



BY JESSIE SHOOK

# 1818 Farms

Life the Way It Used to Be

**1818 Farms** is slowing down the rush of everyday life on their farm in historic Mooresville, Alabama. Natasha McCrary opened 1818 Farms in 2012 with the mission of preserving history and honoring tradition by working a sustainable farm, producing handmade products and educating the public on the value of self-sufficiency, craftsmanship and a strong sense of community.

The idea for this farm originated with McCrary's 8-year-old son, Gamble. He fell in love with South-down Babydoll sheep at a petting farm the family visited in 2011. "Owning a Babydoll was all he could talk about, so, thinking this would be fun and educational for our family to do together, I began researching where to buy a few lambs to raise as a family project on our land in Mooresville," McCrary said.



When Gamble finally got his Southdown Babydoll sheep, he began to plan what he would do with them. "My 8-year-old entrepreneur decided he would sell wool, sell manure to garden shops, charge for photographs and even stage a Nativity scene at the church ... if he could find a baby," McCrary said.

McCrary started to dream of her own plans for the farm. "I wanted a small, profitable farm where we could teach our children to appreciate the land and animals, and to be good conservationists," she added. "We also wanted to teach our kids the importance of sustainability."

When 1818 Farms first opened, they grew flowers and produce, but when McCrary saw how saturated the farmers markets were with produce, they decided to focus on flowers. "As the 'buy local' market was growing, we saw the need for a farm that offered quality, unique, cut flowers," McCrary said.

As the business grew, McCrary wanted a way to transport the beauty of fresh flowers to multiple locations, and so the 1818 Farms Flower Truck came into the plans. "The truck needed to evoke memories of an era of slower times in small town America when kids rode their bikes, and you knew your neighbors and the farmers who grew your food," McCrary said. "It needed to be a classic, American-made automobile."

As a child, McCrary grew up in Florence, Alabama. "I remember neighbors and family friends being employed at the nearby Ford Motor Company plant in Sheffield, Alabama, that manufactured auto parts," McCrary explained. "My family drove a Ford and our neighbors made those parts with their hands, so the



*McCrary turned a project for the family into a successful business that has taught her children to chase their passion. (Photo Credit: 1818 Farms)*

brand seemed like the perfect choice for the 1818 Farms Flower Truck."

Finding a working, vintage, Ford truck was the next challenge. After months of looking, they found the perfect truck in California – a baby blue 1965 Ford F100. The truck spent most of its life in Southern California with one family. Now, with its hand-painted 1818 Farms logo on the truck doors, it brings beautiful flow-



*The McCrarys found the perfect truck in California to bring flowers to their customers – a baby blue 1965 Ford F100. (Photo Credit: Bookout Studios)*



ers to customers across North Alabama.

The flower truck is used as a place where community members can comfortably ask questions and learn the basic steps of making fresh bouquets, gardening and more. "Customers can build one-of-a-kind bouquets from the hand-selected stems grown at the farm that are on the truck that day," McCrary said.

Most of the time, the flowers are cut just hours before someone sees them on the truck. This is how floral transactions used to take place and the truck is a reminder of that time period. "Our flower truck is unique because it represents a shopping concept for flowers that is new for many people," McCrary added.

Flower offerings change throughout the season. "In early spring you will find varieties such as ranunculus, tulips, snapdragons, hellebores, delphinium, larkspur and bachelor buttons," McCrary said. "As we transition into summer, zinnias, lisianthus, gomphrena, sunflowers, celosia, ageratum, marigolds and many other varieties make an appearance on the flower truck."

While the flower truck is also available for photoshoots and special events, 1818 Farms also hosts workshops, farm visits and has its own line of hand-crafted bath and lifestyle products available online and in stores across the United States. "The primary workshop hosted at the farm is our Bloom Stroll and Bouquet Workshop," McCrary said. "Participants tour our gardens and learn to identify and properly cut flowers and herbs."

After the garden tour, participants gather underneath the 1818 Farms pavilion to discuss the basic steps of creating a stunning floral arrangement. "Each participant creates a one-of-a-kind arrangement using



*The idea for this farm originated when McCrary's 8-year-old son, Gamble fell in love with a Southdown Babydoll sheep at a petting farm that the family visited. (Photo Credit: Hank Miller)*

seasonal flowers that are harvested a few feet away from them the morning of the workshop," McCrary said.

McCrary explained the importance of educating the community on how to grow, harvest and arrange flowers through the experiences and tools offered by 1818 Farms. "Over the years, I have witnessed what I would call a generational gap in gardening knowledge," McCrary added. "People did not learn how to garden from their parents or grandparents as genera-

*McCrary relates growing, harvesting and arranging flowers to being an artist and a scientist. This process is special to her and she enjoys sharing it with the community. (Photo Credit: 1818 Farms)*







1818 Farms host workshops where participants tour the gardens and learn to identify and properly cut flowers and herbs. (Photo Credit: 1818 Farms)

tions before. Both food and flowers are primarily purchased from grocery stores or florists.”

McCrary has been approached by many people who feel they have missed out on the opportunity to learn to grow their own flowers. “They are hungry for educational experiences that teach them gardening and flower arranging,” McCrary said.

1818 Farms has filled this need by launching a YouTube channel to educate viewers around the world about farm life in general. “Whether it is bed preparation, planting, harvesting or drying, our most watched episodes are always focused on flowers,” McCrary added.

McCrary relates the process of growing, harvesting and arranging flowers to being an artist and a scientist. This is why the process is so special to her. “Flower farming is both creative and analytical. The flower farmer artist is designing the field layout in color blocks, planting the correct flower varieties for balanced bouquet production and arranging bouquets in specific color palettes. The flower farmer scientist is focusing on how to farm sustainably. You are testing the soil, composting your natural resources to feed the soil, trial testing new varieties, seed saving and focusing on zero waste by using effective flower drying techniques. There is so much more to flower farming than just dropping a few seeds into the ground and hoping for the best.”

While flowers are a significant part of the farm, you will notice that Babydoll sheep are still an integral part of their brand. Not only is it their mascot, but they also breed Southdown Babydoll sheep. “This heritage

breed was almost extinct in the 1990s,” McCrary said. “A piece of our farm mission is preserving this heritage breed for future generations.”

Breeding Babydoll sheep and educating the public about farm life are two of the many ways that 1818 Farms preserves history and honors tradition. “Our annual sheep shearing day is always a favorite for guests,” McCrary added. “It is the perfect day to learn about the dying art form of sheep shearing and to tour the farm.”

1818 Farms is a truly a family business. The whole family participates as needed and in between school schedules. “Throughout the years, 1818 Farms has shown our children the necessary steps to building a successful business,” McCrary said. “Whether it is working special farm events or a flower truck shift, delivering local orders to wholesale accounts, dropping off packages at shipping facilities or assisting during lambing season, they have experienced the many facets that make our business unique and successful.”

McCrary explained how starting the farm has benefited her children and what they have learned about owning a business. “Owning your own business is not easy ... however, nothing worth having really ever is easy and success does not come overnight,” McCrary said. “This has also given them the entrepreneurial spirit and to not be afraid to chase your passion.”

The 1818 Farms motto of “life the way it used to be” embodies the essence of their farm, cultivating flowers, community and education within Alabama and beyond. Visit [www.1818farms.com](http://www.1818farms.com) for more information on their handmade products, workshops and where you will see the 1818 flower truck next. 🌿



1818 Farms breeds Southdown Babydoll sheep because it is important to preserve this heritage breed for future generations. (Photo Credit: Hank Miller)