

A Farm Story:

Farm Vacations at

Four Springs Farm



Heleigh Bostwick

Jinny Cleland is a farmer with a mission. She wants to educate families, and children in particular, about the small family farm and to instill an awareness of the economic realities of farming.

In keeping with this mission Cleland, for the past several years, has offered farm vacations for family groups at Four Springs Farm, a small organic family farm that she owns in Central Vermont. As a former textile designer who worked in the interior design field, Jinny began her farming career when she began raising her children, simply because she felt it was important for them to understand where food comes from and how it gets to the table. She has been farming ever since—25 wonderful years so far. Cleland says, “I’m still a designer, but now my palette is vegetables.”

As the last of her children was nearing adulthood however, Cleland decided it was time for a change, and in July 2001 bought Four Springs Farm, which she named for the

springs that flow year ‘round on the property.

Located in Royalton, just four miles from exit 3 on Interstate 89, admittedly one of the most scenic interstates in America, the 70-acre farm is perched on a southwest facing ridge, offering sweeping views of some of the most beautiful hills and valleys in the state of Vermont.

In fact, Cleland says that the view is what most people say is one of the highlights of their stay at the farm, that and the absolute quiet. “The storms that sweep across the valley are amazing too,” she says, then pauses and adds, “And the sunsets are just beautiful here.”

Jinny Cleland is not only a farmer she is also a businesswoman.

Cleland has been a part of the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program, since 1991, providing vegetables, herbs, pasture-raised chickens and turkeys, and eggs for 50 local families. On Saturday mornings during the summer months,

you can find Jinny Cleland at the Norwich Farmer’s Market in Norwich, Vermont, where she sells her organically grown vegetables, flowers, and herbs, along with strawberries, raspberries, currants, and elderberries.

Cleland states that farming is not an easy profession to make a living from and says, “That’s why I decided to make double use of the land, using it for farming as well as for educational and recreational opportunities.”

She bought Four Springs Farm knowing it would be the perfect location for the rustic accommodations that she had in mind for her farm vacation idea. Cleland says, “That is what makes Four Springs Farm so unique. It’s not a bed and breakfast or an inn, but a small campground on a working farm.”

Tucked away in the corners of fields and orchards on a mowed grassy knoll, are the rustic accommodations that Cleland refers to. Open April to October, farm vacationers park remotely and hike in with their belongings. There is a simple wood cabin, designed by Cleland, and built with the help of a local builder, and seven tent sites each featuring a tent platform, fire pit, and picnic table.



Four Springs Farm

Other facilities include the wash house and a picnic pavilion with hot and cold running water that holds up to 30 people and is suitable for small family reunions or weddings.

Mountain View Cabin has a porch and glass windows with screens that let in plenty of natural light. Inside there are four bunks that hold five people. "There is no running water or electricity in the cabin," says Cleland, "But there is a propane heater to take the chill off." Cooking facilities are located outside the cabin. When asked about pesky insects she chuckles and replies, "We have very few mosquitos here at Four Springs Farm because there's no standing water for them to breed in."

"At Four Springs Farm nature is the entertainment," says Cleland, "There are no swing sets or swimming pools." She adds that people who come to the farm enjoy the rural outdoors, wide-open spaces, and seeing the stars shine brightly in the night sky. They also appreciate the friendliness of the farm and its simplicity. Cleland says that staying on a farm vacation at Four Springs Farm is a very personal experience. "Almost all of our visitors say good-bye to me before they leave."


Cleland also says that whether hailing from the city or suburbs nearly everyone is respectful of the environment. "Only once in the three years that I've had people staying here has anyone left any mess behind," she says.

As far as helping out around the farm, Cleland says, "Family members can tag along on farm chores and pick their own veggies for dinner. There's plenty to do here. We recently had a group of five moms and nine kids stay here. The kids really loved collecting the eggs while they are still warm from the nests."



To further her educational mission, Cleland has hired a program director to help families with children customize their vacation plans to include educational activities relating to nature and farm life. For example, art on the farm nature walks, learning about the water cycle, star gazing, and soil to salad. Educational programs are available upon request.

Guests can hike on one of several trails on the property that meander through fields, woods, and ravines. Self-guided tours of the farm are available through a program called Valley Quest. "Actually it's a treasure hunt complete with maps and clues that takes you around the farm and it's lots of fun," explains Cleland. Once a year Four Springs Farm participates in the local farm open house program and, there is also the annual Firefly Festival held the Saturday evening that coincides with the July 4th holiday. "The fireflies here at the farm are spectacular at this time of the year," says Cleland.

But mostly folks just relax and enjoy the peaceful rural surroundings--until it's time to go home and face the hustle and bustle of modern life. Jinny Cleland is lucky. She gets to enjoy life here all the time. 

Heleigh Bostwick is a freelance writer living in the beautiful state of Vermont and the publisher of Marigold Lane, an online resource for simple living with a green twist.

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