

Some Vets Turn to Farming to Overcome War Trauma

November 24, 2011

Xinhua News Agency | by Mark Weisenmiller

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TAMPA, Fla. -- Chances are, many Americans' Thanksgiving dinners are going to have food grown by U.S. military veterans who flocked to farming to not only for a second career, but for therapy to overcome their war traumas.

These programs, either agricultural therapy or horticultural therapy, are used primarily, but not solely, by former or retired Airmen, Marines, Sailors, and Soldiers, some of whom were also physically wounded and disabled during their deployments in Afghanistan or Iraq.

Nick Lemley, owner and operator of Devil Dawg Farms in Ringgold, Georgia, believes that the four aspects of military life, which can also be applied to veterans working on a farm, are "hard work, discipline, initiative, and having the drive to complete the job no matter what it takes."

Lemley, who served in the Marine Corps for six years, had to decide what to do with the remainder of his life after his discharge. He and his wife, Hannah, came up with the idea of setting up a farm by acquiring acres of his grandfather's land in rural Catoosa County, Georgia.

Now, the Devil Dawg Farms produces both "products and foods," ranging from honey made by their bee farm, to farm animals such as goats, to even custom-made furniture.

Farmer-Veteran Coalition, a national organization that oversees such farms as Lemley's, is itself a branch of the Los Angeles-based California coalition called Community Partners, whose mission is "to help poor returning veterans find employment, training, and places to heal on America's farms."

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"FVC provides veterans with informational resources on beginning farming operations,

educational retreats, and when available, small grants," said FVC spokesman Chris Ritthaler. "We cater our services to each vet individually, as different regions and types of agriculture have varied needs and resources available. "

These farms can range from producing beef and poultry to producing organic vegetables, not to mention maple syrup and beer or wine.

However, not all such farms require their workers to toil away for hours in the heat during harvest time.

The work at Warriors to Farmers, in Littleton, Colorado, is all done in greenhouses, where they grow food via hydroponics, a unique process of growing plants in sand, gravel, or liquid.

Hydroponic plants are grown without soil but with numerous nutrients, omitting the need for specially-designed farm equipments for disabled veteran employees -- although some greenhouses, which employ only four veterans, were retrofitted for those in wheel chairs.

"The labor is not hard work. Everything is in a greenhouse, so although labor intensive, it's not overly physically demanding," said farm owner Buck Adams, a Marine veteran. The typical pay for these employees is 10 dollars an hour, in addition to free food from the farm.

Another pro-military veteran organization, Work Vessels for Veterans, which began in 2008 when a commercial fishing boat was donated to a returning military veteran, has grown so much that it now donates tools and tractors to military veterans who are undergoing agricultural or horticultural therapies.

"Farming is becoming a bigger piece of the WVFV universe for several reasons," said WVFV spokesman John Niekraash. "First, the U. S. economy is wobbly and jobs are scarce for returning vets. Second, the therapeutic wonders of working the land. Third, this is a way for vets with PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) to help one another, which is extremely important to them."

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[ajax58](#)

Nov 24, 2011 2:35:55 PM

Wow. What a great way to overcome war related experiences while continuing to contribute to your communities in important ways

[purpleheartpark](#)

Nov 24, 2011 2:44:48 PM

Somebody should tell All the Vets at the OWS movement about this golden opportunity. Oh thats right, Most of them are Fake Vets.....

[M60_Man_V_66-67](#)

Nov 24, 2011 3:23:59 PM

Work in any form is the best therapy for injured or Disabled Veterans when they are released from the Military or Military Hospitals and are not confined to a bed. I got a job 3 days out of the VA Hospital and never had time to look back. Most people asked me if I was in a car wreck or something like that. I usually replied, "Something like that" and kept going.

[8659681](#)

Nov 24, 2011 3:29:48 PM

I don't know what it is about raising animals or growing vegetables but this way of life has a way of making everything right. I have been a gardener since I was a young child and this way of life has continued up to present day. As a disabled Veteran (PTSD) I find so much pleasure and a sense of accomplishment each year from the planting of seeds to the end of the season when it is time to reap the bounty. I give half of my vegetables to neighbors and friends that are on hard times. People talk about helping others who are in need and I am here to tell you that there is no other greater feeling than doing so. With me, it is my vegetables and people are so receptive to fresh grown food. Now I'm not necessarily a religious man even tho being brought up in a church environment helping others gives me a feeling like no other. I guarantee if you start a garden or begin farming you will find great pleasure.

[conradswims](#)

Nov 24, 2011 5:10:10 PM

Now this is good. Real therapy, not drugs and talk.

[Docsenko](#)

Nov 24, 2011 6:11:24 PM

well, i grew up on a truck farm, and i swore i will never do that again. our tractor was a hand cranked Farmall. before that it was mules. that was hard work to the nth degree.....but iam glad it is working out for others. Semper Paratus

[Jasper179245](#)

Nov 24, 2011 7:42:07 PM

I have had a farm since 1968 and it is a great place to decompress. Now a professional farmer raises hay there and I just visit for the peace and quiet. Recommend it for all, if you can't afford it or don't want the commitment just stop at any farm. I bet if you tell the farmer your a vet and just want to help him do some work, you'll be welcomed with open arms. Disabled Army vet 1963-1966.

[25727248](#)

Nov 24, 2011 7:48:26 PM

jim the only thing that has worked for me is being alone,im glad other thing work for others but i think its not the same for nam vet ,just coming home wish i never did

[Keeper_of_Horses](#)

Nov 24, 2011 9:22:18 PM

go guys...all the way!!

[purpleheartpark](#)

Nov 24, 2011 10:47:26 PM

8659681.....Bill I agree. Just working in the garden, the yard, mowing the grass, checking the Tomatos, trimming the Roses, even feeding the wildlife is a great form of excercise and mental relief. It makes the Beer and the Cigar on the Deck really seem worth it and a reward for a job done.....

[chief74Ret](#)

Nov 25, 2011 1:40:51 AM

You don't have to have a farm to work in the soil, a back yard garden works wonders for your health both physically and mentally,the Tomatoes are good also.

[Whitjonw](#)

Nov 25, 2011 1:43:48 PM

I'm not a Marine but I like the ring of Devil Dawg Farms. I'd like to see that name on the shelves !

[M60_Man_V_66-67](#)

Nov 25, 2011 2:14:25 PM

"The Farm" can be many thing things and take many shapes and forms. In Combat, you will experience many ugly and horrific scenes that the images are forever burnt in your mind. You have to come to grips with what scared you and what made you a better soldier. The farm is an activity that takes your mind off what has happedned or can happen at any given minute in a combat zone. In my first week in Nam, I was paired off with a Veteran Soldier who was so happy we were filling sand bags in the hot sun. I hated the hot sun and detail while we were waiting for more replacements to bring the unit close to full strength. We were Soldiers so lets get on with the fighting. After a few missions and having lost half of the 16 replacements in our little group; I learned to appreciate those rare moments when you could sit back in a fairly secure peremeter and fill sand bags. Lesson learned; "Don't be in a hurry for the bullet".

[SgtRock2008](#)

Nov 25, 2011 2:59:52 PM

Thought about buying farm land in South Dacota, but the price has shot up like crazy lately. Maybe take out loan and get started?

[CAREGIVER92](#)

Nov 25, 2011 5:00:04 PM

This sounds like a great idea. But I have one question, will the government finance the veterans to purchase farms, equipment, greenhouses and other materials and products needed to succeed in this venture? My husband is a vietnam veteran, has applied 2 times before now applying again for his injuries. He's a waterman, but will raise animals if this would help his PTSD, Agent Orange, and a host of other illness caused from the war. So if the government will commit to helping these veterans by helping purchasing these items, I think that would be great. Our veterans serviced our country and the government would rather pay-out money for illegal aliens. If we would stop that practice, keep the illegal aliens out and take care of our veterans that would be fantastic.

[Docsenko](#)

Nov 25, 2011 5:52:21 PM

my wife tends a garden every year. i do the yard, trim trees, etc. it does bring a type of relief and accomplishment. my daughter loves our big lawn tractor, so it is a squawk of who gets to use it. i always let her have it. she too feels good afterwards. even though i dislike farming, working the yard with the proper equipment can be fun. Semper Paratus

[HMCLiz](#)

Nov 25, 2011 7:12:21 PM

My husband and I are both USN disabled vets. He was raised an Iowa farm boy milking cows and growing corn. The only thing that gets him out of bed in the morning and keeps his depression at bay is taking care of our hobby sheep. He is at his happiest on the tractor mowing or baling hay. He loves to mow the lawn. We have to hire teenagers to pick up the bales and stack them in the barn, clean out sheds etc but our animals are what keep us going. He gets depressed more in the winter because he can only use the tractor to plow snow. It would be wonderful if the VA would use farming therapy for more vets. If VA could have a Voc Rehab program track to help a vet start farming vs going to college as an "employment" or a therapy goal: that would be the ideal. Another idea: the VA home loan could also be a VA farm loan for land and equipment??? My husband uses old rakes, balers etc and loves them but we had no help buying them or the few acres of farm field we have. The VA home loans will only finance a house and 5 acres if you can qualify for that large of a loan.

[awahili](#)

Nov 25, 2011 8:50:31 PM

I raise my many varieties of peppers, eggplants, and tomatoes; it keeps me busy and eating good also. My flowers do the rest. From destroying the land to beautifying the land. When I get P.O.'d I cook. Kind of hard to think of bad things when one is building a dish or trying to raise a new

be a new variety. If it is, I get to name it. Though I don't come anywhere close to these folks, reconnecting to the Mother Earth is one way to find peace, even if for only small periods of time. Unlike the VetAdmin, my bonus comes from the blooms and vegetables. Ah **!

[crankedup1958](#)

Nov 25, 2011 10:40:00 PM

conradswims,Amen!

[13657540](#)

Nov 26, 2011 5:35:18 AM

Former military folks turning to farming, as a way of life, and your way of recovering, is commendable! Thank you, not only for your honorable service but the wonderful, products you are, and will be, producing!!! If there is a way, the military trained individual will find that way. I for ojne hope this trend continues because we need more farming than ever before...The Giant Farming Techniques havve chased and scared many farmers away by their sheer size and MONEY, causing far too many bancrupcies of the smaller guys----FORM co-opts!

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