

# Share Your Soil, Sisters!

## Host a Farm Tour

by Lisa Kivirist

Lisa Kivirist is co-author of the new book *Homemade for Sale*, the first authoritative guide to launching a food business from your home kitchen—from idea and recipe to final product. I first met Lisa and her husband, John Ivanko, when we featured their solar- and wind-powered Wisconsin B&B in “Off the Grid Living at Inn Serendipity” in our Oct/Nov 2010 “Attitude of Gratitude” issue. You might also remember Lisa from our Aug/Sept 2011 “Nifty Thrifty” issue, where she gave us a lesson on budget-friendly cooking with a sun oven. This issue, Lisa shares how she and her neighboring “sisters” have designed an annual farm tour event that brings awareness—and dollars—to their women-owned farm enterprises. Lisa and John have also authored *Farmstead Chef*, *Ecopreneuring*, and *Rural Renaissance*.

Two things we farm women love: our farms and sharing that connection to the land and our food with others. Combine those two passions and what do you get? A farm tour!

Take advantage of the beauty of the season and the summer harvest abundance and invite folks to share your passion for farm life by hosting a farm tour. A farm tour creates the opportunity to connect people to the land while also marketing, and generating sales for, your business.

And without a doubt, everything works better when we do it with our sisters. That’s my experience here in southern Wisconsin, when a group of my women farmer friends and I decided to launch a cooperative farm tour called “Soil Sisters: A Celebration of Wisconsin Farms and Rural Life.” What started on a small, grassroots, local level has now evolved into a regional tourism

destination event that showcases women growing fresh, healthy food for their communities.

“We live in a rural area dominated by large-scale, industrialized agriculture, and it’s easy for us women running small-scale, organic, and sustainable agriculture-focused operations to feel lost and isolated,” shares Dela Ends, an organic farming pioneer who’s run Scotch Hill Farm in Brodhead, Wisconsin, for over 20 years. “We women started gathering regularly at informal potlucks, and lo and behold, we started scheming to change the world over a shared meal together.”

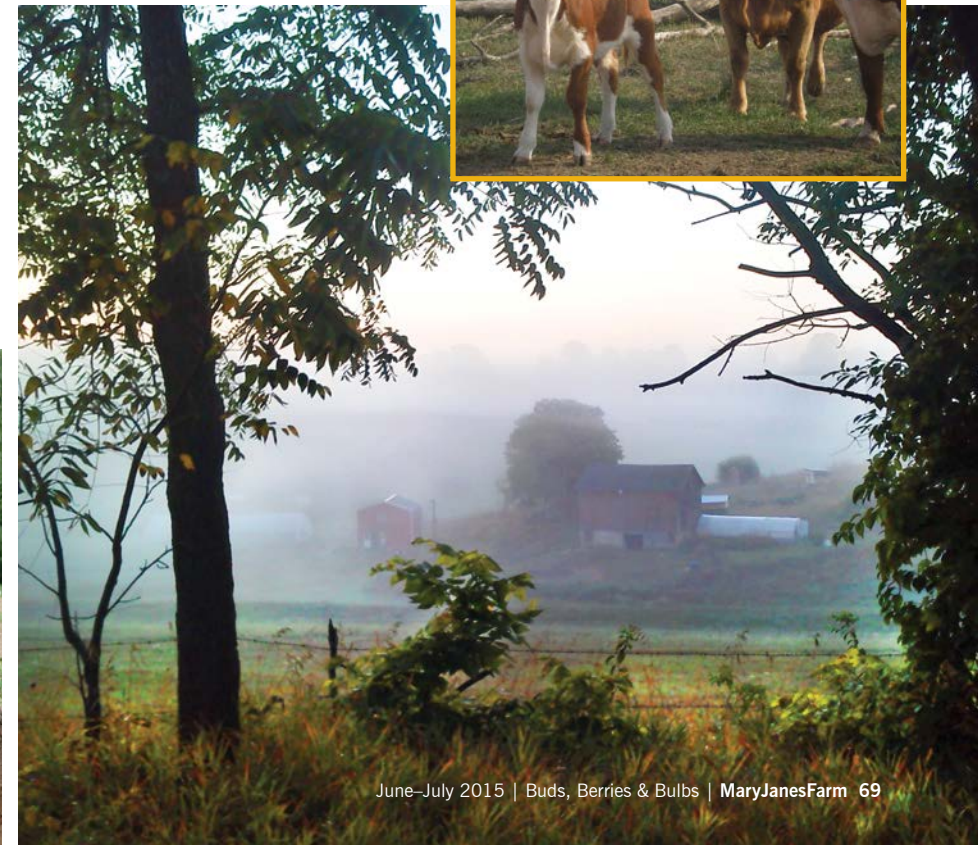
As we gals connected regularly over potlucks at each other’s farms and cultivated deep-rooted friendships, we felt stronger and even more committed to our agriculture mission. We wanted to go public to celebrate and champion this inspiring tribe of female farmers.



The outcome of all this girl power? The Soil Sisters event (SoilSistersWI.org), a public, multi-farm tour that sprouted in 2012 and featured eight women-owned farms. It has since blossomed into a three-day event that includes hands-on immersive workshops covering everything from spinning for beginners to canning tomatoes, plus on-farm dinners and area restaurants that offer special menus featuring locally raised produce. More than 20 women-owned farms are now involved.

“What’s so inspiring is that our Soil Sisters event showcases the powerful economic impact we women farmers add to our communities through our passion for agriculture,” explains Lindsey Morris Carpenter of Grassroots Farm in Monroe, Wisconsin, an organic-certified diversified vegetable and livestock operation. Lindsey runs the farm in partnership with her mom, Gail Carpenter. “Once people realize the value of what we’re all about—both from the dollars generated, and also from the healthy food access and

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 environmental stewardship we bring to our community—we collectively hold more influence to truly transform our food system.” The Soil Sisters event will likely draw over 1,200 visitors to the area this year, adding over \$100,000 to our local rural economy—especially to farmers who make farm-direct products or teach on-farm workshops such as chicken raising or lip-balm making.

The best part of organizing a farm tour is that anyone can start one. You don’t need to be a perfectly successful operation or be in business for years. What you need is a willingness to slide open the barn doors, fire up the tractor for a hayride, and share what you’re all about. Even if you’re a young and beginning farmer, hosting a public tour can serve as a catapult to launch your business. With 2015 being the United Nation’s Year of the Soil, timing couldn’t be better to introduce your customers to your way of growing veggies, caring for animals, and stewarding the land.

“While we’re farming land that’s been in my husband’s family for generations, we’re technically beginning farmers,” says Jen Riemer of Riemer Family Farm in Brodhead, Wisconsin. “We’re taking things in a new direction by direct-marketing our farm products, raising cattle and pigs naturally, and adding

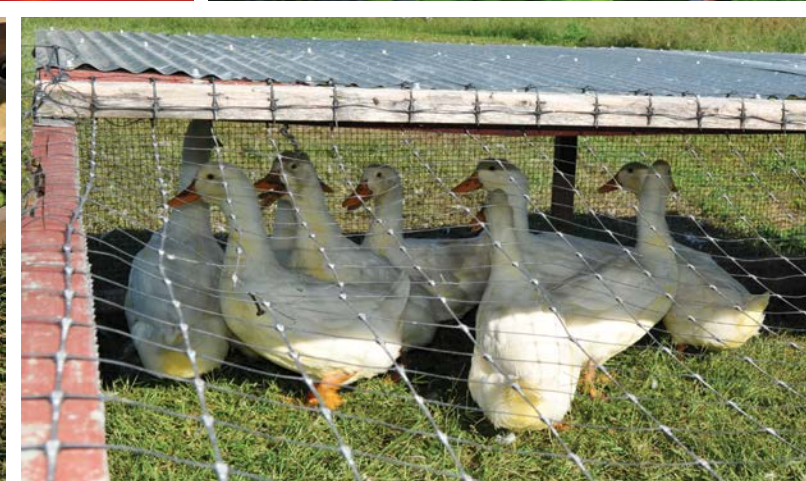
pastured poultry.” She and her family are new host recruits for this year’s Soil Sisters tour. “The support of our local female farmer network has been a key ingredient in building my confidence as a beginning farmer. We’re looking forward to generating more local customer connections through being on the tour this year.”

Are you curious to start a farm tour in your corner of the rural world? Start with these tips and ideas from our seasoned Wisconsin Soil Sisters crew:

# 1. Know Your Objectives

Before you invest time in planning the logistics of your farm-tour day, step back and think about the big picture of why you’re doing it. What are your goals? Why do you want people to come to your place, and what do you want them to take away? This is an important, often overlooked, first step that can help direct and focus the rest of your plans.

Remember, it’s okay to have multiple goals, like generating income and teaching kids about where their food comes from. Set up a farmstand with produce for sale and print out simple, kid-friendly recipe cards for folks to buy the ingredients and make at home. Of course, samples go a long way in selling those ingredients! (continued)





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## 2. Set Your Rules

Remember, it's your farm, your rules. Clearly set out any procedures to ensure everyone is kept safe and the experience is enjoyable by all. Make sure to communicate to guests, both beforehand and on-site as they arrive.

Another member of our Soil Sisters group, Joylene Reavis of Sugar Maple Emu Farm, keeps things organized by offering pen tours with a knowledgeable guide starting on the hour and half-hour throughout the day so everyone has a safe and facilitated farm experience. "We don't allow people to wander around the farm without a guide. We also pen our livestock guardian dogs for these events so they don't overwhelm visitors, especially little kids," Joylene adds.

Visiting dogs can be an issue. Consider a "no dogs" policy for your tour. "Many times in our first couple years of farm tours, we experienced people who aren't savvy about farms and who brought city dogs with no experience in a setting with other animals," recalls Gail Carpenter of Grassroots Farm. "People would unleash their dogs, which is always a recipe for disaster, especially if you have other livestock."

## 3. Prepare Guests & Your Crew

However you communicate your tour specifics, from your website to a Facebook event page, help your guests maximize their farm-tour experience by coming prepared. "It may seem obvious, but it's important to remind folks that they will be visiting a working farm and that they must wear sturdy footwear. Sandals and flip-flops aren't practical," continues Gail. "Also, remind folks to bring sunscreen, insect repellent, and a hat for sun protection."

Let guests know ahead of time what items you'll have for sale and encourage them to bring a cooler with ice blocks to safely store their fresh produce, meats, eggs, or cheese. Also remind them to bring cash if you don't take credit cards.

Likewise, prepare yourself and your family and helpers for what could readily be a fun, but long, day. Giving multiple farm tours and talking to people all day long can drain your vocal cords and energy. Keep your water bottle close by and constantly hydrate yourself. You probably won't have time to sit and eat a full meal during the tour, so keep yourself and your host team fueled with small, easy-to-eat snacks like hard-boiled eggs or vegetable plates with hummus.

## 4. Share Yourself

Sprinkle your personality on the day by sharing your interests and expertise. One of my passions is supporting women to launch food businesses in their home kitchens under cottage food laws, state-specific laws that allow you to make and sell certain non-hazardous items like baked goods without the cost and hassle of using a commercial kitchen. That led to the new book I co-authored with my husband, John Ivanko, titled *Homemade for Sale*, the first authoritative guide to launching a food business from your home kitchen. Many folks are unaware that they can even do something like this. Often, there's little-to-no cost, no state inspections, and few other regulatory

hoops to jump through. I create a whole display about cottage food for our tours, including sampling of my own pickled products (like pickled pumpkin) that I sell under Wisconsin's cottage food law.

## 5. Collaborate

Don't feel like you have to do it all yourself. Working together with a local group of women farmers to create Soil Sisters helped us tremendously. We could promote the event together. Multiple stops on the tour gave visitors a range of places to experience, but we found that most attendees like to stop by and visit all of them. We also collaborated with kindred-spirited organizations like the Wisconsin Farmers Union Foundation, the Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service, and Renewing the Countryside to help our outreach.

"When women farmers connect behind a mission like Soil Sisters, our strength and outreach quickly multiplies," adds Kriss Marion of Circle M Market Farm in Blanchardville, Wisconsin. Her farm will be hosting various fiber workshops this year. "Together, we cultivate a new way of farming, prioritizing our local communities, the earth, and each other." You said it, sister!



# Soil Sisters: A Celebration of Wisconsin Farms & Rural Life

July 31 to August 2, 2015

Meet your kindred-spirited Wisconsin sisters at our Soil Sisters event this year, which promises to be bigger and better than ever in 2015. Now a three-day event, Soil Sisters showcases more than 20 farms. From heirloom tomatoes to emus, sheep to solar energy, bed and breakfasts to beef, the farmers and artisan-food producers share a unique diversity of farm experiences showcasing the summer's bounty. The Soil Sisters event is a weekend celebration that includes five components:

### 1) Tour of Farms: Sunday, August 2, 11 a.m.–6 p.m., free

Meet the women farmers behind Soil Sisters and experience their operations first-hand. Farmstands are open at numerous farms, sharing eggs, fresh produce, cut flowers, and handcrafted items. Bring your coolers for fresh produce and meats, pull on your farm boots or overalls, wear your sun hat, and kick back for a relaxing time on one, or all, of the farms. Tours run throughout the day.

### 2) Green Acres Workshops: Friday, July 31, and Saturday, August 1

On-farm, hands-on fun and educational workshops. Preserve the harvest, spin some fiber, take the kids on a hayride. There's something for everyone, even if you're simply looking for a relaxing rural afternoon (think: soak your feet in a farmstead cucumber spa!). For women looking to take the next step toward their own farm dream, come early on Friday, July 31, for the "In Her Boots" workshop, a daylong program for aspiring women farmers facilitated by the Midwest Organic & Sustainable Education Service (MOSES). Hosted by Katy Dickson of Christensen Farm, the day will include a detailed farm tour, including efficient equipment choices that don't break the bank; ways to create a family-friendly enterprise by integrating your kids into the farm business; and cover-crop planning.

### 3) Dinner on the Farm: Saturday, August 1, 4–9 p.m.

Farm-to-table, family-friendly picnic featuring local cuisine and live music at Inn Serendipity Farm and B&B. The menu, created by leading Wisconsin female chefs, features produce, meat, and other items from the Soil Sisters' farms.

### 4) Taste of Place at Cow & Quince Café: Saturday, August 1; 3–5 p.m.

For those who love to sample various local flavors while chatting with the farmers and food artisans behind the fare, Taste of Place is your event. Hosted by Cow & Quince, a local food café run by women farmers and supplied by them, too.

**5) Dine Fine:** Local restaurants feature "locavore" specials showcasing ingredients from Soil Sisters' farms and area farmers' markets.

Soil Sisters is a project of the Wisconsin Farmers Union Foundation in collaboration with the Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service (MOSES), Renewing the Countryside, and the Wisconsin Department of Tourism. For more information, see [SoilSistersWI.org](http://SoilSistersWI.org).

