

BEGINNING FARMER CASE STUDY: LAND ISN'T PROMISED

NICOLE SAVILLE



FARMER:

Nicole Saville,
Lincoln, Nebraska



For Nicole Saville and her partner, Paul, the dream of farming land became reality five years ago. Growing medicinal and culinary herbs, sold at farmers markets in Nebraska, grew from a passion of sustainable agriculture. Due to land inaccessibility, Nicole and Paul will discontinue farming at the conclusion of 2021.

Grew up around conventional farming, which led to interest in more sustainable practices.

Started farming medicinal and culinary herbs on two acres of rented land in 2016.

Discontinuing farming; new endeavors to begin in 2022.



Studied sustainable agriculture in college.

Current land owners decided to go a different direction in 2020, leaving Nicole and her partner in a land bind after 2021.

DRAW TO AGRICULTURE:

“My partner and I believe that if we do nothing else with our time here on earth, we have an obligation to leave it in better condition than we found it.”



FARMING OPERATION:

“Through 2021, we grew medicinal and culinary herbs. We started all our seedlings in the late winter/early spring in our 2,100-square-foot greenhouse. We free-ranged 25 to 40 chickens year-round to control pest issues and add organic matter to the fields. Although our operation was not certified organic, we were very strict about following organic practices.”





LEARNING IS KEY:

“There weren’t very many local farmers growing medicinal herbs at our scale. We relied pretty heavily on a couple of good reference books when we were starting out. There were also local herbalists we looked to for inspiration.”

CONVENTIONAL FARMING NEIGHBORS:

“We had many farmer neighbors—most of them were conventional/commodity farmers. I don’t think they fully understood how we operated, but that is OK. Some neighbors were genuinely interested and we loved when they asked questions.”



ADVICE FOR OTHERS

“I wish we had worked in ‘regular jobs’ for a couple years more before beginning our farming venture. If I could, I’d go back and tell myself to save up for property and purchase land first.”

MARKETS WE SOLD TO:

“We focused on the Lincoln and Omaha, Nebraska, areas. Our primary avenue for sales were the local farmers markets.”

BARRIERS TO OVERCOME:

“The biggest barrier was finding land. This is the number one struggle for anyone trying to break into farming. It can make or break the entire operation. Unfortunately, we weren’t able to overcome this obstacle.”



A FARMING OCCUPATION:

“Farming is often portrayed as a noble and romantic endeavor, and while this is true, it also means getting very little sleep, enduring aches and pains, working in extreme weather, and generally being undervalued. Farming has to be a passion. If you’re considering farming for the perks and the paycheck, you may want to reconsider.”

