

Farmer... For A Day

by Jessica Wood

October 31 2022 12:34 PM



BUZZ MAGAZINE - A few years ago I became friends with a young, hip farmer named Mindy. As someone who had just learned to operate a leaf blower, Mindy's life fascinated me. Instead of being behind a computer, she spent her days collecting eggs and crossing the creek to check on her forest-foraging pigs.

But every time I started to express even a hint of envy for Mindy's life, she was quick to remind me, "Everyone thinks being a farmer seems cool, but they have no idea how hard it is." Well last week I decided to put her statement to the test when I found a local farm that welcomes volunteers.

Nearly smack-dab in the middle of Godfrey, Illinois is where you'll find the 10-acre slice of heaven that is Theodora Farms. Because I'm no masochist, I chose to volunteer on a perfect 80 degree, partly cloudy day. The farm was just breathtaking. Morning dew still glistened on the top of the grass as the farm manager, Jeff, led me out to meet the rest of the crew.

In my mind I pictured myself standing in a greenhouse, poking seeds into soil while listening to a favorite podcast. That vision changed however as we approached a crop bed to find seven women crouched down together in the mud, doing what looked like pulling weeds, but what I learned was thinning turnips. After a quick lesson, I joined them down in the mud.

Have you ever worked on a puzzle with friends? That's what farming at Theodora Farm was like. Only the puzzle was large and caused more back pain. Much of the morning we worked mere feet apart from each other, chatting, laughing, and working together until the task was complete.



After the thinning of the crops was finished, everyone, including myself, was handed a stirrup hoe (a tool I'd never seen). These were used to cultivate the soil, or as one farmer told me, "to give the earth a backscratch." Cultivating proved to be more challenging for

me than thinning turnips. With every little raise of my arms, I could feel the promise of tomorrow's soreness. Once the bed was finished, I was delighted to hear it was time for a break.

I took a swig of water and reached for my phone to check the time. Surely it was getting close to lunch. I nearly fell over when I realized I had only been a farmer for one hour and a half (the others had been farming for four hours).

It was at this point that I knew, I am not a farmer (or probably any kind of physical laborer). But I am still fascinated by farmers, specifically the kind at Theodora Farms. These strong, intelligent, kind people (mostly young women) are there six to seven days a week doing everything by hand, with no help from chemicals. And why? Because they care, deeply, about growing, eating, and providing good food. They love the earth and dirt and their community enough to be out there every day doing what I could barely do for three hours (I made it until lunchtime).

Another farm manager, Kris, told me the whole philosophy of Theodora Farms stems from a quote, "The best fertilizer is a farmer's footprint." Meaning the more involved a farmer is with every tiny little part and process of farming, the better the food will be. You can see the evidence of this if you stop by the Theodora Farm Store or one of their stands at Tower Grove or U-City Farmers' Markets. You'd be hard-pressed to find a prettier, tastier leaf of lettuce. And if you've never farmed before,

I highly urge you to spend a morning at Theodora. Not only will you walk away with larger biceps, you'll also have a new appreciation for farmers and the food they work so hard to grow...even turnips.

Theodora Farms is a 10-acre organic farm that grows vegetables, herbs, flowers, and annual fruits using sustainable growing practices. Their produce is available for purchase at the farm, local farmers' markets, and online with home delivery. Located at 4835 N. Alby Road in Godfrey, Theodora Farms also offers tours and hosts family events. Learn more at www.theodorafarms.com or follow them on Facebook.

Jessica Wood is a mom, writer, and small business supporter. Email her at jessicaleewood@yahoo.com if you'd like her to write about a small business that you love.

This story originally ran in the October 2022 issue of The Prairie Land Buzz Magazine <http://www.thebuzzmonthly.com>.