jay Lee showing the many items in JV Farms garden during the 2016 Farm Family Media Day. (Right) Jay Lee standing with a sign for JV Farms items for sale at the Bernice Gardens Farmer’s Market in Little Rock. (Below) Valorie Lee and neighbors and family picking vegetables from the garden. (Far left) 1970s photo of Jay’s family working the land which is now part of the JV Farms.



Photo Submitted



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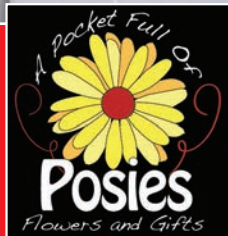
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Congratulations Jay & Valorie

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Congratulations, Jay & Valorie!

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LeeContinued from page 10

Feed, where they mix feed. They also feed the mixed feed to their own animals. All animals, (chickens, goats, cows and pigs) are raised on the locally grown, mixed feed.

The Lees have egg laying hens, a variety of laying breeds, and additional pens with broiler chickens for selling as food.

Farm fresh eggs are sold at \$6 per dozen at the farmers' market. The State of Arkansas MPIP only allows for 200 laying hens per farm, anything above must be approved.

Jay said they have considered upgrading the poultry to 500 and acquiring the status needed for that number. He also said an egg washer and dedicated egg refrigerator is a must with the status.

Chicken processing for 2,000 or fewer chickens can be done under the Arkansas Small Farm Exemption. Jay said the goal is to eventually process the chickens off the farm to free up the time and space for them to expand the farm.

The broiler chickens,

Cornish cross, are processed at 8 to 9 weeks of age. They are primarily grass fed. The Lees have several chicken tractors housing the broilers, which are moved daily to a new grassy location.

A chicken tractor is a portable/movable chicken coop. Chicken tractors can be large needing the assistance of a tractor to move, while others can be built small enough to be moved by humans or horses.

The Lees also raise potatoes, onions, squash, zucchini, kale, cabbages, swish chad, beans, corn and berries.

The Lees pick and gather their produce on Friday mornings to be sold at the Milk Barn on Friday and the weekends farmers' markets. Items that do not sell or go bad, "it goes to the pigs," said Jay.

The Lees have about 100 pigs that are Hereford/red waddles/landrace crosses. They also have Nubian/Lamancha cross goats as brush eaters and occasionally meat.

Valorie said that being able to live without debt is something she never thought would happen. But she said living the route they are has allowed them to not have debt major debt. They have



Valorie and Jay Lee at the Milk Barn office table.

Photo by Gretchen Ritchey

a 1950s 8N Ford tractor and operate the farm themselves so they do not have any overhead, she said.

As newlyweds, Jay was offered a job managing a ranch in Hot Springs. The couple managed the ranch for many years, the ranch eventually moved to Texas and the Lees moved back to Hot Spring County.

The Lees said they are considering moving into the Agri-Tourism as a means of educating the public about farming.

In the fall, the Lees plant mushrooms in logs. Mushroom logs are done by cut-

ting a tree, drilling holes and placing the mushroom biome (seed). Once the seed is in place a wax cap is placed on the log and six months to a year later a mushroom develops.

Jay said they are planning to have mushroom workshops in the fall to teach others how to grow mushrooms.

The Lees said they did not have any animals giving excess milk at the time but they plan to increase the heard of goats and possibly dairy cattle to enhance their milking operation.

Raw milk can be sold on the farm, only. Valorie stat-

ed that all milk sold on the farm must be labeled that it is raw milk, meaning it has not been heat treated. Arkansas recently passed a law allowing farmers to see raw milk to customers for human consumption, however the milk must be purchased from the farm where it was made and farmers are only allowed to sell up to 500 gallons per month.

The Lees continue to update the Milk Barn making it better for their customers.

JV Farms can be found on Facebook at www.facebook.com/jvfarms or at www.facebook.com/dirtybarefootgirl.



Photo by Gretchen Ritchey

Jay and Valorie Lee at the Milk Barn which is open Friday's from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. located at 6156 Sycamore Drive, Bismarck.



Photo Submitted

JV Farms produce and goods at the Hot Springs Farmer's Market where they can be found on Saturday's from 7 a.m. to noon.



Jay Lee tilling the garden. (Inset) The Lees no till garden.

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