# History of Minkdale Farm and What Caused Us to Become B.-D. Minded

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Fourteen-odd years ago Minkdale Farms was a wilderness. It was purchased because of its scenic appeal, trout brook, rocky ledges, trees, and its proximity to New York to serve as a week-end camp located off the beaten track away from human beings and human habitations. With all this it was but half a mile from a State highway known as route 25 three miles south of Newtown, Conn. Even now only two houses have been built on our dead-end road and the character, except for farm buildings and fields, has changed little.

Soon the idea was born to make the camp into a permanent home and to make use of the land, consisting of about 65 acres. Inasmuch as we did not wish to compete with local farmers and also because of the condition of our fields, we decided to raise minks, from which venture the farm derived its name. Because meat and fish prices in this section of our country are too high the mink branch of our operations was liquidated after a few years.

The raising of minks taught us among other things that they prefer raw milk to pasteurized milk, for instinct probably tells them pasteurized milk through the application of heat has become a partly sterilized dead food with some of its nutritional value impaired. They likewise preferred goat milk to cow milk, fresh eggs to cold storage eggs. Here again Mr. Mink seems to have shown a better knowledge of food values than his lord and master can muster, notwithstanding a whole array of test tubes and scientific methods to improve upon Mother Nature. The value of fresh food and natural food could clearly be demonstrated on minks which were sick. If you were fortunate enough to secure live sparrows for his diet for a few days he would, generally speaking, quickly respond. Seeing the good results derived from goat milk we reasoned what is good for the goose must be good for the gander. If it proved beneficial in raising minks it ought to be equally good to raise other animals, including the human being.

Raising minks was not a very common farm practice and our animals created quite some interest at the Danbury Fair. One kind old lady was very much taken in by the little fur bearers and wanted to know what we fed them and what we raised them for and how many skins it took to make a fur coat. After meditating a little while she ventured to say, "Why, if it takes a hundred skins for a fur coat I take it you have to skin those little fellows twice a year." We were very much tempted to tell the dear old soul there was only one animal living which could stand a double skinning and that was the human being.

Our mink-raising experience became responsible for laying the cornerstone for a goat dairy, a dairy which in the course of time has seen visitors from thirty-three different States of our Union, as well as many foreign countries. Goat dairying is on the increase, yet there is still a great deal of prejudice and ignorance about the animal and its milk. Properly handled goat milk differs but little if any in flavor from cow milk, but due to its fine curd (which

is artificially imitated in processing cow milk) it possesses a greater digestibility. For this reason it may become a veritable lifesaver to those with weakened digestive organs or a body builder to those who are allergic to cow milk. There is no disagreeable odor to a doe, the female of the species, but beware of the buck during the breeding season. It is he who has given the goats a black name because of the strong and penetrating odor. Hence, if you desire to become a goat owner or goat breeder, you must be prepared to climb down a rung or two in your social status, for in the eyes of many of your friends you will lose in social standing once you elect to associate yourself with agriculture's cinderella. This requires a certain sense of humor on your part. If I happen to be questioned as to the nature of my business I take great delight in introducing myself as a "goat herder" and generally enjoy a grand facial reaction. Once in a while I admit I have to pay for this little pleasure with a snub but—what is life without enjoyment?

Converting our former wilderness into farmland, the building of roads, of terraces and of houses has taken lots of time and elbow grease, and only now are we slowly beginning to see some of the fruit of our labor. As an example, two hundred and eighty loads of stone came off a field not quite two acres in size, and where there was nothing but briar bushes, today we have alfalfa.

When our government came out with its conservation program we were among the first in this section to join up. Wanting to be good to our fields we increased the lime and chemical fertilizer applications by about 20 or 25%. One field was seeded to ladino clover. Having more seed than needed we seeded another field with ladino at the same time. While this field received a dressing of lime it received nothing but barn manure. As far as we could learn this field was never plowed before, whereas the former chemically fertilized field had been worked for one or more seasons. It produced as fine a stand of ladino you ever wished to see, and the government inspector could not help but remark about it, much to our satisfaction. We were full of expectations as to what the goats would do for us 'round milking time after grazing in a field of such type stand. When the gates opened you thought you could hear the gravel fly under the feet of the herd eager to get at the clover field. They almost dived into it, but like a diver who cannot stay under water for any length of time our goats did not stay in the clover field either. Soon the entire herd was only grazing the borders of the field, and in subsequent days no interest was shown to graze in the middle where we had the best stand. What the trouble was we did not know, nor did those who were consulted. It was assumed goats did not care for ladino clover. This thought was not substantiated, for the other field, which had no chemical fertilization, was grazed evenly. We concluded that the chemical fertilizer had something to do with the dislike of the goats to graze on it. This theory of ours was laughed at by others, for our horses and the neighbors' cows who got loose showed no disinclination to graze on this field. However, somewhere and somehow we felt sure animal instinct told us to keep our eyes open for signs of an explanation.

It so happened that we learned about bio-dynamic farming and what it stands for, which convinced us all was not well with chemical fertilizer applications. As a result, we were probably the very first to drop out of the

government conservation program, not because we do not believe in conservation efforts, but because we believe in it so strongly that we concluded it was not applied in the proper form and could stand improvement or correction. From then on manure piles began their growth at Minkdale Farms. We took manure and carted it out on the land in a pile helter-skelter, we piled it up in heaps and we interlaid manure and soil to see what happened. The helter-skelter method made just a dead pile which took two years to rot. Manure in heaps fared better and it showed up when used. The last method of interlaying manure and soil turned out best. Fortunately, we had some swampland on our farm consisting of black muck which came in handy for this purpose. How to get it out with little expense was a problem. We finally hit upon the idea of cutting an old oil drum in half and by attaching a bow-shaped handle on the ends to allow dumping we were all set. A cable was strung from a tree in the swamp to one standing on hard ground. By means of a trolley the drum traveled from swamp to cart, where it was dumped. The muck has the ability to hold a large amount of water and when put in alternate layers with manure helps to make it rot faster.

Applied to one field it grew silo corn this year thirteen and one-half feet high and on a field which a few years ago nothing grew but briars, moss, thorn, apples and weeds. Apart from a dressing of lime, according to government recommendation, it had received no previous fertilization. Not only that, but the corn was neither hilled nor cultivated. It grew on a hillside and during an exceptionally dry season. Previous to corn it had a stand of ladino clover which was the first crop after it had been stoned and reclaimed. A second batch of corn was planted on meadowland without an application of composted manure and while it was cultivated it made but a poor showing. On another reclaimed field we seeded rye, giving half of it a dressing of composted manure and letting the better half with dark soil color go without. You could almost draw a line when cutting day arrived where manure had been spread.

We made another interesting observation that clover as well as alfalfa will grow on acid soil if conditions are favorable. In one part of the field we had a ledge which we blasted. After clearing the rocks it left a wide crater. To cover it up it took twenty-odd loads of muck from the swamp. When the field was seeded to clover and alfalfa this muck spot which had received no liming could not be discovered. In time our good-for-nothing swamp spot will form a pond and it will have given much needed humus to our fields.

We have noticed a very marked increase in our worm population which was much lacking in newly reclaimed fields. Following the plow on the field longest in operation the soil showed a heavy perforation of holes. On newly reclaimed fields hardly any worms could be noted.

We now come to our animals. We feel their health has benefited since we began raising our own hay. We have also noted that our worm infestation has receded, whereas by right it should have increased. In graining we have noted that milled grain does not seem to agree with their bowels as well as whole grain once they have become used to it. When a change from milled grain to whole grain is first made, undigested grain is frequently passed for

several weeks until the intestine has gotten used to it. Another change which we feel has benefited the herd resulted from the use of oyster shell meal which replaced ground limestone. In raising kids we have made the following observation: Nothing seems to be able to replace mother's milk straight from the goat, for even chilling of the milk and reheating it to body temperature seems to take away a certain "something." The animal which is allowed to nurse its mother or foster mother makes better headway than the kid which has to drink drawn milk, even though it might get a larger amount of it. There are many things in favor of raising kids by hand excepting the kid itself, which does not mean that good results cannot be gotten, yet it allows the question what better results might have been made the more natural way?

Time has not permitted us to apply the B.-D. spraying method, hence we cannot lay claim to a B.-D. operated farm. However, we have seen enough to convince us that the conceptions and principles of B.-D. methods are preferable to what we might term conventional farm methods of present-day agricultural conception. In the interest of our nation we hope that agriculture will undergo rapid changes and break away from factory mass production and monocultures into more harmonious homesteads.