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top story

# Mossyrock's Beaver Hills Farms Sells Heritage Breed Dexter Cattle

## BOVINES: Owners Tom and Janet Meade Started the Farm in 2001 After Tom's Retirement from the Air Force

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Oct 26, 2020



Tom Meade feeds his animals at Beaver Hills Farm in Mossyrock on Friday.

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**Editor's Note:** *The Chronicle is working to assist local businesses suffering from the effects of the COVID-19 virus spread and associated government orders to close or limit commerce. There will be a feature on a local business in each edition of The Chronicle and at chronline.com moving forward. To be considered, email reporter Eric Trent at [etrent@chronline.com](mailto:etrent@chronline.com). Additionally, The Chronicle will continue to offer its coverage of the coronavirus and its effects across the community, state and nation free outside of our paywall at chronline.com.*

MOSSYROCK — When Tom and Janet Meade were looking for a place to start an animal farm following Tom's career in the Air Force, they decided to settle on a location halfway between Tom's family in Tacoma and Janet's family on Puget Island, Oregon. That halfway point happened to be Mossyrock.

The Meades started Beaver Hills Farms, located on West State Street near downtown Mossyrock, in 2001. The farm has had llamas, chickens, goats, alpacas, fish, lots of dogs and cats, and pet birds over the years. They currently have one alpaca who has befriended some of the cattle and lives with them.

The Meades weren't exactly strangers to farm life, having previously owned and operated a crop farm while being stationed in Nebraska. But they had never run a livestock farm, and they wanted to try something new.

"We've always liked animals and it just seemed like the natural thing to do, particularly since we moved to a small town like Mossyrock," Meade said.

Their primary product is beef, either live animals or sides of harvested beef. The Meades use solely Dexter cattle, a heritage breed originally from Ireland that is one of the smallest cattle breeds in the world. They grow to be about 40 inches tall and weigh anywhere from 700 to 900 pounds. They're easier to handle and friendlier than most breeds of cattle, and the meat is tender and lean, Meade said.

When the Meades first started with Dexters, the breed was on the brink of the endangered list. But their numbers have increased globally over the past 20 years and they have grown to be popular as a small farm animal in North America.

"They were rare," Meade said. "It was hard to find a Dexter. Most people had not heard of them before."

Most of their business comes from either live animal sales, which involves the Meades visiting a prospective buyer's property to make sure they have a suitable place to keep it. Buying a side of beef from the Meades is even easier. They are firmly committed to humane farming, including harvesting on-site. There is no long-haul transport, no feedlot, no factory slaughterhouse. One minute the animal is grazing, the next minute it's down. Then the cow goes to a local butcher and the customer picks it up about two weeks later.

"No stress involved whatsoever, or at least that's our goal," Meade said.

What's unique about Beaver Hills Farm is the herds are not all together at one location, rather scattered across five separate farms around the Mossyrock area. Each pasture ranges from 4 to 30 acres and holds a herd of breeding cows, heifers for breeding, several steers and a herd sire. They also keep a separate herd of bulls for future use and retail. Having cows dispersed across several locations allows the Meades to rotate them around and give them different types of terrain to feed off of.

"That's just a nice way to have animals," he said.

The Meades also raise all their own food for the cattle; no artificial growth enhancers and no antibiotics. Their animals are all grass-fed and the farm has three barns stuffed full of hay right now. Mineral supplements are given to provide nutrients for promoting health and growth. It's as close to the old-time, healthy, local food supply as one can find in today's marketplace, Meade said.

"We would rather not trust someone to buy hay from," Meade said. "So we raise all of ours and it takes me most of the summer to do that. It's a complete lifecycle."

Beaver Hills Farms currently has 39 Dexter cattle right now, about half of what their largest herd size has been. That's due to rising sales from a heavier demand for local beef this year, partly caused by the COVID-19 pandemic creating a potential beef shortage at the grocery stores.

It's caused the Meades to put their bulls back in with the cows to create more calves for upcoming years. It takes a calf 18 months to three years to reach full size.

Meade, who grew up in the city and spent most of his adult life in the military, said he never imagined he'd be a cattle farmer one day. But working with animals every day has been a rewarding lifestyle, he said.

"If you're an animal lover and the animals are gentle-natured like ours are, it's definitely a pleasure and fun to work with them," Meade said.

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