

NARRATIVE
FOR
LIBERTY FARMS
EVENT VENUE
60 OSTRANDER ROAD
GHENT, NEW YORK

MARCH 2020

LIBERTY FARMS OVERVIEW

Liberty Farms is a certified organic farm located in Ghent, NY, with supporting farmland in Claverack and Philmont. The main farm is over 300 acres located off of Ostrander Road in Ghent (two parcels on contiguous lots). We raise certified organic pigs, chickens, sheep, cows and bees. We also grow a wide array of organic vegetables. In addition, we board horses, make our own hay for all of the animals and lease approximately 10 acres of the farm to Collective Retreats for their seasonal eco-tourism glamping operations. Liberty Farms employs nine (9) full time workers and another 8-10 seasonally. This is in addition to the dozens of jobs created locally to support on-farm activities and seasonal events.

We also use our additional 44 acres of farm land off of German Church road and Route 66 for pasture, hay production and storage, and raising animals. We have several core common objectives and guiding principles for our farm. First, we have reclaimed and revitalized fallow, unproductive and neglected farm land and structures in the Town and worked to turn every acre into a integrated, sustainable, responsibly farmed, productive and organic farm. All of our land is now NOFA certified organic. Second, we have extremely high standards and produce and sell only what we would want for ourselves and our family. Third, we have tried to maintain open spaces and farmland and create healthy, vibrant and sustainable pasture land. We are trying to maintain the land as farm land, and other than structures such as a barn, riding arena or storage area, we have not sought to sub-divide any of the land or build any type of commercial or residential buildings. Fourth, we are focused on being good neighbors, both for the people nearby and in the community more broadly. Finally, all of our employees are fairly paid, on the books, covered by workers' compensation and treated with respect and gratitude.

We have had a home in Claverack/Ghent for over 15 years and have been committed to preserving farmland and open spaces. We purchased the farm approximately 5 years ago. We would like to continue to host seasonal one time a week events (primarily weddings and donated events to non-profits) in our existing and renovated code compliant "stallion barn" constructed many years ago when the property was used as a stud farm. We would like to be able to conduct 27 events annually which will allow us to continue to host the weddings once a week during the season and continue to donate the space to non-profits for their events or fundraisers. The events are an integral and critical aspect of our ability to sustain the farm, keep it viable and operational, preserve open space consistent with the Town's Comprehensive Plan, retain our employees and avoid having to divide or develop the farm land.

THE STALLION BARN

When we purchased the farm, it was in need of substantial repairs and attention. Decades ago, it was used as a stud farm. When we began to renovate and reclaim the farm and its structures, we decided to refurbish the mare barn for horse boarding, build an indoor and outdoor riding arena, replace all of the roofs on all buildings, and reclaim and improve the land and repair fencing and systems.

We had no intention, or expertise, to run a stud farm so we decided to renovate the stallion barn to transform it into an event space. We really did not know what to expect but we tried to be as thoughtful about the building, the land and the neighbors as possible. We added siding, landscaped, made cosmetic changes to the interior and installed a number of improvements to avoid and remediate any sound or light concerns. This included, hand sewn, double thickness floor to ceiling acoustic drapes. With the guidance of the Town we have also implemented a substantial number of additional code and safety improvements to make sure we comply with appropriate rules and regulations.

Over the last 4+ years we have regularly hosted events, primarily weddings, once a week from May until the beginning of November. We have installed central heat and air conditioning and have done occasional weddings in later November but that's been rare. The broader area where the event barn is located is also where we have our working greenhouse and where we raise some of the pigs at certain times of the year. The farm is very much an integrated operation, though the event space and surrounding paddocks are used almost exclusively for the once a week events. The event venue is highly regarded earning numerous accolades and a 5 star rating from both Wedding Wire and the Knot (the premier wedding sites).

Fortunately, we have never received a single complaint during our entire time of operation. We believe that is not an accident, but rather, the result of a constant focus on enforcing our strict rules (discussed below) and respect for our neighbors and the community. Our planning, design and operation from day one focused on mitigating any issues with sound and light and limiting the operations to once a week, seasonally. Further the nature of the site and barn, including its distance from the road, hills and thick tree lines also serve as a natural barrier and set back. As a practical matter the space is used for only a few hours a week during a limited season. In addition, if we ever received any complaint or concern we would immediately address it.

TYPICAL EVENT DETAILS

The typical event is a Saturday wedding between May and November. The wedding couples retain the caterers, bartenders, photographer and DJ (or musicians). We typically have three or four of our own employees at each event to facilitate and make sure that all rules are followed and all systems and facilities are in order. One or both of the owners also attend a number of the events to insure that everything is running as expected. Our event manager, Blanche Mackey, has been with us for several years, is a local resident and does over 90% of the events personally.

The events are very much integrated into the farm overall. By way of example, the weddings use produce and/or meat from the farm, often use flowers grown on the farm as well, the couples will provide our Liberty Farms salsa or pesto as gifts, the photos are typically taken on the hilltop with horses or other animals and many couples and event guests tour the property and purchase Liberty Farm and other local products from our farm store.

The events are typically 5-6 hours and guests typically arrive at 4-5 PM. There is usually a bus transporting guests from hotels in Hudson, and back again at the end of the event, usually in two trips. Guests who are driving drop off passengers at the front and proceed to the parking area behind the greenhouse. They can walk down to the Barn or take our six person electric golf cart (we supply the driver and no guests are permitted to use it). The caterers typically prepare the food using their equipment. Depending on the preferences of the couple, some people will get ready at the barn a few hours early and others will get ready in a salon or hotel.

Everyone is typically out of the barn and off the property by 11:30 and there are absolutely no overnight accommodations.

The caterers leave the space “broom swept” and our farm team removes the garbage from the enclosed pails the next day. We also hire two local woman who clean the entire space on Wednesdays before events. Because it’s critically important that the property is always in impeccable condition, our team keeps the inside of the Barn and outside land clean, vibrant, inviting and healthy looking.

FARM AND EVENT EMPLOYEES AND WORKERS

As noted, the farm has nine full time employees, and several of them perform duties related to the events. In addition, we hire on a seasonal basis a significant number of local people who support the events. These include two local women who clean the event space for each event, local contractors who perform repairs, improvements and upkeep on the space and property, and local landscapers who maintain the flowers and shrubs. In addition to our employees and contractors, there are many other local businesses and employees who receive a direct and substantial benefit. Our guests stay in local hotels and dine in local restaurants. They shop, explore and frequent local cultural and arts institutions. The caterers hire local servers, bartenders and food preparers. There are also local florists, rental companies, valets, liquor stores, salons, bus drivers, musicians, venue planners, Uber and Lyft drivers, local cake stores, restaurants for rehearsal dinners and brunches, hair and makeup people, officiants and even babysitters or dog sitters, among many others. The realistic economic benefit to the community and workers is over \$1.5 million, above the rental fee for the space. And 100-150 people attending the weddings and staying the weekend each week are introduced to our community in a favorable way.

RULES AND REGULATIONS

From the very first event we have had in place strict, but important, rules and regulations for couples and their guests to adhere to. They were carefully considered and are not negotiable. They were put in place for safety and community reasons and couples must agree to the contract terms before having their event. In terms of facility and process items they include:

* No exterior lighting other than safety lights which are not visible from outside the property.

* Before our first event, we purchased, at a cost of over \$12,500 professionally designed and installed floor to ceiling acoustic sound curtains for each of the large barn doors within the space. The custom sewn drapes are all made from a material called “RB cloth” which is IFR (inherently flame resistant).

* Group transportation is encouraged and vehicles must be parked in a designated area behind greenhouse where 60-70 cars can be parked.

* Strict rules and regulations incorporated into our contracts, displayed web-site and made clear during tours and site visits.

* Liberty Farms event manager and assistants on site at all times when guests on property.

In terms of our rules and regulations:

* All music must end before 11 on Friday or Saturday and once the music begins the west door and sound curtains are closed. For rare wedding dates Sunday to Thursday the cut off is 9:30PM.

* Our contract provides that we have the absolute right to ask the DJ or musicians to lower the volume if we, in our discretion, think it needs to be lowered.

* DJ advised of need to be mindful of volume and positioned away from west side of building. Bands are less common but same rules apply. Because the space is “bright” in terms of sound, the volume is necessarily moderated so it’s at a comfortable level for guests.

* We only do one event a weekend, seasonally.

* The guests must have licensed and/or certified bartenders and no alcohol is “self serve”

* All guests are generally departed by 11:30.

* No afterparties on the property.

* No open flames in the barn.

* No smoking in the barn.

* No balloon releases or Chinese candles (candles that power balloons).

* No rice or confetti or sparklers.

* We have full insurance; we require the couples to have event insurance and all caterers who come to the property must provide proof of insurance in advance of the event.

IMPROVEMENTS

In addition to the exterior and cosmetic improvements, we have made or are in the process of completing several other improvements. We have installed additional emergency exit signs, emergency exit doors with cement pads and awnings, installed new entrance door and awning to comply with codes, modified existing handicap accessible bathroom to insure compliance with code, insured handicap access throughout space, installed infrared water filtration and purification system, regularly test water for compliance with NOFA organic certification, installed mop sink and other modification in staff kitchen.

TRANSPORTATION AND PARKING

We strongly encourage the wedding guests to hire a transportation company and bus to transport guests. Most of them do and since the guests typically stay in Hudson, it's easy to transport the guests to and from the event space. Of course, some guests will drive and we have created a parking area back behind the greenhouse for parking. We can easily fit 70 cars if needed, but that would be atypical. The parking area is over 1000 feet from Ostrander Road. The guests either walk down to the event or we transport them in our 6 seated golf cart. The drivers are typically brought up to the cars in the golf cart at the end of the night. The golf cart is electric so there are no sound issues from a gasoline golf cart. We use citronella lanterns to light the driveway in the evening but they are extinguished when the guests depart.

KITCHEN

Collective retreats is working with us to have an operational certified commercial kitchen and we are far along on that process. But the kitchen is not used by the event caterers. We have an ice machine, one food warmer, and sinks which are used by the caterers.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

In addition to trying to be good neighbors to the surrounding area, Liberty Farms is an active supporter of numerous non-profit organizations and initiatives. We donate the space when requested, donate food to the local food banks, have provided CSA shares to underprivileged families in need, support the NYC Food Bank and seek to train and employ individuals from the community. We are proud to employ several people who are veterans or who have significant disabilities. In addition to that, as a certified organic farm, we run a CSA for local families, maintain an "honor" farm store, conduct local farm tours to introduce people to farming, hire and train summer interns from colleges including Colby, host WWOOFers, host clinics for riders, support the 4H, and sell vegetable and meat to many restaurants in the area. We are also a founding member and supplier of the Philmont Coop.

APPLICATION

As the Board is aware, our application has been pending for some time. Although we believed that we were given the approvals needed at the time, the Board asked us to hold our application because the Town wanted to enact some new provisions. The Board also recognized our operations while it was working through the process. Because of our desire to collaboratively work with the Town and Board, and by extension the broader community, we agreed to adjourn our application while the provisions were enacted. We had seen and reviewed a version of the provision shortly before the final code provision and we believed that we were in compliance with every requirement and obligation. Upon review of the final provision, which we did not see before passage, we became aware of the set-back provisions and limits on the number of events. Other than the set-back provisions, we believe that we are in full compliance with all other aspects. Based on our track record and history as a good neighbor with no complaints, our proactive affirmative efforts to mitigate any sound or light issues, the terrain and geography of the site, the initiatives described above, and the critical nature of the events to the Farms's viability, we are respectfully seeking both approval from the Planning Board to operate and a variance from the Zoning Board to conduct 27 annual events (which include charity and non-profit donated events in addition to weddings). But, we will not seek to have more than one event in any week.