

SPOTLIGHT on The Barnyard

Carteret Local Food Network welcomes new member – The Barnyard. Amber Nead, representative from The Barnyard recently talked to us about her family's agritourism and meat production business in Newport.

When did you start your business. And why?

The family farm was created after my dad, Russell, retired from the Marine Corps. It was 2004 when my parents purchased our small acreage on Robert's Road in Newport. In the beginning, we only kept our horses and my various 4-H/FFA livestock projects at the farm. As my 4-H/FFA projects began adding more farm animal species to our land, close friends began requesting the use of our horses for birthday pony rides and even the chance to use our livestock for kids to pet. After getting quite a few requests over the years, my mom, Kim, decided that she would venture into creating our farm into an agritourism business. Our business, The Barnyard, began in 2010. Our vision is to teach the community about animal agriculture and have a farm where families can visit to learn more about farm animals. We want to provide this area of North Carolina that is better known for its beaches, rather than its agriculture, with an extreme hands on environment.

Tell us about the challenges you encountered?

In the beginning, our primary challenge was getting the word out about our business. Many people knew our family from 4-H and other youth organizations, and most of them knew we had farm animals - but it has taken several years to make a business name for our farm instead of just being a local family farm. It has especially been hard to transition from family farm to farm business in Carteret County because we are not a traditional local family name. Now, after years of word of mouth marketing and dedicated social media marketing, The Barnyard as a petting zoo and birthday venue has gotten its name. Our present challenge, though, is trying to get the word out that we also are a real working farm. The animals that we raise for the educational agritourism part of the business, are also used for meat production. Many people, now, don't realize that we sell meat, eggs, and wool from our animals.

Sounds like this is a labor of love and an intensive, hands on process. Tell us more.

Building the farm was simple in the first stages. But to take a family farm and turn it into a public business definitely took a lot of work. We have had to clean up the parts of the farm where people will be, build multiple pens and extra barns for our "zoo crew" and facelift everything to make it very appealing. We have created a very safe and fun environment for families to enjoy. A ton of our love for agriculture and teaching the public about that topic has been poured into The Barnyard for sure.

How do you sell the products?

We technically do not have products. The Barnyard, first and foremost, is an agritourism business and educational farm. We can host birthday parties at our farm, which include access to the farm animals for a petting zoo and the horse for pony rides. We can take our farm animal

petting zoo and/or the horse to birthday parties at other locations. We also can host events at the farm, such as family reunions or squadron parties, and we also can take the farm animals and/or the horse to non-birthday events such as school festivals or other community activities. In addition to the parties and events, The Barnyard is open by appointment for individuals, families, and small groups to come take a farm tour and see all the animals. The Barnyard is even open for school groups to take field trips to as well! We give horseback riding lessons for kids also. We are a very interactive farm and details about all we have to offer in the agritourism sense can be found on our website.

Although we are an agritourism business, we are a working farm too. This means that we breed, birth, and raise all the animals at our farm. Once the animals reach their market weights, we send them to be processed and packaged, and then we are able to sell locally born, raised, and processed meat products: beef, pork, goat, lamb, chicken, turkey, duck, eggs, etc. We sell the meat products at the farm mostly, but we can also be found at some local markets, such as the Olde Beaufort Farmer's Market!

What do you think you would be doing, if not this business?

If The Barnyard had never been created, we would still be involved in agriculture and our farm. We would definitely still have our land and would be growing farm animals on it for ourselves. I do have a feeling though, that if the agritourism business did not exist, we may still be involved in selling meat and eggs - if not publicly, definitely to our friends and family.

Do you have a partner helping you run the Farm. If so, how does that work?

We are a family operated business, so we do not have any partners that help run the farm. Russell and Kim Nead own the farm, and their kids, Joshua, Daniel, and me, Amber, all have a part in helping make major decisions. Joshua and Daniel do not live close by though, so they remain behind the scenes. But if you visit the farm or attend a birthday or event at the farm, you will likely meet Russell, Kim and me, Amber. Besides the family maintaining the business, we often partner with outside farms and organizations for most of our events - for example, this past spring we partnered with the Carteret County Humane Society for our Let's Kid Around Day which involved the baby goats. Instead of a gate fee to come play with the baby goats, we asked for pet food donations to donate to the shelter.

What comments do you hear from shoppers? From the Kids enjoying the Farm?

At the markets, we hear a lot of positive feedback from people that interact with our booth. Many people are shocked to learn that there is a farm petting zoo in the area and are excited to take a business card to learn more. We have gotten great comments from customers that have purchased our meat, which makes us feel like we are successful in producing a clean and quality product. A lot of excitement is often shared when customers learn that we sell more than the normal beef, pork and poultry products - they love the chance to try goat and lamb meat! At the farm, after events, parties or visits, we hear awesome comments from parents and children. They talk about the unique opportunity that our farm can offer for people. Many people in eastern NC have not had a chance to get up close and personal with farm animals, and we provide that. Just

like every business, we have heard a few negative comments, but only a handful out of the hundreds of positive comments over the last 5 years - so we feel that is a good thing for our business.

Tell us a little about you personally.

We are a retired military family that settled in Newport. As a family, we have always been involved in youth organizations from FFA to 4H to Girl Scouts. Even as my brothers and I got older and left for college, my parents have maintained their involvement with youth in Carteret County. This interest ultimately led to the creation of The Barnyard. My parents have been so involved in helping teach youth through those organizations, that now, teaching youth that come out to The Barnyard - be it a school group, birthday party, community event, etc - just comes naturally and secondhand. My dad, Russell, still works full time on base and my mom, Kim, is still a 4-H leader, but other than those obligations, the farm and The Barnyard are literally my parents' whole life. They dedicate every free moment they have to the farm animals and making the business better.

What are your plans for the future?

Our plans are to continue to grow into a prime birthday and field trip venue. We would love to be as well known as Mike's Farm to the community and further. Although we only offer the animals and farm right now, we still feel it is a special thing. Eventually, we would like to add little things like extra educational sections on other parts of farming (food crops and gardens) and we would love to explore the option to have a mini gift shop with Barnyard themed items to help people remember us. In the past, we have offered summer camps, but have not had a great response...however we really want to try and change things up to encourage more summer camp participation. Although it may be a long term goal, we also hope to have business hours for the petting zoo one day, instead of being open by appointment only. We are also planning to get more involved in meat production. Our land is limited, but we can rotate species based on season.

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