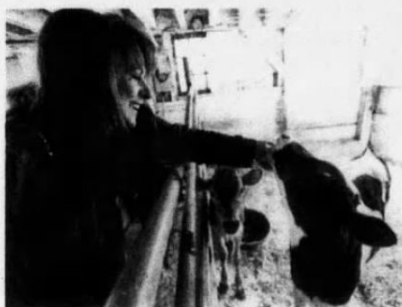


## Grass-fed dairy cows and restored farm buildings beckon visitors to the Lands at Hillside Farms



Suzanne Kelly, director of development and marketing, pets Faith, a young Holstein cow.



Barbara Lawson, a horticulturalist, raises plants in the greenhouses.



Doug Ayers, board chairman, talks about how the farm functions on a daily basis.

# ON SOLID & SUSTAINABLE GROUND

By EDWARD LEWIS / [elewis@timesleader.com](mailto:elewis@timesleader.com)

**K**INGSTON TWP. – Step into the refurbished dairy barn at the Lands at Hillside Farms and almost immediately you feel like it's 1890.

Or head back to the past with a visit to the mercantile barn constructed in 1800, later dismantled, moved to its current location outside the dairy store, and recently rebuilt using the same 212-year-old wood and 24-inch-wide planks milled from a Norway Spruce tree that toppled last year on the 412-acre farm.

The mercantile barn with large slabs of Pennsylvania blue slate for the floor and soybean insulation in the walls was re-erected with wood pegs instead of nails and screws.

The two barns are among the many buildings at the 150-year-old farm that has transformed itself into a unique, nonprofit educational complex. More than 300,000 people visited the farm last year, said Suzanne Kapral-Kelly, director of advancement at the Lands at Hillside Farms.

The goal of the farm is to teach people sustainable gardening and farming practices to live healthy lives, said Doug Ayers, a veterinarian and co-founder of the Lands at Hillside Farms.

On Hillside Road, the farm is a 10-minute drive from the hustle of city life in downtown Wilkes-Barre. While it may seem odd if a chicken walked by you on Public Square, it's the norm here.

The Lands at Hillside Farms has come a long way since the nonprofit idea was born in 2005. The organization purchased the farm from the Conyngham family in 2007 for \$4 million, preserving and restoring many of the buildings, including the summer cottage built in 1882 that still has original wallpaper and furniture.

The summer cottage itself is a museum with books, paintings, hand-painted tiles from Scotland, place settings and the Conyngham family's ledgers that detail coal-shipment sales throughout the late 1800s.

Back in its heyday, the farm was more than 800 acres, Ayers said.

More than 100 volunteers have helped to restore and maintain the farm as it was back in the late 1800s.

Ayers said more than 50 Jersey dairy cows have returned to the farm, which produces milk used to make butter, ice cream and the Hillside famous chocolate milk for sale to the public. He said cows disappeared from the farm in 2001

due to the high cost of feed and maintenance.

Today, the cows are fed grass instead of corn. Feeding cows grass produces milk that is healthier to the human body, Ayers said.

"We have cows that are 14 years old because they were fed grass all their lives," Ayers said. "You won't see that in 98 percent of the farms out there. Most farms have become industrialized feeding their cows corn and injecting them with growth hormones. And in three years those cows are off to slaughter."

Ayers said he can distinguish between a "happy" cow, those feeding on grass and an "unhappy" cow eating corn.

"The cows' guts are made for grass, not corn," Ayers said.

A popular event that began a few years ago is week-long day camps during the summer, which teach children gardening techniques and maintaining livestock.

"It's competitive," Kapral-Kelly said. "To register, we have people calling early trying to sign up their children. Children enjoy taking part in digging up the earth and planting vegetables or participating in feeding cows."

For more information about the Land at Hillside Farms, call 1-888-887-7811.