

From Patio Pots to Prairie Hills Farm

In 2018, Sabrina Friend thought a backyard garden sounded a little crazy. Living in suburban Georgia, surrounded by neighbors with neatly kept lawns and no vegetable plots in sight, she remembers thinking, “Our neighbors are going to think we’re crazy.” She had no agricultural background. Her career was in cosmetology, childbirth education, and lactation consulting. Bugs, dirt, and growing food outside were not her world. But her husband brought home pots, soil, and seeds anyway and they started on their back patio.

At first, Sabrina was simply the “garden attendee,” making sure things were watered and alive until her husband got home from work. She was not even sure when vegetables were ready to harvest. One night, she hesitantly picked a bell pepper to make dinner. “I remember thinking, can I even cook this? Is it ready?” That bell pepper changed everything. Dinner tasted better. Her children ate it without complaint. Something clicked. The freshness, the pride of growing it themselves, the connection to the food. It was transformative.



That is when she went down the rabbit hole. “I went from garden attendee to gardener,” she laughs. Raised beds multiplied. Compost piles appeared. Herbs filled the patio. Neighbors started peeking over fences. What began as a few pots became a calling.

By 2020, Sabrina and her husband were asking bigger questions. Could they leave corporate America? Could they grow enough food for their family? Could they build something more? They moved back to Indiana and purchased nine acres. The property had no pastures, no hoop houses, and no farm infrastructure. Just a house, a barn, and possibility. They had never owned livestock. Not a chicken. Not a goat.

Within a short time, they added goats, installed raised beds, and planted a kitchen garden with 24 beds. What started as a homestead experiment quickly grew into something far more ambitious. Today, their operation includes over 100 goats, thousands of meat birds annually, lamb and turkey production, an apiary, five hoop houses, market-style vegetable production, and targeted grazing services. The growth has been extraordinary. In

Sabrina Friend | Prairie Hills Farm

www.prairiehillsfarms.com

County: Delaware County

Years farming: 6

Farm size: 9 acres

Primary products: goats, lamb, pasture raised poultry, eggs, raw honey, and targeted brush clearing services.

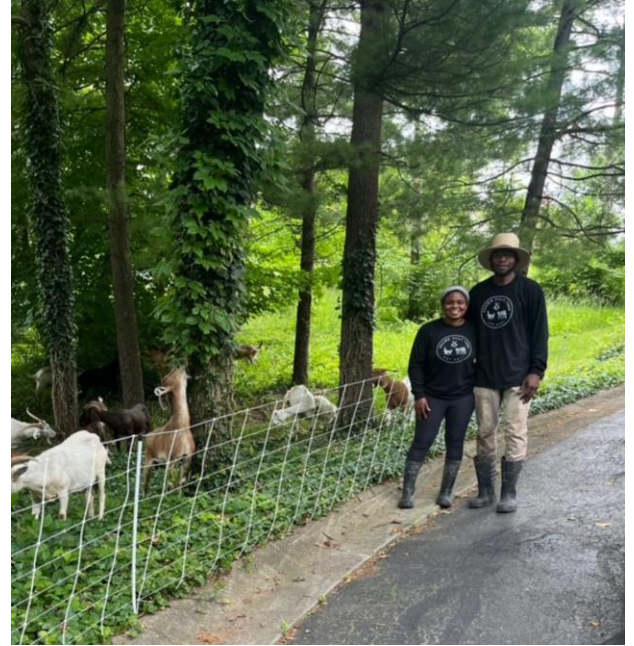
Production approach: As organic as possible, regenerative, diversified

Conservation practices in use: No-till or reduced tillage, rotational grazing, pollinator & wildlife habitat

less than a decade, they have gone from patio pots to thousands of birds and regenerative brush-clearing contracts. “It’s wild to think about how far we’ve come,” Sabrina says. “But we didn’t throw everything at it at once. We scaled as we learned.”

Scaling did not mean figuring it out alone. From the beginning, Sabrina and her husband sought out mentors in every area of their farm. They asked an experienced cattle and sweet corn farmer to serve as a general farm mentor. When Sabrina began beekeeping, she found a seasoned beekeeper with hundreds of hives across Indiana to guide her. They leaned on livestock mentors during kidding season and crop mentors when soil questions arose. “There’s no research like hands-on experience,” she says, “but there’s also no substitute for someone who’s done it for 20 years.” That network of experienced farmers has helped steady them through losses, hard seasons, and new challenges. Mentorship, she says, has been just as important as any piece of equipment on the farm and she’s ready to pay it forward by mentoring others. Learning from seasoned farmers gave her confidence, but it also clarified her convictions.

Many farms adopt conservation practices later, after years of conventional production. For Sabrina, conservation was never an add-on. It was the starting point. During her early research phase, soil health kept rising to the surface. The message was clear. Healthy soil equals healthy crops equals healthy families. “It just made sense,” she says. “It’s not as simple as putting a seed in dirt and watching it grow. If the soil isn’t right, the nutrition won’t be right.”



The Indiana Small Farms Conservation Program (formerly Urban Soil Health) was an early resource supporting the Friends with annual soil testing and guidance on minimized tillage, intentional composting, and mulched walkways to retain soil moisture. With support from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) they added hoop houses and installed drip irrigation, captured rainwater from hoop houses, planted native prairie in orchard areas, and integrated livestock into rotational grazing systems. They did not convert to conservation. They built around it. Over time, they watched the soil transform. Each year, testing probes slid deeper into the ground. Moisture retention improved. Crop yields strengthened. By their third season, the difference was visible and measurable.

As a woman farmer and as an African-American woman farmer, Sabrina is deeply aware of how she is perceived. When she shows up alone, people often assume she is the spokesperson rather than the hands-on operator trimming goat hooves or hauling chickens. At conferences, her expertise is sometimes quietly questioned. “I don’t look like what people expect a farmer to look like,” she says. But every thriving hoop house, every healthy herd, every successful grazing contract quietly dismantles those assumptions. Women like Sabrina are expanding the public image of agriculture. They are visible proof that farming does not belong to one demographic, one background, or one tradition.

She believes visibility matters. “Women need to see women in these roles,” she says. “We’re often behind the camera because we’re so busy doing the work. But representation is important.” By simply showing up, muddy boots and all, she is breaking barriers.

When asked what gave her the courage to make such a dramatic shift, especially with young children, she does not hesitate. “My faith and hope.” Hope that the next season will be better. Hope that diversification provides resilience. Hope that small-scale farming can feed families well. Looking ahead, Sabrina hopes to teach, guide others toward farm viability, and grow her acreage to make an even bigger difference.

Her advice to other women is simple. “The sooner the better. Start on a patio. Start in a backyard. Volunteer. Go to your local USDA office. Find a small-scale farmer and ask to learn.” Because she knows firsthand how intimidating that first bell pepper can be. And she knows how powerful it is once you harvest it.

Learn more about Prairie Hills Farm at www.prairiehillsfarms.com. Need a taste? In addition to farm pick ups, Prairie Hills Farms offers nationwide shipping of their pasture raised meats, local honey, and merchandise.