



## Six reasons to go to the Common Ground fair

BY KATHLEEN PIERCE  
BDN STAFF

UNITY — Sept. 23-25 marks the annual gathering of modern farmers at the Common Ground Country Fair in Unity. Because homesteaders and growers often toil alone, this shared celebration of the rural life is Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association's signature shindig. Yes, you can eat well, take in a folk show and shop a mega farmers market, but there is so much more to learn and experience.

Here are six reasons to go this year.

**Learn how to use a scythe:** You know the slow food and slow money movement? Well, this is slow mowing. Learn about the elegant, ancient tool perfected by Europeans and get in a good workout while cutting grass and whacking weeds. The scythe takes all kinds of farm work and puts it in your capable hands. Enthusiast Richard Scott of Perry shares tips and tricks needed to master this healthy mowing alter-

native all weekend. Go green!

**Watch sheep dog demos:** Border collies are the hardest working dogs in the farm business. Watch man's best friend strut their stuff. Herding sheep or fowl in response to subtle signals from their handlers is good, clean fun. This choreography is a living demonstration of harmonic cooperation. Plus, it's entertaining. Better scurry to get a good position; this event is always packed. Daily at 10 a.m., noon and 2 p.m.

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Sheep dogs herd ducks during a demonstration at the Common Ground Country Fair in Unity in 2013.

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## Hermon dairy reaches end of the line

### New owner says she must close Siberia Farms

BY ABIGAIL CURTIS  
BDN STAFF

**S**iberia Farms, the small Hermon dairy that charmed customers with high-quality products and home deliveries of milk and more, abruptly closed at the beginning of September.

Sierra Perry, a 22-year-old University of Maine animal science and resource and agribusiness management major who bought the farm last year, said she needed to close largely because of the high cost of business and the current low price of milk.

"It's tough. We do love our customers, but we just couldn't make it work," Perry of Etna said Wednesday. "It's really sad. We didn't want to do it, but we had to."

Perry purchased Siberia Farms last year from founding owners Suzanne and Ed Moreshead. She had begun working at the dairy in January 2015 and loved working with the 25 or so Jersey cows that gave rich milk, which was turned into yogurt, flavored and plain milk and more, at the Hermon farm.

When the Moresheads told their employees in September 2015 that they were going to shut down the farm, Perry jumped into action, according to an article published on the Maine Dairy Promotion Board's website.

"The farm had a quality product, a solid customer base and loyal employees, and Sierra didn't want to see that wasted," the article said. "Within three days, she was the new owner of Siberia Farms."

Perry got a farm loan through the USDA's Farm Services Agency and took some time off school while she settled into her new business. But there was a lot she still had to learn about the unusual business model, which included making home deliveries to customers around a sprawling portion of eastern Maine.

"Home delivery is more expensive than



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A Jersey dairy cow peeks its head out Wednesday at Siberia Farms in Hermon. Sierra Perry of Etna, who bought Siberia Farms in September 2015, said she is closing the farm.

you might think," Perry said recently.

She also had five employees who helped make the dairy products, do deliveries and more. Making value-added products from the milk produced by the herd of Jersey cows allowed Perry to get more money for it than the wholesale price of just \$10 per hundredweight of milk, but it cost a lot in terms of labor and equipment.

"Five employees is a lot to have on a farm like this," she said. "We just got too big."

Perry said she tried to cut down on the delivery route and to increase beef and dairy prices.

"We tried many ideas," she said. "None worked enough to save it, though."

#### Industry pressures

Hundredweight, the standard of volume measure used by the industry, is 100 pounds or a little over 11.5 gallons of fluid milk. At the current wholesale

price, a dairy farmer will make just 86 cents for a gallon of milk that sells for about \$4 at the store.

It's a sharp decrease from just two years ago, Perry said, when milk was priced at \$24 per hundredweight. At that time, more farmers bought dairy cows, and the end result now is that there is more milk than the market can bear, according to the young dairy farmer.

"It's frustrating. Farms are barely able to process anything, the milk prices are so low," Perry said. "There's so much milk. We're flooding the market with milk."

Tim Drake of the Maine Milk Commission, which oversees the milk industry in the state, said he believes the current down period in the milk market has more to do with a national reduction in the amount of milk that gets exported.

"It's down by at least 3 percent nationwide, and 3 percent of the annual

milk production in the United States is a lot of milk," Drake said. "What's keeping it from being much worse is that domestic demand is quite high."

He cited recent news articles debunking the old belief that full-fat dairy products are unhealthy. A new study published this spring in the Journal Circulation found that dairy fat may actually protect against Type 2 diabetes.

"Dairy fat is different. It's actually good for you," Drake said. "It's causing butter sales to increase and demand for whole milk, also."

But in Hermon, the small dairy farm with a complicated business model had simply run out of time and could not wait for the market to rebound.

Perry said her customers are loyal and love the Siberia Farms products, but when many of them suspended delivery this summer while they were on vacation or traveling, it had a direct effect.

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Judith Frost Gillis of the Orrington Historical Society volunteers at the Curran Homestead, where she enjoys encouraging children to dive into history. She is excited about a major gift that the Curran Homestead will receive from the 19th Century Willowbrook Village in Newfield.



ABIGAIL CURTIS | BDN

## Curran Homestead gets major gift from museum

Village donates most of its items to Orrington farm

BY ABIGAIL CURTIS  
BDN STAFF

ORRINGTON — One hundred years ago, when the Curran family began operating a subsistence farm near Fields Pond, they couldn't have imagined their ordinary way of life would one day be the subject of a living history museum that brings Girl Scouts, blacksmith students and many others to their farmhouse doors.

Nor could they have imagined that their homestead would one day connect rural Orrington with Newfield, a small York County town that is home to the 19th Cen-

tury Willowbrook Village. But that is what's happening, now that officials from Willowbrook announced earlier this month that the village will close for good at the end of its 47th season in mid-October because of financial pressures. Still, it's not the end of the road for the village's mission or its many treasures. A large portion of items from the village and even some of the land and buildings in the village will be given to the Curran Homestead, including the working Armitage Herschell traveling carousel from 1894.

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