



Emily Johnston, © Windshadow Farm & Dairy, LLC, used with permission.



Where Wild Animals Roam

Windshadow Farm & Dairy becomes Michigan's first Certified Wildlife Friendly farm

When farms come to mind, most people envision a place where roosters crow, where goats graze, where rows of vegetables and grain fields grow. Ron and Suzanne Klein also see tree frog habitats.

Ron and Suzanne own Windshadow Farm & Dairy, a Grade A goat dairy in Bangor, MI. The Kleins have about 175 goats on their 46-acre farm. The farm is verified by Animal Welfare Approved (AWA) and by the Michigan Agricultural Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP) for farmstead, cropping and livestock. Recently, Windshadow Farm became Michigan's first Certified Wildlife Friendly farm.

During their AWA certification process, the Kleins made it their mission to become Certified Wildlife Friendly as well. To be considered wildlife friendly, the Kleins went through an extensive series of interviews and site visits. They also kept a log of different species of wildlife they would see on their farm, a record meant to ensure that their land provides the environmental quality and sustainable habitat required to support a variety of wildlife.

"This wildlife certification put us at a higher level of awareness—actually quite a higher level of awareness—and

we were encouraged to improve a variety of habitats. These aren't trivial things," Ron said.

Windshadow Farm is a pasture-based dairy: The animals are frequently moved around the farm, providing them with the most vegetative and nutritious pastures. The Kleins control where the animals eat and what they eat—it allows them to pinpoint and protect areas where grassland birds will nest.

The farm has also created a rich wildlife habitat by regulating the flow of water drainage, slowing it down with a series of retention ponds. This has eliminated erosion and created ponds that serve as a chain of quality habitats for wildlife such as egrets, toads, tree frogs and insects. The ponds even became a stopping point for migrating wood ducks.

"Virtually every night we would have a flock of wood ducks, ranging from about 90 to 200, land in one small pond near our house," said Ron.

The Kleins are pleased with their certifications. Objective and rigorous third-party verifications are important in protecting farmers from those who are critical of farming, the Kleins say. The standards of AWA are the most

detailed and strictly enforced and assure to outsiders that the herd is healthy and well cared for. Certified Wildlife Friendly is equally rigorous and shows that farms can and do protect and promote wildlife. MAEAP assures that a farm is operating under state and federal standards that protect surface and ground water.

"Our ability to develop our pasture-based, eco-friendly farm shown by our verifications was made possible by our partnering with the skilled and dedicated people from the National Resources Conservation Service, local Soil Conservation District and MAEAP. There is a tremendous amount of knowledge, skill, experience and passion available to help farmers, and that passion was infectious," Ron said. "Third-party verifications provide a protective umbrella and a higher level of awareness and guidance."

However, there are other reasons the Kleins chose to become wildlife certified. Ron and Suzanne both possess a high respect for the environment.

"I very much believe," he said, "that farming cannot only coexist with wildlife, but can enhance the quality of the environment to promote wildlife. It's our belief that eco-friendly, sustainable and humane farms should be leading by example."

To find out more about Windshadow Farm & Dairy, or to explore their artisan cheeses produced at their partnering farm, Evergreen Lane Farm & Creamery, and sold under the Evergreen Lane Artisan Cheese label, visit evergreenlanefarm.com/windshadow-farm-dairy. 📍

—Maggie Weaver

Windshadow Farm & Dairy

24681 County Rd. 681

Bangor, MI 49013

269.599.0467

Windshadowfarm.com

Maggie Weaver is a Goshen College student, a food enthusiast and a past intern with Edible Michiana.