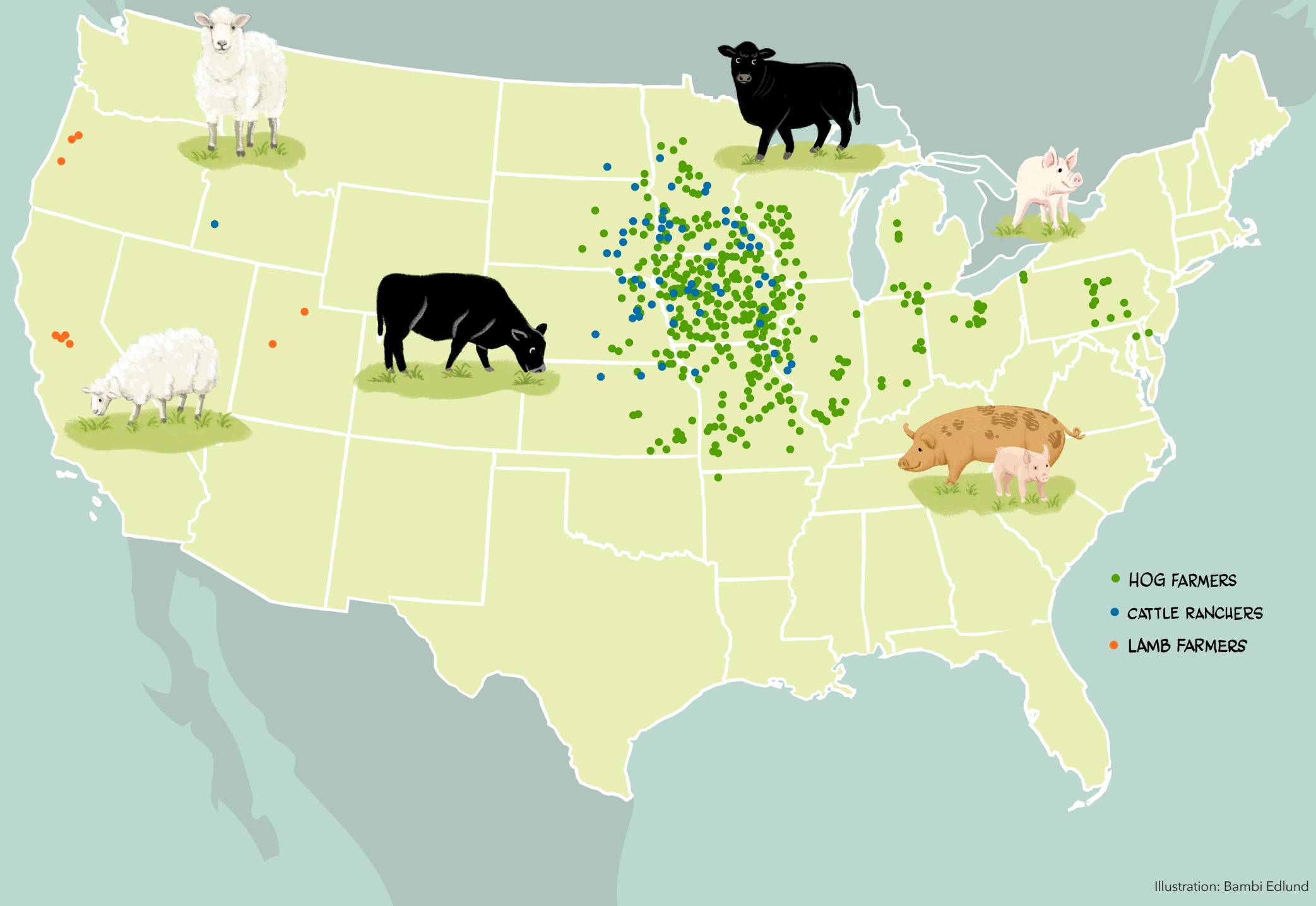




NIMAN RANCH IMPACT REPORT

Small Farms, Big Impact

2021 IMPACT REPORT | CONTENTS



NIMAN RANCH is a network of 750 independent family farmers and ranchers raising beef, pork and lamb sustainably and humanely. Each farm and ranch is unique but all share a commitment to raising livestock with care and preserving the land for future generations.

NIMAN RANCH
1765 West 121st Ave., Ste. 400
Westminster, CO 80234
nimanranch.com

    @nimanranch

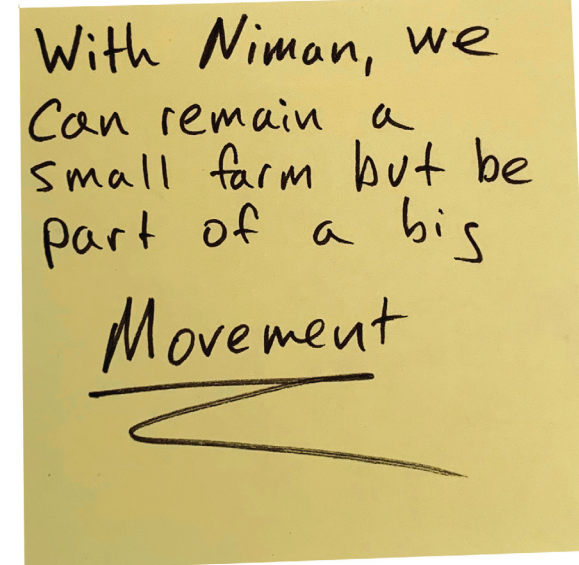
- 3 A LETTER FROM LEADERSHIP:** Impact and Legacy
- 4-6 INTRODUCTION:** The Path to Sustainability and Resilience Sometimes Means Embracing Inefficiency
- 7-17 ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY**
 - 7 A Message from the Sustainable Food Lab
 - 8-9 Measuring Our Environmental Footprint
 - 10-11 Policy From the Ground Up: Dave Serfling & The Farmer-led Movement to Create a Groundbreaking Conservation Program
 - 12-13 How Niman Ranch Farmers Preserve Water Quality
 - 14 Pay Dirt: The Power of Niman Ranch, Composting & Small Family Farms
 - 15 The Indigenous Roots of Regenerative Agriculture
 - 16 Native Roots for Pollinator Protection
 - 17 Farmer Spotlight: Joel Gindo of Free Happy Farm
- 18-27 RAISED WITH CARE**
 - 18 When We Say, Raised with Care, We Mean It
 - 19-20 A Watershed Moment for Crate-Free Pig Production
 - 21 A House of One's Own
 - 22-24 Humane Animal Care and the Women Who Made It a Way of Business at Niman Ranch
 - 25-27 Proudly, No Antibiotics Ever
- 28-32 COMMUNITY IMPACT**
 - 28 Restaurant Relief Advocacy
 - 29 Chef Adrian Lipscombe: 40 Acres & a Mule
 - 30-31 Niman Ranch's Outsized Impact on Local Economies Confirmed
 - 32 Supporting Diversity, Equity & Inclusion in Food and Farming
- 33-41 FARMER SUPPORT**
 - 33 Niman Ranch's Relationship with Farmers and Ranchers
 - 34-35 Farmers Helping Farmers: The Many Benefits of Mentoring
 - 36-37 Niman Ranch Next Generation Foundation
 - 38 Farmer Spotlight: Derek Brown, Alderland Family Farms
 - 39 One Generation to the Next: Hamilton Brothers Farm and Family Farming
 - 40 Darby Knoll Advocating for Family Farms
 - 41 Spotlight: Sustainable Farming Practices

On the cover: Niman Ranch founding hog farmer, Paul Willis, greets a sow. Photo: Saverio Truglia



Photo: Vincent and Holly Crawford

A LETTER FROM LEADERSHIP: IMPACT AND LEGACY



Post-it note from the desk of Chris Oliviero

Niman Ranch Friends,

“With Niman Ranch, I can remain a small farm but be part of a big movement.” I have this quote from a young Niman Ranch farmer, Mark Sperflage, written on a Post-it note that I keep on my desk. This note serves as a daily reminder of the core values that ground Niman Ranch and the limitless promise we share as a community.

This quote also raises a few important questions: Where is the Niman Ranch movement marching toward, how far along on that journey are we and what milestones have we achieved so far? These queries are the foundation of this publication, Niman Ranch’s first Impact Report.

This is not your traditional corporate sustainability report, because we are not a traditional company. For most companies, success is measured based on efficiency, scale and quantity. At Niman Ranch, we have always gauged our success on the positive impact we have on our four pillars: independent family farmers, sustainable agriculture, animal welfare and great taste.

In this report, we have collected data and stories that highlight our brand journey and the impact we have made over the years. From the visionary leadership of women in the Niman Ranch community who developed the very first protocols for humane animal care (page 22) to a brand-new study quantifying the outsized collective impact of small Niman Ranch farms on rural economies (page 30), we have always punched above our weight—a small brand making a big impact.

This report feels especially well-timed, coming as we hopefully experience the final days of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic pulled away the curtain of the food system, showing the fragile nature of the conventional model and the resilience of alternative supply chains like Niman Ranch. We saw as a country the true cost of cheap food and the compromises made to justify efficiency. Collectively, we were reminded not to take for granted essential workers—farmers, meat plant workers, truck drivers, grocery store workers and so many more.

We are also releasing this report at a time when demand for alternatives to conventional pork production continues to gain momentum, with ballot initiatives in California (Proposition 12) and Massachusetts (Question 3), requiring new animal welfare standards scheduled to take effect in 2022. While Niman has always far exceeded these gestation crate-free standards, the new regulations formalize alternatives to farming systems that do not prioritize animal care. These measures will result in increased demand for high welfare pork, providing greater opportunity to continue adding more independent family farmers to our network and supporting the communities in which they live.

Looking forward, we will proceed on our continuous improvement journey, always prioritizing the well-being of our farmers and ranchers, the planet, animals in our care and everyone along the supply chain. In the years ahead, we look forward to better quantifying the positive impacts of our model of agriculture, building on new farmer survey findings quantifying regenerative farming practices currently in use (page 8), while simultaneously setting new goals to continue serving as leaders in building a sustainable, equitable food system.

We believe Niman Ranch and our community of farmers, customers and other partners are currently and can continue to be a major player in building an agriculture sector that allows for future generations to have the opportunity to enjoy our natural resources, pursue a career as an independent family farmer and enjoy nutritious, delicious food.

Thank you for reading and being part of our big movement for a better food system.

In partnership,



CHRIS OLIVIERO
General Manager, Niman Ranch



The Path To Sustainability and Resilience Sometimes Means Embracing Inefficiency

By Tracey Ryder

Niman Ranch isn't just a business, it's an engine of transformation. Whether considering the independent family farmers they support, the humane treatment of the animals they raise or the environment we live in—they aren't satisfied with simply maintaining. Their focus is on long-term sustainability and resilience. Exercising common sense, and learning from their experiences, they are committed to leveraging a set of core values into a sum greater than their individual parts. As a company, they are innovators restoring rural communities by helping family farms thrive. The way they accomplish this may seem counterintuitive at first glance but that's okay because at Niman Ranch, appearances account for a whole lot less than performance.

Every crisis is fraught with challenge and during the past 18 months of disruption due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there was no shortage

of challenges, especially when it came to the food industry. Weaknesses in every system were suddenly exposed, vulnerabilities revealed and efficiencies broken. For Niman Ranch, however, it was actually the inefficiency of their supply chain that allowed them to adapt and make changes quickly. Supply chains of larger companies are fixed and rigid and therefore, brittle, whereas smaller Niman Ranch was able to stay fluid and flexible. According to General Manager Chris Oliviero, "It basically removed the risk of a single point of failure. If you think about more industrial food systems, which are focused specifically on efficiency and low cost, that equates to high-capacity utilizations. That's not what we have. Our emphasis is on quality, it's on stability. The partners that we work with are focused on that as well. And when your emphasis is on quality, you tend to not run everything at a level of capacity where if you have a point of failure you can't recover from it."

"As a small company, Niman Ranch was agile rather than fragile, which was not the case for the larger packing companies. We had excellent communication with our farmers assuring them that the flow of pigs would continue as usual."
—Paul Willis

Not so Much Pivoting as Planning

The pandemic-related dilemma consumers and producers faced was two-sided: Consumers found limited availability of meat items on grocery store shelves, while producers had difficulty finding a market for livestock ready to harvest. For Niman Ranch, this was not an issue. Niman was able to process every animal their farmers raised, and they kept their workers safe while doing so. Quick, efficient planning was key. As Oliviero explained it, "We had our COVID plan ready to go by the end of February 2020. So, before there was a full-blown pandemic, we had thought through everything from redundancy if people were to get sick to redundancy from a production standpoint. We weren't having to build that while we were trying to make tough choices. We adapted, but we had a playbook that we were able to pull from before things got bad."

Niman Ranch hog farmer, Paul Sobocinski, summed up his view this way, "Niman Ranch was stable and consistent. It didn't shut down during COVID because its processing plant was ahead of the curve and its workers were valued and are not subject to the line speeds of the large processing plants."

Niman Ranch Pork Co. founder, Paul Willis, added, "As a small company, Niman Ranch was agile rather than fragile, which was not the case for the larger packing companies. We had excellent communication with our farmers, assuring them that the flow of pigs would continue as usual."

Having a short-term focus is not part of the Niman ethos. In fact, when most companies were laying off team members who worked on the food service side of the business, Niman was hiring. "We knew it was going to be tough on food service for awhile, but we wanted to make sure we

were ready to go when we came out of the pandemic," said Oliviero. And taking it a step further, Niman Ranch invested \$80,000 into a restaurant relief fund, but not as a handout. They purchased gift certificates for restaurants to distribute to loyal patrons, essential workers and community members in need, enabling them to do what they love—prepare meals and feed guests. In addition to making financial contributions to restaurants, Niman also donated product that provided 80,000 meals to local communities all across the country.

As Paul Willis described it, "Niman Ranch also came to the aid of food service customers that were hard hit by the lockdown. The restaurant business was down 90 percent at one point and Niman stepped in with food donations and people to help during the most difficult times."

Family and Community First

For Niman Ranch, the community and family piece of their business is critically important. And while they can't fully reverse rural decay, they can have an impact on the 750 independent family farmers they partner with and the community they live in. This bold premise is a main element of their position on sustainability. It's another way Niman Ranch balances the importance of being forward-thinking and steeped in tradition at the same time.

Niman farmer, Penny Janousek, knows this all too well. She said, "We value the importance Niman places on family. They are concerned about the small family farmers and future generations of farmers. Niman Ranch is like a big family. They care about each other, help each other, and support every one of us. They want us to succeed and grow. Niman is a collection of small farmers and ranchers that continue to do big things."

Continued on page 6

When Paul Willis first started the pork program, he didn't set out to check boxes on some set of protocols or a playbook that somebody else had come up with. He wrote his own playbook and then made it available for others to follow.

Continued from page 5


Long-time Niman Ranch farmer, John Gilbert, described the focus on family and sustainability this way: "We all quickly realize farming involves many obligations—economic responsibilities, environmental issues, ethical concerns. What really separates sustainable farms is that when moral and other issues clash, moral concerns take precedence. We know from many years of experience that making those gut-wrenching decisions requires a solid set of core values. For us, those values are all anchored in respect—for family, partners, customers, neighbors, animals, land.... It's rare to find a partner who shares these values. For the more than 20 years of our association, Niman Ranch has been unwavering in their devotion to these principles. It's a joy to be selling our pigs to Niman Ranch. The fact they recognize, honor and value what we do, and why we do it, is invaluable. We are part of Niman because they fit our desires to be sustainable, not the other way around."

Looking Ahead

When considering the future, Niman Ranch plans to continue filling geographic voids in their distribution map, but they are careful to grow at a pace that doesn't require them to compromise values, or in a way that might affect the stability their farmers and ranchers expect from them. Ultimately, it is their willingness to embrace inefficiency that keeps them evolving.

According to Oliviero, embracing inefficiency "allows [Niman] to stand out in the marketplace in a way that others might not. It keeps us from compromising on things like the use of gestation crates and

farrowing crates and other tools that are used in the name of efficiency but that then require high levels of antibiotic usage and systems that don't provide a level of care that we would feel good about, or that consumers should feel good about." He then added, "But we think a key element of sustainability is the community piece and making sure that farmers are paid in a way that they can count on—that it's a livable wage—and that they can invest that money back into the communities they live in. When Paul Willis first started the pork program, he didn't set out to check boxes on some set of protocols or a playbook that somebody else had come up with. He wrote his own playbook and then made it available for others to follow. And so, having the willingness to do that is what got Niman to this place, and I think it will inform our course well into the future."

Nothing predicts long-term success and sustainability like a business built on powerful values and true partners. There is an expense inherent in building long-term relationships over short-term transactional ones, especially in a business that often faces significant uncontrollable challenges—from a pandemic, to drought, to rising grain prices. Thankfully, Niman Ranch knows the value of investing in the long term, regardless of how inefficient that may seem to others. 



TRACEY RYDER
Co-Founder of *Edible Communities*

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

A MESSAGE FROM THE SUSTAINABLE FOOD LAB

By Elizabeth Reaves

When Niman Ranch reached out to the Sustainable Food Lab last winter about helping measure their impact and chart a path forward, all of us on the team were thrilled with the opportunity, knowing Niman Ranch's reputation as a leader in the sustainable agriculture space. Now, nearly six months later, after reviewing hundreds of surveys and spending hours in conversation with farmers, ranchers and Niman leadership, I can confirm that Niman Ranch has built a resilient brand that offers the key pieces for a truly farmer-focused, regenerative model.

We surveyed 200 farmers and ranchers on their current practices, values, community involvement and more. We then dug in deeply with a subset of farmers and ranchers to get more refined data that can be used to model Niman Ranch's larger impact using the Cool Farm Tool, a Gold Standard accredited sustainable agriculture assessment tool.

What we have found is a farmer network that already leads in many aspects of regenerative farming, including adoption of no or minimal tillage, cover crops, manure- and compost-based natural fertilizers, small grain production and more. One key difference that stood out in our conversations with farmers was the

premium pay and stability the program provides farmers. Without financial sustainability, it is unlikely that farmers will experiment with different sustainable practices.

The beauty of regenerative agriculture is that it offers a path toward continuous improvement, each step forward providing an opportunity to progress further. We see exciting opportunity for Niman Ranch farmers and ranchers to continue to lead through potential solutions including increasing their use of cover crops and more diverse crop rotations, enhanced pasture management, improved manure management and composting systems, and reducing input use and improving feed efficiency.

We are grateful to all the farmers and ranchers who took the time to meet with us and share details about their farm. It was personally such a pleasure to speak with so many passionate producers committed to stewarding the land so it can be passed on to future generations.



ELIZABETH REAVES
Senior Program Director, Agriculture & Environment, Sustainable Food Lab

Measuring Our Environmental Footprint

Sustainability is a foundational pillar of Niman Ranch. As a brand and as a community of farmers and ranchers, we are committed to supporting a model of agriculture that is in balance with natural resources and that can have as many positive contributions to the environment as possible.

In 2021, we set out to better measure the environmental footprint of the Niman Ranch farming model, including the outputs and emissions created as well as the regenerative practices that positively affect the planet.

This surveying, measuring and modeling is just step one on our continuous improvement journey. We look forward to using these data and insight to set goals on doing more to lessen our footprint throughout our business supply chain and assisting our farmer and rancher community so they can continue to lead.

Regenerative Agriculture: Principles and Practices

A Continuous Improvement Journey: A holistic approach to farming, takes into consideration the farm context, current constraints and starting place.

Economically Viable: Managing practices based on needs, contributes to farm viability. Farmers are able to thrive while providing land stewardship.

An Inclusive Value Chain: Practices are meant to include a diverse set of farmers across a variety of locations and landscapes.

Regenerative Agriculture: Outcomes

Water Quality and Quantity: Farmers adopt practices that improve natural resources' functioning into the future.

Carbon: Increased farm resilience to minimize future climate shocks.

Soil Health: Maintain or increase yield and quality.

Social: Farmers are able to make a livable return to farm. Next generation farmers are ready and excited to join and start operations.

Animal Health and Well-being: Animal health and productivity is maintained or improved.



Increase Plant Diversity

Diverse rotations and cover crops diversify soil, providing habitat for more soil life.

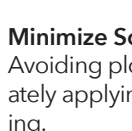
Keep Roots in the Ground

Plants growing throughout the year provide a steady source of food for organisms and take up nutrients so they don't wash into waterways.



Keep Soil Covered

Soil cover reduces erosion and evaporation and helps lower soil temperatures.



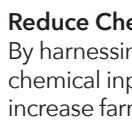
Minimize Soil Disturbance

Avoiding plowing and overgrazing, and appropriately applying inputs keep healthy soils functioning.



Integrate Animals

Including animals in the farming system closes the nutrient loop and reduces the need for fertilizers.



Reduce Chemical Inputs

By harnessing natural cycles to build soil health, chemical inputs that can disrupt biodiversity and increase farmer costs are reduced.



WHAT WE ARE LEARNING

Between May and July 2021, 206 Niman Ranch hog farmers responded to a survey on how they manage and sustain their farms. Here are the highlights of the findings:*

41% use cover crops on annually planted fields. On average, this represented 41% of their total annual cropped acres planted with a cover crop.

67% use no-till or reduced tillage on their annual cropped acres.

77% reported that 50% or more of their crops are rotated annually.

38% have buffer strips on a portion or all of their fields.

65% use grassy waterways on a portion of their farm.

17% use prairie strips on a portion of their farm.

20% manage pollinator habitat.

37% currently are or have previously been involved in a federal or local conservation program (EQIP, CSP, CRP, etc.).

46% plant, harvest or graze non-GMO crops.

43% take soil samples of their annual crop fields at least once every three years.

POTENTIAL AREAS FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Compost and manure management: Our farmers and ranchers are blessed with rich manure and compost from their livestock that is primarily used to fertilize their land to grow crops to feed their livestock. We see an opportunity to improve our environmental benefit and get even more value for our farmers from this output through improved and additional manure management practices.

Small grains: Many Niman Ranch farmers grow small grains for animal feed, bedding and other uses. Small grains, like oats, wheat and rye have been shown to be beneficial for building soil health and make it possible for farmers to add a nitrogen fixing cover crop to their rotation. Small grains give farmers the option to use cover crops to build organic fertility, reducing synthetic inputs, which is good for the bottom line. Small grains give farmers an additional manure application window, saving labor and improving water quality as well as reducing manure emissions.

Fall cover crops: Many of our farmers are already using cover crops on some of their acres. Cover crops help hold soil and nutrients in place, preventing loss into waterways. They can hold carbon in the ground and help farmers reduce input use by enhancing nutrient cycling and breaking pest and disease cycles. Grazing a fall cover crop helps Niman Ranch farmers capture more value from this practice.

Stacked practices: Our farmers think holistically about their farm and how practices stacked together can have multiplier positive effects. We are inspired by early Niman Ranch farmer Dave Serfling, profiled on pages 10-11, and his vision for the Conservation Stewardship Program. We aim to model our support for farmers after his approach.

* Percentages were calculated based on number of responses to each particular survey query, not a percentage of total respondents as not all farmers answered all questions.



Policy from the Ground Up: Dave Serfling & The Farmer-led Movement to Create a Groundbreaking Conservation Program

By Brian DeVore

Photo: Land Stewardship Project

It was the summer of 2005, and Dave Serfling was ecstatic. The 350 acres he and his wife Diane were raising crops and livestock on in southeastern Minnesota had just enrolled in a new USDA conservation program that paid farmers for producing environmental benefits on working farmland. I had called Dave to talk about the implementation of what was then called the “Conservation Security Program,” and he informed me that a 2,000-acre crop operation in his watershed was also enrolled in CSP but didn’t qualify for as much money through the program.

Why? It turns out the program was going to reward Dave and Diane not based on how many acres of corn they raised, but on how much of a positive impact they were having on the landscape. Over the years, they had established diverse crop rotations, rotational grazing and perennial systems like hay and pasture, and they had plans for putting in more of what today would be called “regenerative” practices. In a region where rain can send soil flying off steep hillsides and karst geology makes groundwater vulnerable to contamination, the Serflings felt this was the only way to farm. And now, for the first time, government policy, and indirectly, society itself, were recognizing that fact as well.

“This never happened in the commodity program, where I actually was paid more than the big cropping operations,” Serfling told me.

But he wasn’t bragging about a financial windfall at the expense of a fellow farmer. Serfling was simply expressing amazement that for once his diverse production techniques were not being penalized by policy. And CSP wasn’t prescribing how to farm. Rather, it was providing goals—cleaner water, less erosion, more wildlife habitat, for example—and then leaving it up to the farmers to creatively reach them. That’s exactly what Serfling had in mind when, a few years before, he walked into a meeting of the Land Stewardship Project’s (LSP) Federal Farm Policy Committee with an 11-page proposal to revamp federal farm conservation policy. His fellow farmers on the committee went over the proposal, and with the assistance of then-LSP policy director Mark Schultz, hammered out an initiative that, rather than promote the production of more monocrops, would reward results-oriented whole-farm conservation practices on working land. This was groundbreaking—federal farm conservation programs have traditionally relied on retiring acres via initiatives such as the Conservation Reserve Program and funding the establishment of piecemeal projects such as terraces that don’t always produce the results intended.

“Dave’s idea was that policy ought to reward farming practices that create public goods,” recalled Schultz, who recently retired as the executive director of LSP, a Minnesota-based grassroots sustainable farming organization.

“You have over one million creative farmer minds out there in the country. If you tell them the environmental results that you want and give them financial incentive to achieve them, they will find a way to deliver.”

—Dave Serfling, testifying before the U.S. Senate Ag Committee, July 31, 2001

A working land conservation program that took a whole-farm approach resonated with Tom Harkin, who was then a U.S. senator from Iowa and chair of the Senate ag committee. After meeting with Serfling and other members of the LSP committee, Harkin made CSP part of the 2002 Farm Bill.

What is now called the Conservation Stewardship Program is, by farm acreage covered, the largest federal conservation program in the country—at least 70 million acres of crop, forest, pasture and rangeland are enrolled in the program. I’ve been on dozens of CSP farms that are using an array of innovative practices to save soil, protect water, build carbon and provide wildlife habitat.

Unfortunately, Serfling never had the opportunity to see his vision fully realized. Less than a year after he signed that CSP contract, he was killed in an auto accident. He was only 46 at the time, and it’s astounding the impact he had on regenerative agriculture, policy and his local community in such a short time.

Besides being a key player in the development of one of the most innovative farm conservation programs in history, Serfling was deeply involved in on-farm research and farmer-to-farmer education. The Serfling farm was frequently featured in local and national media, and Serfling himself was an eloquent and effective communicator. His presentations, essays and fact sheets blended the farmer’s razor-sharp analysis of numbers with his own family’s experience as land stewards. Serfling had a knack for expressing to non-farmers the joys of making

a living on the land. “As you can probably tell, I love farming,” he wrote in one newspaper commentary that described in loving detail the life he and Diane, along with their children, Hannah and Ethan, had on those 350 acres.

Perhaps Serfling was his most animated when he talked about working with livestock. He loved figuring out how to balance care of the land with profitable production of hogs, cattle, sheep and chickens, and he saw animals as playing an integral role in creating a diverse, sustainable operation with a tight nutrient cycle. That’s why it made sense that the Serflings were early award-winning farmers for Niman Ranch.

It’s fitting that Serfling is closely associated with an innovative piece of policy like CSP. Its foundation was built on the ideal that when given a chance, farming can have a positive impact on the land, people and community. Dave Serfling lived that ideal every day. 🌱

LISTEN: Hear from LSP’s Mark Schultz about Dave Serfling and the development of the Conservation Stewardship Program: landstewardshipproject.org/posts/podcast/1050



BRIAN DEVORE

Editor with the Minnesota-based Land Stewardship Project and the author of *Wildly Successful Farming: Sustainability and the New Agricultural Land Ethic*.

CREATION OF THE GULF OF MEXICO “DEAD ZONE”

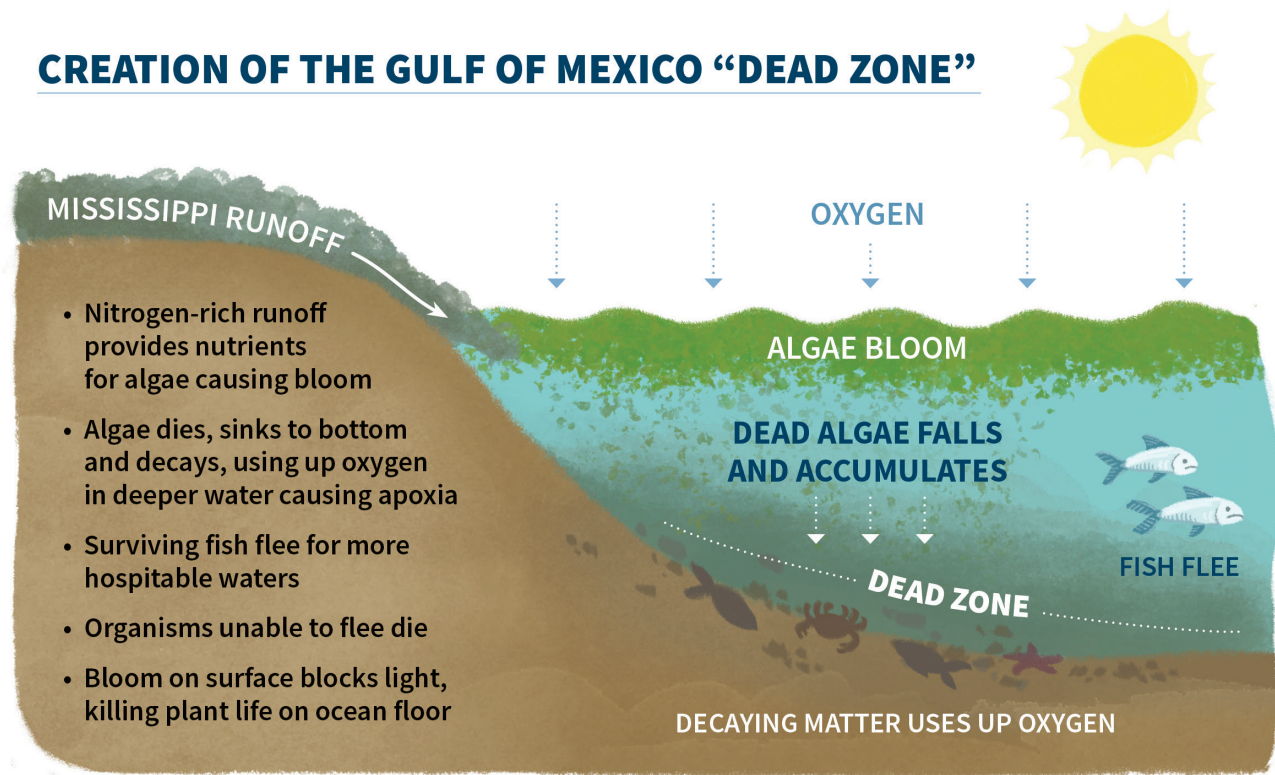


Illustration: Bambi Edlund

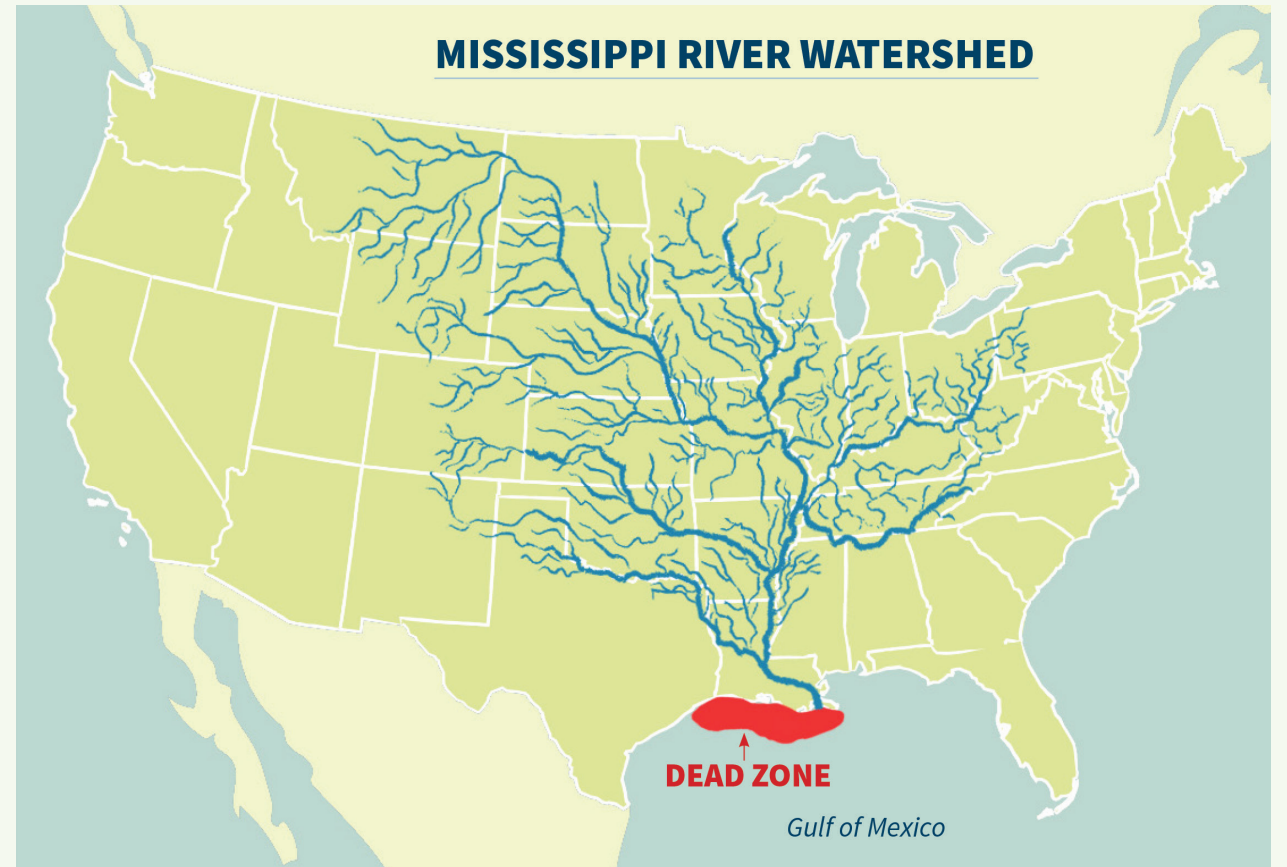


Illustration: Bambi Edlund

HOW FARMERS CAN PRESERVE WATER QUALITY

Nutrient Management: Overfertilizing is a major driver of water quality degradation. By paying very close attention to how much fertilizer is applied and when, farms can reduce the amount of runoff that ends up in our watersheds.

Buffer Zones: A riparian buffer zone acts as a sponge for nutrient runoff from the fields, allowing local flora to thrive instead of allowing the excess nutrients to flow downriver.

Vegetative and Tillage Practices: By designing the contours and drainage of fields to maximize absorption and minimize runoff, farmers can keep more water and nutrients on their field instead of it being flushed into the watershed. Using minimal and carefully timed tilling also reduces runoff.

Structural Practices: Farmers can build basins and grassy waterways to allow for further natural infiltration through the soil and allowing more sediment to settle before it flows into a waterway.

Manure Management: Farmers and ranchers can carefully manage their manure and compost to reduce runoff. The goal is to keep the nutrients on the farm and avoid them being washed away into the watershed.

Year Round Ground Cover and Field Buffers: Fields with ground cover are less prone to being eroded and washed away. Also field buffers, or areas of native vegetation, shrubs, grasses and trees, between fields and waterways absorb sediment and nutrients that would otherwise end up in our watershed.

HOW CAN MIDWEST FARMS AFFECT THE GULF OF MEXICO?

Nutrients and Manure: When a farmer applies fertilizer to their crops, or stores manure incorrectly, the nutrients can end up being washed into nearby streams and creeks. With hundreds of farms causing hundreds of pounds of excess carbon, nitrogen, and phosphorus to enter their local watersheds, all of these dissolved nutrients end up flowing into the Mississippi River.

Dissolved Nutrients: The river continues to accumulate these dissolved nutrients downstream, where a massive amount is ultimately dumped into the Mississippi Delta and into the Gulf of Mexico.

Excess Nutrients: A usual amount of dissolved nutrients can be beneficial. However, when the amount of dissolved nutrients is extremely high, as has been the case each year for many decades, the excess nutrients are taken up by an algae that grows extremely rapidly, blocking out other native species, and creating an ecological disaster visible from space.

Dead Zone: The 2021 Gulf of Mexico “dead zone” spanned approximately 6,334 square miles.

PAY DIRT

The Power of Niman Ranch, Composting & Small Family Farms

By Cassandra Lofflin

April Wilson began raising show pigs at the age of nine. By the time she completed high school she was a two-time winner in the 4-H Swine Show. After graduating from college, she left the farm and lived in the city for over a decade.

"My father called to tell me that he was getting rid of the pigs because no one was interested in raising them," Wilson said. "I had never forgotten about my love of raising pigs. I came back because I missed the farm."

Wilson is now a third-generation hog farmer and works alongside her mother and father, her two brothers and their wives at Seven W Farm—where they are also using hog manure-based compost to support their farm and protect the planet.

While each farm in the Niman Ranch network looks a bit different, they all strictly follow the animal care protocols, one of which requires bedding for the pigs. "We use wheat, oat and barley straw," Wilson shared of her family's farm. "They love to root around and lay on it." The sows also use the bedding to build nests when they are ready to have piglets.

As the bedding is soiled, a fresh layer of straw is applied and eventually the straw and pig waste begin to break down or compost, with the help of the little hooves above naturally turning and aerating the compost. The compost has an added benefit: The heat generated from decomposition helps to keep the pigs warm through the winter. In the spring, the compost is transferred to a windrow, a large open container, for months until completely decomposed. This results in a nutrient-rich fertilizer that can be used on the farm to recondition the soil and increase its ability to retain moisture, preventing water runoff and soil erosion.

This method of manure management is quite different than conventional scale hog production. On industrial pig operations, pigs are raised on slatted floors, allowing waste to fall into a pit below. The pig waste is then stored in massive lagoons; as it breaks down, ammonia is released into the air.

The untreated waste, which has a high nitrogen content, is sprayed directly on surrounding crops. The excess nitrogen can contaminate drinking water by either leaching underground or through water runoff during heavy rains.

"It is difficult for an industrial farm to practice regenerative agriculture with the animals confined and overcrowded," Wilson said. During a recent storm, the Wilsons were able to clearly see water runoff from area farms that implement less sustainable practices.

"The answer for a better environment is more farmers and smaller farms," Wilson continued.

Niman Ranch and its network of U.S. family farmers and ranchers are focused on regenerative farming practices, and holistic and dynamic approaches to revitalize the environment. In addition to composting, Wilson uses rotational grazing, cover crops and organic practices for healthier soils.

New research from the Rodale Institute indicates that large-scale ecological rehabilitation can be achieved through regenerative agriculture. Carbon dioxide makes up the majority of the greenhouse gases contributing to the warming trend, and agricultural soil naturally has the ability to sequester or stabilize and store carbon emissions at lower depths. Increasing healthy soil mass through regenerative practices including compost usage reduces climate-damaging levels of atmospheric carbon dioxide while improving soil structure and eliminating soil erosion.

The Wilsons' radically traditional approach to farming through composting and other regenerative practices delivers a sustainably sound solution to both family farms and consumers.



CASSANDRA LOFTLIN
East Coast-based food writer and recipe developer focusing on ways to connect home cooks with local farmers



Photo: Erika Larsen

The Indigenous Roots of Regenerative Agriculture

By Dawn Sherman

Niman Ranch has proudly partnered with Native American Natural Foods (NANF), maker of the Tanka Bar, since 2018. Inspired by NANF's mission to use traditional, regenerative farming methods to support the Lakota people on the Pine Ridge Reservation, Niman Ranch serves as a technical adviser and partner to help NANF grow its business. Their support includes operating, marketing, communication and financial contributions.

Native American Natural Foods is a certified minority-owned business, a certified Native American-owned business and a certified B Corporation.

There is a lot of talk today about a new approach to farming—one that builds soil health, supports biodiversity, helps farmers lower costs and even fights climate change. The way regenerative agriculture is buzzed about, one might think this was a newly discovered model by contemporary farmers looking for a better way. However, regenerative agriculture is built upon Indigenous wisdom and practices going back hundreds of thousands of years.

Long before Europeans arrived, Indigenous populations had developed community-driven practices to achieve food sovereignty in balance with natural resources. From diverse plantings to build soil health and not deplete nutrients, not tilling the land, and using

agroforestry and silviculture to planting buffers to protect nearby streams, Native people invented these farming methods celebrated in the regenerative agriculture community today. For my Lakota people, bison on the land have always been an important part of how we feed our community while also preserving the land and biodiversity.

While there are many overlaps with the contemporary discussion of regenerative agriculture and its Indigenous roots, there are stark differences. In modern agriculture, the building blocks of farming are treated as commodified resources rather than a part of who we are as living beings. By commodifying the food system, we put it at risk of depletion and damage, with a focus on short term gains and individual—rather than community—success.

As excitement builds for regenerative agriculture, I hope that more appreciation and ownership are given to its Indigenous origins and that Native people are looked to as leaders in the movement for a diverse, healthy, sustaining food system.



DAWN SHERMAN
CEO of NANF and a member of the Lakota, Shawnee and Delaware tribes

Scan here to learn more about Native American Natural Foods



Native Roots for Pollinator Protection

“Prairie is the ultimate form of biodiversity, an ecosystem custom designed for Iowa by nature.”
—Paul Willis

Paul Willis’ Iowa roots run deep, from the family farm, establishment of Niman Ranch to quite literal native tallgrass prairie roots.

Paul modeled his farm after the prairie throughout its years of production and over time returned 140 acres of the farmland back to its natural state, an oasis for native birds, bees, butterflies and other pollinators.

More than 80 percent of Iowa was once home to the tallgrass prairie supporting native pollinators. Today, only a sliver of the habitat remains. The natural ecosystem is the most effective teaching tool on how to support pollinators and biodiversity alike.

\$200,000 Niman Ranch committed \$200,000 to help partner farmers expand or adopt new sustainable farming practices to protect pollinators, build soil health and preserve water quality.

20% of Niman Ranch farms have pollinator habitat on their land.

HABITAT Niman Ranch has established pollinator habitat on our three company-owned sow farms.



Photo: Joel Gindo

FARMER SPOTLIGHT: Joel Gindo of Free Happy Farm

Our partners at Imperfect Foods, a sustainable online grocer building a kinder, less wasteful food system, sat down with farmer Joel Gindo of Free Happy Farm to learn about his approach to farming and why he chooses to partner with Niman Ranch.

Raising pigs is what Joel Gindo’s father would have considered risky business. They take a long time to raise and they’re a little unpredictable. So instead, cows, chickens, and ducks foraged freely about his father’s farm outside Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. But, while cows would have been a safer choice, Gindo thinks they’re high maintenance. Like clockwork, cows have to be milked twice a day. That’s why Gindo appreciates pigs. They’re independent. And they fit right in with the care-free chickens that trot about his farm near Brookings, S.D.

On Free Happy Farm, the pigs and chickens that Gindo raises are just that: free and happy. These pigs have it all: grassy and wide-open space, fresh food and water, and a farmer who cares. And Gindo really cares—as in, he tends to his pigs before, after, and on top of a day job and a family.

As you can imagine, it’s not easy being this busy. Gindo honestly wishes he had more time to fish. But he loves what he does, and so he goes above and beyond to take care of his animals.

Gindo describes his farm as “not so high-tech,” but while he may not be using the latest in farming technology, his practices are advanced in another way. Gindo rotates the open range of his pigs and chickens continuously, a practice that improves the health of the animals and the land. First, he lets the pigs roam a plot of land, and then he lets the chickens come in and do their thing. Once hoofs and hens have trodden down the plot of land, he moves them to a new pasture to let the grass regrow. All the animal activity helps aerate and fertilize the soil, while giving the animals the free-roaming lifestyle and varied diet they enjoy best. This “mimicry of nature,” as Gindo calls it, keeps the soil healthy, allows the animals to act as they naturally want to and makes Free Happy Farm a regenerative farm.

Not everyone sees the value in what Gindo does. But Niman Ranch does and that’s why he joined the network in 2018. Niman’s partnership ensures that Joel’s care and dedication get fully appreciated and financially valued.

There are farmers like Gindo out there—farmers who treat animals with respect, farming like a craft, and who can inspire others to rethink where our food should come from. By sharing his story and partnering with farmer networks like Niman Ranch, we can build a better, more equitable food system.

RAISED WITH CARE[®]

When we say, Raised with Care[®], we mean it.

From Paul Willis, our founding hog farmer, developing the very first hog welfare protocols with the Animal Welfare Institute in the 1990s, to today using our voice to advocate for regulations and policies to phase out the extreme confinement of pigs, humane animal care has always been a core value at Niman Ranch.

100%

Certified Humane[®]

100%

transparent, publicly accessible protocols

100%

of farms and ranches personally inspected before joining the program

100%

American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals[®] (ASPCA) Shop With Your Heart compliant

100%

of farms and ranches audited annually at a minimum

No

hormones EVER

No

tail docking

No

teeth clipping

No

antibiotics EVER



Photo: Adobe Stock

A Watershed Moment for Crate-Free Pig Production

By Paul Willis

I started the Niman Ranch hog program in response to the rise of factory farming in the U.S. I always considered gestation crates, farrowing crates and intense confinement cruel to highly intelligent animals like pigs. That's why from day one, Niman Ranch has required that pigs be raised on pasture or in deeply bedded pens—without crates or cages—where they can root, roam, socialize and play.

I am happy to share that thanks to animal welfare advocacy organizations, consumer demand and leadership from brands like Niman Ranch, the hog sector is finally being forced to make some big changes to improve animal welfare through two state-based policies: California's Proposition 12 (Prop 12) and Massachusetts' Question 3 (Q3).

These two new laws stipulate that starting January 1, 2022, the sale of pork sourced from pigs raised in gestation crates will be banned in both California and Massachusetts. While Niman Ranch has always been compliant, the broader hog industry is currently in defensive mode, trying to fight the inevitable in court or racing to retrofit confinement facilities. It is estimated

that less than 4 percent of sow housing in the U.S. is compliant with Prop 12/Q3.

We believe so strongly in this issue that in the summer of 2021 Niman Ranch filed an amicus brief in the courts to support the law's implementation. We are the first and only brand in the industry to speak out in this way in support of Prop 12.

Prop 12/Q3 certainly does not end all cruel practices in the industrial hog sector, but it's an important first step and I expect these laws to expand. As the saying goes, "As goes California, so goes the nation."

I am proud that at Niman Ranch, we prove every day that you can have a meat brand that's better for the pigs, the farmer, the environment and the consumer.



PAUL WILLIS

Niman Ranch founding hog farmer

GESTATION CRATES DEFINED

For the nearly four-month pig gestation period, the vast majority of sows in the U.S. live in a breeding stall/gestation crate, a roughly 2-by-7-foot stall where the animals do not have enough room to turn around, walk or socialize.

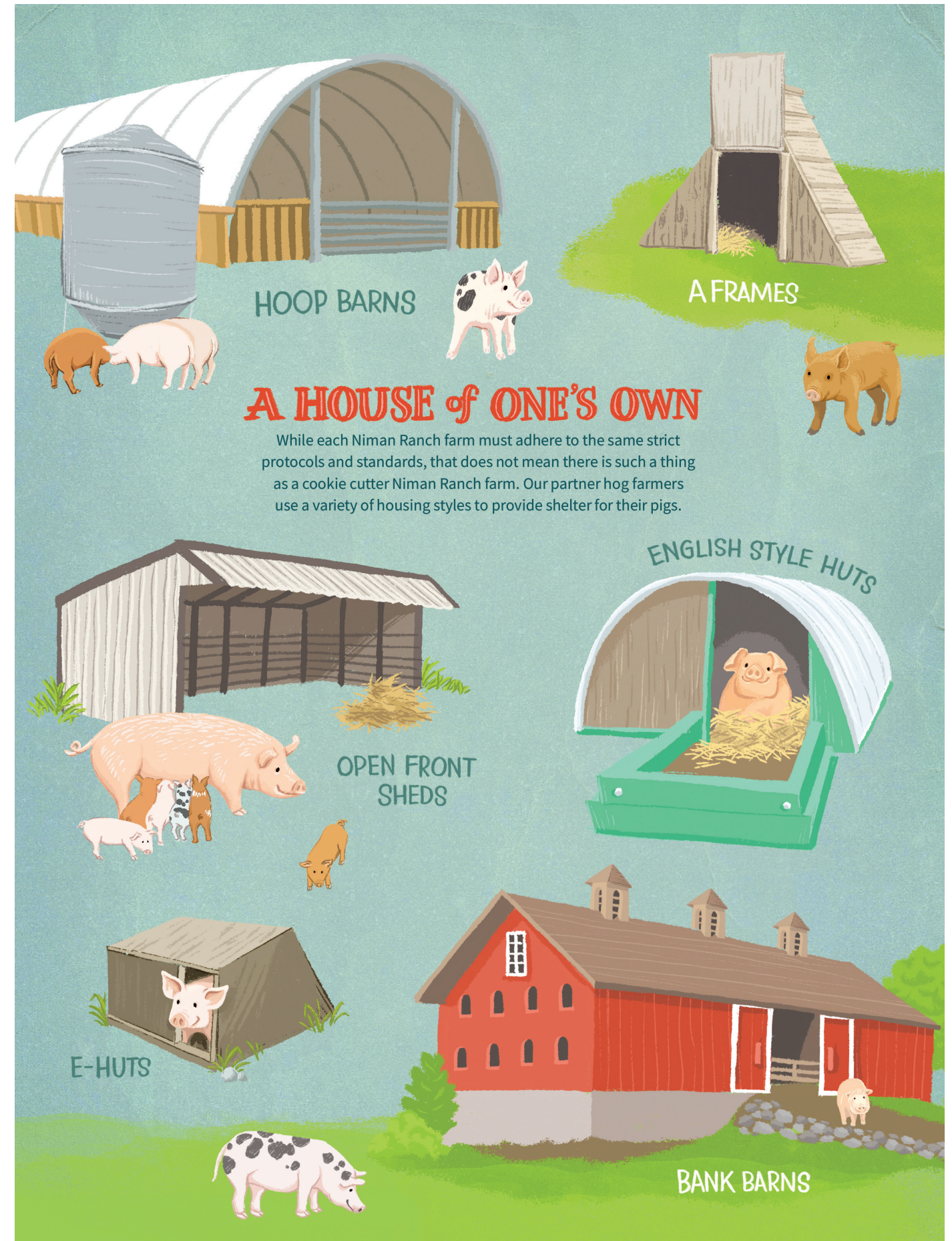
When the sows are ready to give birth, they are moved to farrowing crates where they spend the next three to four weeks before going back to the breeding stall/crate.

Niman Ranch bans the use of gestation and farrowing crates, ensuring pigs have plenty of room to exhibit their natural behaviors.

Niman Ranch minimum space per sow: 35 square feet
(45% more than Prop 12 standards and 150% more than industry average)

Prop 12 gestation crate standards:
24 square feet

Average gestation crate:
14 square feet





Humane Animal Care and the Women Who Made It a Way of Business at Niman Ranch

By Marilyn Noble



Humane animal care is one of the four Niman Ranch pillars, and in the past three decades, four women renowned for their work with animals have helped to define and refine the true meaning of that pillar. Each of them looks at livestock production from the perspective of the animal first. And each of them—Dr. Temple Grandin, sisters Marlene and Diane Halverson, and Phyllis Willis, the founding mother of the Niman Ranch pork program—have left an indelible mark on the way livestock is handled by not only Niman Ranch farmers, ranchers and processors, but thousands of others in the industry as well.

The late Phyllis Willis, who passed away in 2017, was a passionate advocate for family farms, rural communities and living things of both the four-legged and two-legged kind. Her daughter Sarah Willis relays plenty of stories about her care for creatures, from the abandoned baby bunny she rescued in her denim jumper pocket when she was hosting a coffee for her friends to the hitchhikers she would bring home for a shower, hot meal and sometimes even a haircut. “I would say that describes her heart,” said Sarah Willis. “Some people go to church, but she really wasn’t one for organized religion. But she always would say that was her way of expressing Christianity. We’re all in it together. You know, we help each other when someone needs help.”

Willis was also a vocal and fearless opponent of concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs), not just because of the environmental damage they can cause, but also because of the inhumane conditions they create for the livestock inside. Her former husband Paul Willis told the story of a company that wanted to build an operation with 5 million confined laying hens near them. At a public meeting, she spoke

up. “She was fond of asking, ‘What about the animals?’ he says. “People talked about the smell, but she always got back to asking, ‘Shouldn’t the animals be taken care of, shouldn’t they be able to live in a natural environment?’”

It didn’t matter if she was speaking to the local city council, the county board, farm organizations or politicians. Willis always came prepared with the facts and figures to support her position, and she wasn’t afraid to raise the issues, something which earned her both admiration and ire. Most of all, she was dedicated to the Willis farm and Niman Ranch and their humane methods for handling their hogs.

It was at one of those public meetings organized by the Campaign for Family Farms and the Environment that Phyllis and Paul Willis encountered Diane Halverson. “Paul and Phyllis later recounted to me how when they heard me speak it sounded like kindred spirits, because I said, basically, What about the animals? All of this starts with the treatment of the animals. It all starts with ignoring their natures. And then when we ignore who they are, we pay all these other costs,” said Halverson.

In 1989, while working at the Animal Welfare Institute, Halverson, in consultation with animal welfare scientists, veterinarians and farmers, formulated hog husbandry standards for the first USDA-approved animal welfare label claim, AWI’s Pastureland Farms. That label didn’t gain traction in the marketplace, but the standards were a natural fit for the newly founded Niman Ranch pork program. Diane’s sister Marlene Halverson, who had studied the economics of European welfare-friendly farming systems, introduced Niman Ranch farmers to their European

Photos L-R: Phyllis and Paul Willis, Temple Grandin (Photo: Rosalie Winard), Diane Halverson (Photo: Frédéric Moreau de Bellaing), Marlene Halverson

“You’ve got to have clear guidelines. You can’t just say handle cattle properly or handle pigs properly. What does that mean? What’s proper handling? It has to be clear.” –Temple Grandin

Continued from page 23

counterparts to share best practices. “Together with Paul Willis, Diane and Marlene further refined the pork standards for Niman Ranch as well as AWI’s standards for beef and dairy cattle as well as poultry.”

In addition to working with AWI, both sisters have been activists for family farms and international humane livestock standards, advising entities as diverse as the World Bank, the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), universities, farm organizations and food retailers. No longer with AWI, they’re working on a documentary film. “We really want to look at how using, understanding, and applying the science of animal welfare will bring about change in the lives of animals, and the impact of animal agriculture on the climate, on biodiversity, on human health, on local environments, and food sovereignty,” said Diane Halverson. “Basically, it’s about treating the animal as an ecological being as opposed to an economic being,” added Marlene. The movie is currently in post-production with no release date yet set.

Dr. Temple Grandin is another changemaker who has worked with Niman Ranch to develop clear guidelines. “You’ve got to have clear guidelines,” she said. “You can’t just say handle cattle properly or handle pigs properly. What does that mean? What’s proper handling? It has to be clear.”


When Grandin was young, her undiagnosed autism created problems in school and with her social relationships, but when, as a teenager, she visited her aunt’s Arizona ranch, she discovered an affinity for cattle. “Some of the very first work I did, I looked at what cattle were looking at, and noticed they would stop and balk at a shadow or vehicle or chain hanging down, or some of the other little things other people tend to not notice,” she said. “I’m an extreme visual thinker. And I thought everybody thought that way.”

Her understanding of what the cattle were seeing and reacting to and her ability to visualize led her to design less stressful slaughter plants in the 1970s and '80s. “I thought if I could build the perfect handling facility, people would treat the cattle right. Well, that wasn’t the case. They also had to learn cattle handling.”

And they had to learn to work with a strong, brilliant woman. “The biggest barrier I had in the '70s wasn’t autism; it was being a woman. That was the biggest barrier, way bigger than autism ever was. I had to be twice as good as a guy,” she said.

Grandin persevered, and today, she’s a sought-after expert, known and respected for her work in processing plant design, animal handling and the development of humane standards. While she’s worked with organizations large and small, including Niman Ranch, she feels she’s had a great impact on the industry through her work with buyers like McDonald’s, Wendy’s and other large corporations that, reacting to consumer interest in the health and well-being of animals, require animal welfare standards from their suppliers. “When buyers demand improvements, things happen,” she said.

Grandin believes the pandemic has shown how broken our food system is. Working on a bigger scale may be more efficient and economical, but when a crisis happens, the system is prone to break. “A concentrated supply chain, when it works, is very economical, but very fragile,” she said. “If you have a distributed supply chain, it’s much more robust because you break one node on that supply chain, you still have other supply, but it will be more expensive. That’s the paradox.”

Grandin sees the rising interest in small slaughter plants and family farms to be a positive development. “I’ve done a lot of thinking about the future of meat. And I think the grazing animal is always going to have a place because there’s all this land in the world where the only way we can raise food on it is by grazing animals. And you have good family ranchers out there who are good stewards of the land. That’s something we need to keep doing.” 



MARILYN NOBLE

Award-winning, independent food and agriculture journalist

ANIMAL CARE STANDARDS

AT NIMAN RANCH WE ARE PROUDLY A NO ANTIBIOTICS *EVER* COMPANY

The more antibiotics are used by both people and animals, the more likely bacteria can build up resistance, putting these precious resources in jeopardy. Nearly 3 million Americans get sick each year with an antibiotic-resistant infection. That’s why it’s up to all of us to only use antibiotics when absolutely necessary.

For Niman Ranch, our approach eliminates the need for routine antibiotic use. By focusing on building a healthy, low stress environment for the animals with plenty of room to roam and exhibit natural behaviors, Niman Ranch livestock stay healthy and don’t need antibiotics. Additionally, by having lower numbers of animals with more space, the pigs, cattle and sheep are less likely to spread illness among each other than if confined in close quarters. By giving our livestock a better quality of life, they have a better immune system to support health, which means no need for antibiotics.

Should an animal get sick despite the extra care and steps outlined above, the animal will be treated by a veterinarian, given antibiotics if prescribed and sold to an alternate market. Niman Ranch never buys animals treated with antibiotics.

3 WAYS YOU CAN HELP FIGHT ANTIBIOTIC-RESISTANT SUPERBUGS

By Dr. Lance Price

1. Vote With Your Wallet

I can't stress enough how impactful consumer demand is for changing antibiotic use practices in meat production. Support brands like Niman Ranch that have clear policies to not use antibiotics. Look for labels that read "raised without antibiotics," "no antibiotics ever" or "organic."

2. Support Policy Change

That said, we can't eat or buy our way out of this mess. We need robust government policies in place that require antibiotics to be used responsibly in people and animals. Policy change to save antibiotics can (and must) happen locally, on the state level and federally.

3. Only Use Antibiotics When Needed

Never demand an antibiotic from your doctor. If a medical provider prescribes antibiotics, always complete the full course. Remember, antibiotics are only effective at curing bacterial infections. The drugs are powerless against cold and flu.



DR. LANCE PRICE
Founding Director, George Washington University's Antibiotic Resistance Action Center

ANTIBIOTICS BY THE NUMBERS

0 LBS.

of antibiotics used in Niman Ranch livestock.

80%

of antibiotics sold in the U.S. are used for livestock production.

9%

increase in antibiotic sales for U.S. pig production in 2019.

5.5M LBS.

of antibiotics were used in 2019 for cattle production in the U.S.

5.6M LBS.

of antibiotics were used in 2019 for hog production in the U.S.

8 TONS

of antibiotics were avoided in 2019 because of Niman Ranch's Never Ever policy.

3 TO 6 X

U.S. pork and beef producers use antibiotics at a rate approximately 3 to 6 times higher, on a weight-adjusted basis, than their counterparts in France, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Denmark.

COMMUNITY IMPACT

Niman Ranch Restaurant Relief Fund & Product Donations

The economic impact of the COVID-19 virus was felt across the world. The pandemic drove record rates of food insecurity and unemployment and forced many small and independent restaurants to close. Niman Ranch always seeks to do our best to support our community, so when this crisis struck, we knew we had to step up.

\$80,000

distributed to restaurants across the country through Niman Ranch's Restaurant Relief Fund

80,000+

meals donated to essential workers and food insecure families

17,000+

pounds of meat donated to the Pine Ridge Reservation

CHEF ADRIAN LIPSCOMBE: 40 Acres & a Mule



Chef Adrian Lipscombe of LaCrosse, Wis. is the founder of the 40 Acres & A Mule Project, an initiative that aims to support Black farmers and preserve Black culinary traditions. Chef Adrian is currently raising funds for her 40 Acres & A Mule Project to purchase farmland in the Midwest to serve as an incubator and accelerator for Black farmers. Niman Ranch is proud to support this effort.

What inspired you to launch the 40 Acres & A Mule Project?

AL: I saw a need for diversity in farming. As a chef working in farm to table, I saw firsthand that there was a dire need to both protect the history and legacy of Black farmers and also create successful Black farmers today.

Living in the Midwest, there's a real lack of minority and Black farmers. According to the census, only 65 people identify as Black farmers in the state of Wisconsin. There are none in my county.

In 1920, the number of Black farmers peaked at nearly 1 million. Today, that number has shrunk to 45,508, just 1.3 percent of all farmers in the U.S. What are the primary factors that caused this decline?

AL: It was a combination of segregation, racism, lack of government resources and violence against Black farmers and people. We lost generations of farmers because of this. A lot of people migrated north to escape racism and find new opportunities—as far north as Canada. Even up here in Wisconsin, successful Black farmers eventually got pushed out.

What advice would you give to an aspiring BIPOC (Black Indigenous Person of Color) entrepreneur who wants to have a career in the food or agriculture sector?

AL: Find BIPOC mentors working in the field that you're interested in to seeing their lived experiences. You can learn from them and avoid the hurdles and pitfalls that those mentors experienced. Also, I would recommend diving into the history of the field you're interested in joining so you can have a real understanding.

For me personally, I have several mentors. In agriculture, I've learned a lot from my family—it's in my roots with my great-grandfather owning farmland. I've also found both BIPOC and white farmers to learn from.

Who is your food or farming hero?

AL: There are so many people that I look up to. Fannie Lou Hamer is one of them—she did amazing things within food and agriculture. Fannie Lou Hamer was both a civil rights activist and advocate for changing the field for Black farmers. Toward the end of her career, she developed the Freedom Farm Cooperative (FFC) in Mississippi that created a new economic model for Black farmers and entrepreneurship in agriculture.

Scan here to watch a video tutorial from Chef Lipscombe on how to cure your own bacon!



Niman Ranch's Outsized Impact on Local Economies Confirmed

By Katherine Miller

Since the beginning, Niman Ranch has set out to be a different kind of company—one focused on holistically boosting the family farms in its network, the animals they raise and the environment in which they produce them. In a head-to-head analysis with conventional producers, Niman Ranch's values-driven approach to business was found to be a boon for local farming communities, producing a higher number of jobs and positively contributing to the regional economy in Iowa.

The study, conducted by Dave Swenson, an economist at Iowa State University, quantifies for the first time Niman Ranch's significant contributions to the Iowa economy in jobs and labor income. The report found that Niman Ranch's contributions are nearly double those of conventional producers.

"We focus on the triple-bottom-line," said Chris Oliviero, general manager of Niman Ranch, referencing the business concept that places equal value on people, planet and profits. "This study reinforces that as we make more commitments to increasing our positive environmental impacts, we don't have to compromise on our support for family farmers and their communities," Oliviero continued.

Overall, Iowa's 195 Niman Ranch farms created 339 jobs statewide. For every 100,000 hogs produced, Niman Ranch produces 152 percent more jobs across the state than its conventional counterparts.

These workers, in turn, contribute millions to the Iowa economy through taxes and household purchases. Niman farmers and their employees are also participating in every aspect of Iowa life.

"Regional economies are built on local economies. Local economies are built around needs and people," said Ron Mardesen, an Iowa farmer who has sold pigs to Niman Ranch for nearly 20 years.

"Smaller independent family farmers need a place to buy gas, we need a place to buy groceries, we need a place to buy feed, we need a veterinarian, we need a school for our children, we need a place to worship," he continued.

The farms were responsible for \$48.8 million in total output and \$20.77 million in value-added spending, of which \$12.17 million were labor income.

"Niman farms depend on having more people working on them, and that is a selling point. More people working locally helps create stronger linkages to the local and regional economy," said Swenson.

Local Job Creation Has a Main Street Effect

Niman producers also lead the way with higher industry average wages and individual profits from hog production.

"This is the Main Street effect," according to Swenson. "The small farmers in Niman's network hire more people, spend more regionally and their employees also spend their money closer to home."

The study showed that for every \$1 million in direct sales, Niman farms produce 14 jobs and generate an additional \$1.03 million in other economic outputs, including labor income and value-added spending.

"We can't reverse the decline in rural economies ourselves, but our farmers are making a real difference in Iowa," shared Oliviero. "Our support helps them stay in their communities and grow. When they grow, our farmers and everyone they buy from, and those they employ, contribute to their home economies. This makes our towns, communities and businesses stronger and more stable," he continued.

NIMAN RANCH IOWA HOG PRODUCTION ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTION, 2019

NIMAN FARMS MAKE CONTRIBUTIONS THAT GO BEYOND JUST PURCHASES, TRANSACTIONS AND DOLLARS. THEY ARE PART OF STRONG, VIBRANT COMMUNITIES AND ARE HELPING BUILD THE NEXT GENERATION OF FARMERS.

	JOB	LABOR INCOME	VALUE ADDED	OUTPUT
Direct	240.9	\$ 7,005,267	\$11,567,699	\$24,049,679
Indirect	47.0	\$ 2,988,725	\$ 5,124,272	\$17,453,705
Induced	51.3	\$ 2,179,207	\$ 4,082,488	\$ 7,297,277
Total	339.3	\$12,173,199	\$20,774,460	\$48,800,661

Niman farms make contributions that go beyond just purchases, transactions and dollars. They are part of strong, vibrant communities and are helping build the next generation of farmers.

"Pride of ownership and pride of earner-ship are both byproducts of a Niman Ranch farm," said Mardesen. "Many Niman Ranch farms are multigenerational farms. Many rely on part-time help. On my farm, for example, over the years I have hired over 20 young people to help part-time on the farm. Watching these young people leave here and go on to establish successful businesses of their own is a gift I am truly proud of."

Significant Positive Contribution to Iowa Economy

When comparing the two approaches—conventional and Niman Ranch—to hog production in Iowa, Swenson looked at the outputs generated per 100,000 marketed animals. The data clearly show that Niman Ranch's economic contributions per 100,000 hogs are significantly higher than of conventional producers.

"This study shows the multiplier effect. If we can keep farmers in business, then they will keep contributing to the economy," said Oliviero.

According to the study, conventional producers hired nearly 115 workers and generated almost \$36 million in hog value, worker income and other expenditures in Iowa per 100,000 hogs. In direct comparison, Niman Ranch's economic contributions are significantly higher. Niman Ranch producers hired 290 workers and generated almost \$60 million from hog sales, related expenses and worker incomes.

"Local economies would prosper if more adopted Niman Ranch's approach, instead of conventional production," said Swenson. "The more hogs Niman produces, the better the results for the regional economy."


The Market Supports Niman's Approach

Niman Ranch farmers, a network of more than 750 small- and mid-sized independent U.S. family farmers and ranchers nationally, uphold high sustainable and humane farming standards, with higher costs of production than conventionally raised animals.

It's clear, however, that Niman farmers receive more for their animals than conventional producers: Niman Ranch's average price per hog in 2019 was 44 percent higher than conventional producers'. The study, which looked at Iowa farmers, shows that the market will support these prices and contribute to local economies.

"Our farmers are guaranteed a premium payment for their hogs, and that helps them create more stable businesses," said Oliviero. "If their businesses are stable, they can make the necessary investments in regenerative methods and adding more employees."

It is also clear that Niman Ranch's rigor and holistic approach provides benefits for farmers, their businesses and the local community, which help everyone build for the future.

"By 2021 standards my farm is small. I cannot generate the volume large enough to keep up with the big boys. I can, however, concentrate on quality," said Mardesen. "The premium Niman Ranch pays me allows me to manage my farm in a positive, productive way. Niman Ranch gives me the chance to plan for the future of the farm, instead of worrying about there being a future for the farm." 



KATHERINE MILLER
Principal of Table 81 LLC

Supporting Diversity, Equity & Inclusion in Food and Farming

At Niman Ranch, we use our resources, network and platform to support diversity in the food and agriculture sectors. We acknowledge the history of segregation, discrimination and racism that continues today. We commit to supporting diversity, equity and inclusion in our financial support, partnership, education, mentorship, communications and other work.

Event Spotlight: SheCuts Meat Camp

Niman Ranch and SheChef Inc. partnered on a virtual butchery and cooking demonstration to provide skills training and mentorship to the next generation of culinary leaders. Established in 2013, SheChef Inc. is a professional and educational organization for women-identified chefs of color & allies. Their purpose is to bridge the gap of equity and diversity in the food and beverage, media and hospitality industries. SheChef provides mentoring, guidance and consultancy to those who aspire to be exceptional within the culinary industry.



Partner Spotlight: National Young Farmers Coalition

Niman Ranch was proud to support the National Young Farmers Coalition's Farmer Citizen Food Policy Certificate Program. Organized by Arizona State University's Swette Center for Sustainable Food Systems and the National Young Farmers Coalition, this 10-hour course offered training and education on food systems and being an effective voice for change. The program was a majority BIPOC (Black Indigenous People of Color) farmer space aiming to achieve equity and dismantle injustice in the food system.

FARMER SUPPORT

Niman Ranch's Relationship with Farmers and Ranchers

Not only do we know the names of each and every one of our farmers and ranchers, we also know the names of their spouse, kids and often even the family farm dog or cat! The direct relationships we share with the farmers and ranchers who supply Niman Ranch is almost unheard of in the meat sector.

Most meat brands buy specific cuts from middlemen or brokers who, in turn, buy livestock from the farmers. At Niman Ranch, we buy the whole animal, not just specific cuts, paying a premium recognize the extra care the farmers put into raising their livestock. This commitment certainly adds complexity to our business, because we have to find customers for each cut rather than just the more popular parts of the animal. However, these approaches build authentic relationships and foster a shared commitment to quality meat and brand sustainability.

The Niman Ranch Field Agent

From the very beginnings of Niman Ranch, communication with the farmers has been key to the company's success. The role of the field agent was created to support and improve the communication between Niman Ranch and its farmers plus protect the integrity and quality of the Niman Ranch brand. Each field agent covers a specific geography, developing close working relationships with the farmers in their region.

A primary responsibility of a field agent is keeping track of pig numbers on the farms to ensure we have accurate supply quantities to communicate with our customers. In addition to tracking pig numbers, field agents help farmers with production challenges, herd health issues and ways to improve pork quality. The field agents also play the critical role of monitoring the farms to make sure they are following the Niman Ranch Protocols at all times, in addition to our third-party animal welfare certification requirements.

Niman Ranch employs more field agents than sales team members. The field agent program is unique in this industry and speaks to our company's farmer-focused model.

OUR DIRECT RELATIONSHIPS:

- 1. Premium farmer pay based on the price of inputs like corn and soy bean meal**
- 2. Commitment to purchase a specific number of animals annually, providing stability**
- 3. Field agent, veterinarian and mentors for support**
- 4. Whole animal purchase commitment**
- 5. Premiums awarded for meat quality**
- 6. Opportunities for scholarships, grants and cost share of conservation practices**

FARMERS HELPING FARMERS

The Many Benefits of Mentoring

By Tracey Ryder

The unmistakable benefits of a mentor program can be profound, and when that program involves Niman Ranch farmers, it goes beyond the ordinary. For Niman Ranch Pork Co. founder, Paul Willis, starting a mentoring program was an intuitive, natural step to take. “I wanted to pass along traditional practices for pasture and deep bedding raising of pigs,” he said. “I always thought mentoring was a good idea, but it really became a reality back in 2010.”

Willis continued, “The Niman system allows a pig to exhibit their natural behavior. It takes into consideration things like: which direction should your housing face in a pasture, how do you set up electric fencing that works, where do your feeders and waters go, what is the age range of pigs in a group, what age do you process pigs, and how you catch a pig when you need to. All are examples of things we think about that are likely not taught in ag schools.” This is all the more true today, when ag schools almost exclusively teach conventional, intensive livestock production practices.

Today, Niman Ranch has an active mentorship program with each new hog farmer matched with a more seasoned producer from their area who stepped up as a volunteer to provide guidance and support.

Also consider that mentors can learn from the team members they’re helping to guide, so it really is a mutually beneficial relation-

ship. Fourth generation Iowa farmer, Judy Mowry, knows both sides of the mentoring spectrum well. “I went to a meeting hosted by the Iowa State Extension office with Paul Willis as the speaker. He was trying to inform and recruit pig farmers for Niman Ranch. I saw this as an opportunity to use my existing facilities and remain an independent farmer. Niman’s protocols were almost the same ones I was already practicing so it was an easy and smooth adjustment to make. Niman promotes the sense of family with picnics, dinners and meetings. Helping each other with the mentor program is like sharing ideas and information with our partners.”

Mowry and her husband are now experiencing another side of mentoring by providing an opportunity for the next generation. “We retired in 2016 and moved to Decorah, Iowa to be close to our daughter, son-in-law and two grandchildren. Our farmland is in a family trust and is now rented to a young man who used to be our ‘chore boy,’ but now farms it himself. He recently married and had a baby boy who hopefully will be another young farmer!”

Niman Ranch farmer and mentor volunteer, Chris Scheer, sees the mentoring program as a valuable tool in the Niman organization now that there is an organized group of both farrow-to-finish and wean-to-finish farmers mentoring those new to the Niman program. “Raising

hogs has been a way of life for generations on farms, but our mentor program helps those new to our system with information and experience needed to get through a tough time or decision-making process as quickly as possible for the best results,” Scheer said. “We’ve all been in that stage of being a young, struggling farmer, and it’s nice to have help just a phone call away. Helping young people get started in farming and in Niman’s process is what drew me to participate as a mentor.”

For Scheer, seeing young people come into farming with the deep level of support offered by Niman Ranch is what he loves most. “This is a sustainable way to raise hogs with success for generations to come, which is a comforting feeling to a small family farmer. The more family farmers that are out there on the land—our farms, communities, local businesses and neighbors all benefit from them being there. I’d rather see ten young farmers with families operating 240 acres and raising livestock, than have one person controlling 2,400 acres themselves. It’s better for everyone around them, and it keeps our small communities vibrant and growing.”

Mentoring programs, by nature, encourage a healthy amount of support and collaboration, but an effective mentorship experience can yield other benefits as well. Paul Willis sums it up in the simplest and directest way possible: “Watching the behavior of pigs is time well spent.”

Four Generations of Mentorship.



Paul Willis: Niman Ranch founding hog farmer



Marlin and Judy Mowry:
Joined Niman Ranch in 2011



Chris and Joan Scheer:
Joined Niman Ranch in 2012



Trent Banes: Joined Niman Ranch in 2020

NEXT GENERATION FOUNDATION

NIMAN RANCH

From its humble beginnings in 2006 with four scholarships awarded in memory of farmer Dave Serfling (learn more about Dave on page 10), the Niman Ranch Next Generation Foundation today has awarded 324 scholarships to sustainability driven young farmers and future leaders.



NIMAN RANCH SCHOLARSHIP DISTRIBUTIONS

\$2,600

2006
4 Scholarships granted

\$1,400

2007
7 Scholarships granted

\$13,400

2008
15 Scholarships granted

\$26,000

2009
12 Scholarships granted

\$28,000

2010
13 Scholarships granted

\$29,000

2011
16 Scholarships granted

\$36,000

2012
18 Scholarships granted

\$37,000

2013
23 Scholarships granted

\$43,500

2014
16 Scholarships granted

\$50,000

2015
26 Scholarships granted

\$76,600

2016
23 Scholarships granted

\$106,000

2017
32 Scholarships granted

\$118,000

2018
32 Scholarships granted

\$144,500

2019
39 Scholarships granted

\$169,400

2020
48 Scholarships granted



Photo courtesy of Derek Brown

FARMER SPOTLIGHT: DEREK BROWN OF ALDERLAND FAMILY FARMS

2010 Next Generation Scholarship Recipient

Where are you now?

I have been working full-time at our family farm, Alderland Family Farms in central Iowa, since November of 2017. I manage most aspects of our Niman Ranch farrow-to-finish (birth-to-market) hog operation, while helping with field work and other farm duties. My wife and I also own a small beef cow herd. Off the farm, we are members of the county pork producers, co-coordinate the hog show at our county fair and serve our church.

How did the Niman Ranch Next Generation Foundation Scholarship help you achieve your goals?

I attended Iowa State University to pursue a degree in agriculture because I knew I wanted to farm and be involved in the livestock industry. With the generous scholarship I received from Niman Ranch, I was able to pay for college more quickly, which then allowed me to invest more resources toward growing my cow herd and in the family farm. Additionally, the financial assistance from the scholarship allowed me to be involved in more activities during college, such as being a member of the livestock judging team and holding various positions in the Block and Bridle Club, a student led animal science organization. These opportunities broadened my network of contacts within the livestock industry, which will be useful for years to come.

How did growing up on a Niman Ranch family farm shape your future?

Helping on the family farm fostered many character traits essential to life and farming. Some of these include responsibility, work ethic, time management, planning and communication. I use several of these traits every day, whether it's managing our sow herd or leading my family. I can't overstate how much farm life set me up for success in school, jobs, farming and guiding a family.

I feel very fortunate to have grown up on a family farm that raised pigs in an alternative manner, the Niman Ranch way. Learning about niche production strategies on our farm allowed me to gain a wider view of how to raise livestock. Typically, there are many different ways to do things in farming, especially when it comes to raising pigs. Thankfully, I was able to grow my understanding of hog production and learn some of these differences through my time at college and jobs that I had away from the home farm. Ultimately, this allowed me to evaluate different methods of raising hogs and determine which best fit my farming and family goals.

Growing up on a family farm has been invaluable in preparing me for whatever lies ahead, from challenges that face the agricultural sector to issues that relate to managing a productive Niman Ranch hog farm.

One Generation to the Next: Hamilton Brothers Farm and Family Ranching



Photo: Richard Hamilton

For Richard Hamilton and family, farming and ranching in Northern California's Sacramento Valley is a multigenerational operation. In 1867, Hamilton's great-grandfather established the Hamilton Brothers Farm—now over 150 years later, the farm is still a testament to that legacy. "My uncle Dave Hamilton is third generation. I am fourth generation and my kids are fifth generation," explained Hamilton.

Hamilton Brothers Farm is a diversified operation in Rio Vista, Solano County, featuring sheep, lamb and cattle, along with dryland farming that produces grains like wheat and barley. Each generation in the Hamilton family finds its own unique way to contribute to the farm and ranch.

Through the years, Hamilton Brothers Farm has been able to maintain its multigenerational business by working with Niman Ranch. The partnership began in 1996 when the Hamiltons shifted from selling to traditional lamb markets, to joining the company's network of small independent family farmers. "Niman Ranch is one of the main reasons we are still in the sheep business. They appreciate the quality of lambs we supply and [they appreciate] what we have to do to raise sheep in a very demanding market environment that can hinder our ability to be sustainable," said Hamilton.

Collaboration and a respect for resources are fundamental guiding principles of the Hamiltons' sustainable business. From the ranchers and the livestock to the surrounding habitat and

greater Solano community, Hamilton believes that all parts of the system need to work together to succeed. Grazing patterns of the farm's sheep and lambs demonstrate this.

Sheep feed on rotating crop residue—thus facilitating weed control—as well as providing nutrients to enrich alfalfa fields. They also feed on some of the most sensitive grassland areas left in the Sacramento Valley of California. "We work with the Solano Land Trust, UC Davis, and The Nature Conservancy in using sheep in the restoration of native grasses and plants and managing the vernal pool habitat within the Jepson Prairie of the Sacramento Valley," said Hamilton.

Much like his father before him, Hamilton encourages future young farmers to explore the industry and to be continuously open to progressive learning. His most important suggestion for farming sustainably is "being a student of what you are doing." But Hamilton also recommends that future young farmers anticipate, adapt to and acknowledge the inevitable challenges of the industry. "We have to educate the community to the role of agriculture in being a land steward to the open space that surrounds Rio Vista and the other communities of Solano County," said Hamilton. "We also have to educate the community about the role agriculture plays to economies and why our existence is important to the future of our area."

Originally published by Food Tank



Photo courtesy of Darby Knoll

ADVOCATING FOR FAMILY FARMERS

“Spend Just One Day With Me on the Farm.”

Darby Knoll grew up showing her family’s cattle each year at the South Dakota State Fair. She relished the opportunity to talk with visitors from all over about Knoll Family Farm’s humane and sustainable practices. As she got older and learned more about the challenges facing fellow family farmers, she became sure that she wanted to pursue a career in agriculture.

“Each year, we would hear family farmers saying, ‘It’s not working, and we’re going to sell,’ said Knoll. “It was heartbreaking. That’s when I decided that I wanted to get more involved in agriculture and be an advocate, be a voice to say things need to change.”

The Knoll family focuses on “reduce, reuse, recycle,” Knoll said. They raise their own feed and bedding by growing alfalfa, corn, soybeans, milo and rye, and rotating crops. Their land is fertilized with the cattle’s manure, and they’re also thinking of ways to better use water resources by collecting rainwater.

Nearly all of the Knolls’ cattle are sold to Niman Ranch, a network of more than 750 small, independent U.S. family farmers and ranchers. Knoll described this decade-long partnership as the perfect fit. Knoll Family Farm was raising natural and hormone-free cattle already, so they didn’t need to modify to meet Niman Ranch’s high standards of sustainable and humane practices.

Niman Ranch provides niche markets to its farmers, which is “absolutely huge for family operations,” Knoll said. “It’s an eat-or-be-eaten world out there...You see family farms that have been around since my dad was a kid selling out, because the kids either don’t have the interest or they don’t think they’ll be able to make it.”

Knoll sees storytelling as key to pushing for change that will better support small farmers. For her part, she plans to take her farm experience and knowledge beyond her own community. “I like talking to the population that doesn’t know a thing about farming.”

When Knoll hears misconceptions about welfare and environmental issues related to animal farming, she said, “Spend just one day with me on the farm watching us care for our animals. The goal of a farmer is to leave the land better than we found it. Farmers have so much love, passion and care for their animals and land.”

She plans to pursue a career in agriculture finance while running the family farm with her brothers, Davie and Dillon. She said she isn’t worried about juggling the work. In fact, she looks forward to it.

“I still get excited when I get to go home on the weekend and pet my cows,” Knoll said with a big smile. “I love seeing a yard full of healthy cows that are all fat, happy and sassy.”

SPOTLIGHT: SUSTAINABLE FARMING PRACTICES



McCormack Ranch: Niman Ranch’s founding lamb farmers, Jeannie McCormack and Al Medvitz see their sheep program as a crucial sustainable practice on their diversified ranch. By integrating livestock into their crop rotation, they are using livestock to naturally aerate the soil and build soil health through nutrient rich manure. Healthy soil has been shown to sequester carbon, improve water quality and support biodiversity.

Scan here to learn more about McCormack Family Farm



Gilbert Family Farm: Recipients of the 2021 Niman Ranch Sustainable Farmer of the Year award, the Gilberts’ farm is situated on a plot of land that includes more than a mile of the Southfork, a tributary of the Iowa River. They have conserved 50 acres of woodland beside the tributary to protect water quality as well as develop a reconstructed shallow wetland and prairie marsh with many native plants and wildflowers that attract pollinators and support biodiversity.

Scan here to learn more about Gilbert Family Farm



Schmidt Family Farm: On the Schmidt Family Farm, their Niman Ranch hogs are a boon for soil health; hog manure naturally fertilizes the fields, which grow corn to feed the hogs, and the cycle repeats. They regularly test their soil and have seen significant improvement in recent years with higher crop yields thanks to the manure and bedding.

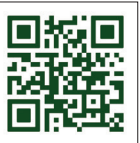
Scan here to learn more about Schmidt Family Farm



Photo: Vincent and Holly Crawford

Borrowman Family Farm: The Borrowman family is converting 52 tillable acres on their farm, Pastvina Acres, into pollinator habitat, 13 acres at a time. The new habitat is enrolled in the Conservation Stewardship Program for the next five years and then it will be used for cattle and hog pasture.

Scan here to learn more about Pastvina Acres





Raised with Care®



Our all-natural pork, beef, and lamb are raised sustainably and humanely by independent U.S. family farmers and ranchers to produce *The Finest Tasting Meat in the World*®.

- No Antibiotics or Added Hormones— Ever
- All Vegetarian Feeds
- Raised Outdoors or in Deeply Bedded Pens



    @nimanranch | nimanranch.com

See the Niman Ranch Difference

Scan here to receive a free Virtual Reality headset to tour a Niman Ranch farm

