



## Lauren Giordano, 2017 BFTP Trainee

**Farm Name:** Schoolhouse Farmhouse

**Location:** Cordova, MD

**Farm Size:** 4.68 acres

**Acres in Production:** 1/4 acre in vegetables (1/8 in active production, 1/8 in cover crops) and 1/2 acre in pastured chickens (currently egg production)

**Year Established:** 2016

**Number of Years Farming:** ~1

**Products:** vegetables, flowers, and pastured eggs

**Certifications, if any:** growing/raising organically but not certified

**Website:** [schoolhousefarmhouse.com](http://schoolhousefarmhouse.com)

**Facebook:** [facebook.com/schoolhousefarmhouse](https://facebook.com/schoolhousefarmhouse)

**Instagram:** [@schoolhouse\\_farmhouse](https://instagram.com/schoolhouse_farmhouse)

**What led you to farming?** My interest in farming grew out of my interest in food. I have been cooking and baking since childhood. In my search for quality ingredients, I became curious about the food system. During that exploration, I developed a belief in the value of small-scale, low-impact agriculture and wanted to be involved beyond my role as a consumer. With the support of my husband, George, who works full-time off farm, I was able to transition from working full-time as an art director (after working in design for 15 years) to freelancing from home and working on our land while participating in the BFTP.

**What are some short- and long-term goals you have for your farm?** We plan to increase our laying flock and add chickens for meat. Like our laying hens, the meat birds will be pastured and fed organic feed. We also plan on processing them on farm. The property came with some neglected fruit trees, and we have begun pruning them. Going forward, we plan to implement an organic management system, as well as add berries. We are also very interested in environmental conservation and plan to add bluebird boxes and additional native flowers and plants throughout our meadow. Our ultimate goal is to strike a balance between taking from and giving back to the land.

**Can you tell us a little more about your land arrangement?** George and I purchased our land in 2015. We were looking for a house with land that we could work, but didn't have much of an understanding of what that entailed. We fell in love with the location and house first (a renovated schoolhouse—which inspired our farm name—within commuting distance of D.C.). It had what we felt at the time was a manageable amount of land. In retrospect, however, we realize we could have paid more attention to the location (proximity of conventional commodity farms) and configuration of the property (wind breaks and blocks from potential synthetic pesticide and herbicide drift). Figuring out ways to work through these issues and maintain the environmental health of our soil, crops, and animals has been challenging, but has also reinforced our resolve.

**During your time in the BFTP, which learning opportunities most helped you become a better farmer?** As a trainee, the first learning opportunity I had was the annual conference. It provided a great intro to Future Harvest CASA as an organization, as well as many farming topics with which I was unfamiliar. (Specifically, the Regenerative Agriculture track sparked my interest in the benefits of soil microbiology.) In addition to the conference, the field school workshops have been helpful. Through attending various events, I have learned actionable steps I can take to create and maintain healthy soil. I've also learned about the benefits of cover crops, and have made connections with other sustainable farmers who provide an important support system and knowledge network. (The Delmarva-specific events have been extremely helpful in this aspect.)

**What would you say is the hardest part about farming?** For me, the hardest part so far has been having patience. Coming into farming with no prior agricultural background and modest prior gardening experience, there has been so much to learn and do before even getting that first seed in the ground or that first chicken laying eggs. As with anything challenging, there will always be more to learn.

**The most rewarding?** While collecting the first eggs and harvesting the first crops were gratifying, seeing all the research and preparation come together and the system we've begun to establish start to function has been the most rewarding.

**How do you market your produce?** Since this is/was our first season, everything was at a trial size, so we didn't feel comfortable applying for markets or starting a CSA. We are lucky enough to have friends who run a porch market at their B&B, Turnbridge Point, in Denton, Maryland. They invited us to sell our eggs and produce (when we start harvesting). We also have been selling to friends, which has grown into a larger group of word-of-mouth customers. As we grow and more products become available, we will explore more outlets.

**What is your favorite crop to grow?** I don't have a favorite, yet.

**What advice would you give to other aspiring farmers?** I think it is important to learn, research, and then do as much as you can. All the research and workshops won't be effective until you start putting things into practice. Also, be patient and keep in mind that farming is a business, and it will take an investment of time and money to figure out how to do it well.

**If you could change one thing about our food system—something that would really help small farms like yours succeed—what would you change?** A good first step would be for consumers to begin to really value quality food by supporting the farms in their communities that work hard to grow it. That support needs to extend beyond direct support of small farms, by also supporting restaurants and retailers that source locally, and politicians that support programs and policies that benefit small farm businesses.