

Homesteading And Livestock

Maximizing Small Farm Profit: Homesteading Classes

On-farm classes can supplement your income without the need to peddle a product. Learn how to host a full day of in-person learning that'll leave participants happy and well-educated.

By Dominic Lamontagne



Look outside the box for small farm profit ideas by selling the service of homesteading classes. Here are some lesson planning tips for hosting a successful farm workshop.

My spouse, Amelie, and I have built up our homestead for the past decade. Slowly but surely, we've achieved a certain degree of autonomy. We haven't [bought eggs at the store](#) for many years, nor chicken, red meat, goat cheese, canned tomatoes, eggplants, potatoes, garlic, onions, carrots, or sweet corn. We also make our own soap, including laundry detergent; try to water our crops only with rainwater; don't use fertilizers or insecticides other than the ones we fabricate; and mill most of our own lumber to build amenities, such as goat shelters, decks, and chicken tractors.

While we continually strive for more autonomy, we also understood long ago that one element would never grow in our garden beds or on our trees: money. Though it would be easy to sell a portion of what we produce, we much prefer enjoying the fruits of our labor over selling them for what appears to be unreasonable prices, considering all the hard work that goes into sustainable agriculture.



Selling a service or a value-added product can be much more profitable than selling a raw good. I often encourage farmers, young and old, to consider this when trying to make ends meet. But while selling ready-to-eat food might be more profitable than selling produce, it remains more time-consuming than, let's say, a paid consultation. Billing for a consultation isn't everyone's cup of tea, however. It isn't mine. So, in the interest of small farm profit generation, we opted for one-day homesteading classes comprising a thorough guided tour of our property; a hearty farm-to-table lunch; and demonstrations of chicken processing, goat milking, and soap- and cheese-making. The day ends with an open Q&A session where people are invited to ask questions pertaining to their own personal projects.

Small Farm Profit Generation

We've offered these homesteading classes since 2017 at the rate of 8 to 10 full-day events per year, usually in August. We limit participation to eight people per day and charge \$100 (CAD) per person, plus tax (about \$90 USD total), which must be paid in full at the time of booking. We don't allow children to tag along for free anymore, unless they're babies. Our daylong workshops don't appeal to most children and preteens, so the few times we allowed children, parents spent the day running after their kids, hampering their own learning experience and that of the other participants. We also don't allow pets.



We don't accept "blind" reservations through automated online booking services. People must contact us by phone or email to make a reservation and pay for the workshop. This means we talk to everybody at least once before they enroll. A couple of days prior to their visit, we send an email reminder detailing how and when to get to our farm, what to bring, and the day's schedule. We also ask people to inform us of any food allergies or intolerances they have.

All of this limits the unpleasant surprises that can arise at the event, such as people not showing up; bringing their children or pets; forgetting proper apparel; not enjoying their meal; or, most detrimentally, not understanding what they're getting themselves into.

Homesteading Classes: Full-Day Schedule

Workshop time and commitment varies depending on what you're offering, but we provide a full day of activities encompassing various parts of our farm.

6:30 a.m. We wake up and Amelie bakes dessert and three loaves of homemade sourdough bread that have been rising in the fridge overnight. We slice and serve one and a half loaves to our guests, and the rest constitutes our daily bread. Whenever we can, we try to get things done for both ourselves and the workshops. It helps us get through the “workshop month” without being too overwhelmed or exhausted. The same principle applies to the chickens we slaughter during workshops, as well as the milk we process and the soap we make.



9:30 to 10 a.m. We ask that people arrive around 9:30 so we can start promptly at 10. We live 90 minutes from Montréal, but people come from all over the province to attend. Most make the drive the same day, hence the importance of not starting too early. Amelie, myself, and our trusty farm dogs (on leashes) greet participants at the eight-car parking spot along our driveway entrance that we cleared especially for this purpose.

Upon arrival, we direct people to the washroom in the outbuilding nearby. Set on a 10-by-10-foot wooden deck, it features an outhouse fitted with a rudimentary composting toilet consisting of a simple bucket with a snap-on toilet seat, toilet paper, a trash can, and a bucket full of sawdust. We've included a laminated instruction sheet that explains how to use the toilet. Next to the outhouse sit two free-standing utility sinks hooked up to our house's potable-water outlet using an RV-style drinking-water hose, as well as liquid soap and paper towels under a pop-up canopy. (A guest bathroom like this is important if, as I recommend, you don't want people in your house.) The outhouse also doubles as a changing room, and the potable-water hookup allows people to fill their water bottles during the day.

10 to 10:30 a.m. We move to the goat shed and milking parlor, where Amelie talks about proper [goat care](#), demonstrates sanitary goat-milking techniques, and helps participants try their hand at it, which is always a big hit. While she teaches, I greet latecomers or help out where needed.



10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Amelie takes the milk pail to the house and prepares lunch while I begin the guided tour. First, I talk about the goat shed's design, then our garden beds where we grow corn, carrots, potatoes, garlic, onions, and asparagus. Next, we're off to the garage, where our 100-chick brooder resides. On hot days, this gives everyone a little respite from the heat. Then, it's off to the pasture, where I talk about the many virtues of perennial grasses and demonstrate daily maintenance of our chicken tractors, such as moving them around and giving the birds food and water. Next stop is the laying hens, raised inside a mobile poultry net. Of course, questions abound, and I happily answer all of them.

At this point, it's close to noon and we're near the final part of the tour: our 1,000-square-foot greenhouse. I've installed a few wooden benches under trees in that area, and many participants appreciate the opportunity to sit while I launch into a rather lengthy description of the greenhouse's construction, including its custom radiant in-earth heating system and automated drip-irrigation setup connected to two 1,000-liter totes. I also explain how we winter our laying hens inside the greenhouse from Nov. 1 to April 1, and how I prepare the soil for summer production once the birds are back on pasture. We then go inside the greenhouse, where kale, bell and hot peppers, tomatoes, eggplants, and cucumbers grow spectacularly well. Finally, it's off to lunch.

12:30 to 1:30 p.m. While Amelie entertains our guests and serves a terrific meal, I'm off to the chicken-processing post to turn on the scalding water and prepare everything for the afternoon's demonstration. Then, it's back to the house, where I catch my breath for about a half-hour and have a bite to eat.



Rain or shine, participants sit on our *terrasse*, inside a 10-by-20-foot wedding-style outdoor canopy tent with side walls. The tent sits beside our kitchen, making it quick and easy to serve our guests. The sit-down lunch has three main courses: a lovage or carrot soup made with our own chicken broth, potatoes, and store-bought cream, crowned with a kale chip; and a mixed plate comprising a leafy green salad with tomatoes, cucumbers, bell peppers, and maple-garlic vinaigrette, with roasted baby potatoes, oven-crisped eggplant slices, chicken liver mousse with honeysuckle jam, a scoopful of egg salad, and a thick slice of our fresh country bread. For dessert, we serve a *canelé de Bordeaux*, a wonderful French pastry made with our eggs, goat's milk, and beeswax, and cooked individually in traditional striated copper molds. Still and sparkling water accompany the meal. For most participants, lunch is a highlight of the day.

1:30 to 3:30 p.m. We split the group in two for the afternoon. Half the participants walk with me to the chicken-processing post while the other half follow Amelie to our government-inspected commercial kitchen.

Amelie describes our installations and the specialized equipment we use to process food, including a freeze dryer, pressure canners, and can seamers. She then demonstrates how to make a basic fresh [goat cheese](#), starting with filtering the milk that was collected that morning. Meanwhile, I'm [processing chickens](#).



After choosing two broilers from our chicken tractors, I demonstrate turning live poultry into oven-ready birds. The first one I do slowly, explaining every step. The second one I do quickly so people see how fast it can be done once you get the hang of it. Then, Amelie and I switch groups.

3:30 to 4 p.m. Everybody meets back under the lunch canopy, where Amelie gives the final demonstration: soap-making. Meanwhile, I clean the processing post, bring the chickens and giblets to the house, rinse them off one last time, and put them in the fridge. Some of these birds we eat fresh, and others we freeze for later.

4 p.m. The final Q&A session lasts about 30 minutes. While I answer questions, Amelie tends our small farm shop set in our commercial kitchen, where we offer fresh eggs, goat's milk soap, some canned products, a dozen or so canelés, and the books I've written. In Québec, we aren't yet able to sell homemade dairy products and farm-slaughtered meat, but things are moving quickly in that direction!

Before they leave, we tell participants that our homesteading classes come with one year of free technical support. Most don't take us up on the offer, but a few have over the years, mostly to ask where we bought our equipment and what brand it is.

Beyond Profitability



We offer these homesteading classes primarily because we believe encouraging people to be more autonomous helps bring about the kind of society we wish to live in. The most common questions we get revolve around time and energy expenditure: "Isn't all this a lot of work?" "Don't you get tired of all of this sometimes?" "Don't you feel trapped at home?" "Do you have any free time?" I respond by saying that every person's existence comes with a significant burden that most of us choose not to see or acknowledge. But a homestead lifestyle means that we've chosen to actively engage with the burden of our existence. What people might consider "useless" time-consuming chores represent the true amount of work that goes into keeping humans alive and healthy, both physically and mentally. As I often say: "Our actions here feed our bodies and our soul, and this is what makes the most sense to us right now." Investing in something as meaningful as keeping ourselves sheltered, clothed, and fed should be a common priority, and a skill set that more people possess.

Lessons We've Learned from Teaching Homesteading Classes

In the five years we've hosted workshops, we've learned a few things that help our days run smoothly and keep our guests happy with the experience.

Summer is the busiest time of year on a homestead. Here in northern Québec, late July to late August is when our farm is at its best. Our goats are full of milk, our hens lay abundantly, our birds are ready for slaughter, and our produce is ripe and plentiful — making it the ideal time to host workshops. However, organizing farm tours is a balancing act. Proper planning is key. It's unrealistic to think you can do more than 8 to 10 workshops a month.

We've found that keeping two days open between each workshop is a must. The first day we try to rest a little, and the next we do all the prep required for the coming event. If you're doing seasonal workshops, as we do, plan a five-day break somewhere in the middle of your workshop schedule.

We announce workshop dates every year around the end of January on our website [En Pleine Guele](#), Facebook page, and mailing list. We also send out a press release then, and again in May. The first year, we booked only half our dates. The second year, we booked all of them within a couple of months. Since then, thanks to word of mouth and a growing number of online followers, we're sold out within a couple of weeks. While weekend dates sell out first, limiting ourselves to those would prove much too constraining.



Eight participants is the perfect amount to show around a small homestead, feed a decent meal in 60 minutes, and interact with on a personal level. Four participants is ideal for the chicken-processing and cheese-making demonstrations.

Nobody has ever complained about the price. Quite the contrary. Other workshops in a comparable price range often don't include a meal, don't offer the amount and diversity of practical advice we give, are half as long, and allow for much larger groups (20 to 30 people). People love the intimate feel of our workshops and tell us so often.

We ask to be paid in full at the time of booking and explain that all sales are final. People who can't attend can get a 75% refund if they give us two weeks' notice, pick another available date, or postpone until next year. They can also transfer their spot to somebody else, but they have to tell us in advance so we can contact that person as we do everyone else.



Surprisingly, we've found that people don't care much for hands-on activities, save the [goat milking](#). When we first started, we had people process their own chickens, but many preferred to just watch me do it. Often, people want to get a feel for the amount and diversity of work involved in a homestead before taking the plunge themselves; they don't necessarily want to roll up their sleeves and get dirty.

In conclusion, don't underestimate the energy involved in giving these workshops, and don't plan other major activities during your workshop times. Don't organize more than a few the first time, and make sure people understand you're not offering a petting zoo or a leisurely walk in the park. Consider investing in liability insurance, and post clear signage around your property. Amelie and I are 46 years old. I believe we can keep this up for another decade, probably two.

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