

Have Flowers, Will Ship

Jodi Helmer



Harmony Harvest Farm created a model that could change local flower farming.



Jessica Hall

“I spent an entire summer working on the farm, packed three wax boxes of green beans, went to our well-established produce auction and watched wagonload after wagonload of Mennonite families arrive...and pallets of wax boxes of green beans pile up,” she recalls. “I realized there was no way I was going to compete in our local market with vegetable production.”

Instead of giving up on her farm dream, Hall switched to growing local flowers instead.

Hall had no background in cut flower production so she invested in a private mentorship with Dave Dowling. He made suggestions for where to locate fields, greenhouses, and high tunnels, and Hall got to work. She currently grows 200 varieties of cut flowers on seven field acres, in seven greenhouses and hoopouses.

In 2017, the team at Harmony Harvest Farm started boxing up bouquets and shipping them near and far with no idea how the flowers would fare in transit; each recipient recorded an “unboxing” video to share the condition of the bouquets.

Over time, lead grower and designer in chief Jessica Hall refined the packaging and shipping process, honing in on the correct cardboard weight and number of ice packs required to preserve the blooms, to establishing an assembly line that got the flowers from field to vase.

“It took a lot of trial and error to figure out what worked best for our farm fresh flowers,” Hall admits. “When you have orders coming in on the internet every single day, you have to develop a process to pull orders, pack orders, run payments, box things up, and orchestrate FedEx deliveries. It’s a complex web but we did it.”

Harmony Harvest Farm is one of the few farms shipping fresh flowers nationwide. It was not a direction that Hall, who runs the farm with her sister, Stephanie Duncan, and their mom, Chris Auville, planned to take when she started Harmony Harvest Farm in 2012.

Hall, a second-generation farmer, bought a 20-acre farm with plans to grow vegetables but, during her first experience at a local produce auction, she quickly realized it wasn’t a sustainable business model.



“[Dowling] has watched as we have continued to break barriers and heighten awareness within our own community, and now beyond,” Hall says.

The family-run farm quickly developed a reputation for growing quality cut flowers and, before long, the farm was selling its fresh blooms to local florists and shipping cut flowers from their farm in Weyers Cave, Virginia, to Whole Foods Markets up and down the East Coast.



In 2016, the team at Harmony Harvest Farm added a second business, purchasing the exclusive manufacturing rights to produce metal flower frogs. The venture, which operates as Floral Genius, the Flower Frog Company, is the only manufacturer of Blue Ribbon Hairpin Flower Holders in the world.

Acquiring that business—an opportunity the team learned about at the ASCFG national meeting—helped diversify their revenue and make the farm more sustainable; it also sparked the idea to experiment with nationwide floral deliveries.



“I was watching boxes of frogs leave [the farm] and decided I wanted to apply that same principle to our business model and start shipping.” Hall recalls. “Without anyone else doing it, it was hard to figure out how to make the model work.”

Seeking Support

Scaling the farm required a significant investment in time in capital—and Hall found a lot of help to make it happen.

“One of our mom’s great skills is money,” Duncan says. “She started finding programs and once she uncovered one, she uncovered another and another. It’s incredibly time consuming to do but it’s so freaking worth it.”

Harmony Harvest Farm has received grants from organizations like the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Lowe’s. The funds have helped with projects such as purchasing high tunnels, installing water hydrants, and investing in woody plants to create windbreaks (and more plants to add to bouquets).

In 2021, the farm was awarded a FedEx Small Business grant. The farm, chosen from among 8,300 entries, received \$15,000 plus \$1,000 in FedEx Office print services.

“If you make time to pursue these kinds of resources; it’ll pay off over and over again,” Duncan adds. “It’s been monumental to our success.”

The Pandemic Pivot

Grant funding also helped keep the farm afloat when the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

Harmony Harvest Farm applied for a grant through Lowe’s Local Initiatives Support Corporation, which offered funding to minority-owned and rural businesses. The flower farmers received much-needed grant funding that helped keep the doors open and employees paid during the pandemic; it also allowed the team to expand in a new direction.

“When COVID happened, events went away,” Hall says. “But we were still growing flowers, and my mom kept



saying, ‘You need to do retail.’ and even though we didn’t feel ready, we knew we had to do something.”

Hall, Duncan, and Auville added several options, including one-time bouquet orders, flower subscriptions that are offered from April to October, and DIY “Farmer’s Choice” boxes featuring 50 stems of seasonal blooms in a cohesive color palette that can be turned into stunning arrangements at home.

“As a farmer, it’s great—sometimes we have a few stems of something special that it’s hard to sell on a sell sheet.” says





Hall. “It’s worked incredibly well for us to manage our inventory, and to get our customers what they want.”

Harmony Harvest Farm also opened its wholesale collections for retail sales. The bulk flower boxes feature 50 to 100 stems in four distinct color palettes: soft, vibrant, blanc (white), or essentials (neutral shades) with prices starting at \$125.

Each weekly newsletter includes details about what’s in season and could be included in a bulk flower box. The retail boxes have proven popular with floral designers and DIY brides who want to feature fresh, locally-grown cut flowers at their events.

“The shipping program has exploded on our farm so we’re trying to focus on it,” says Hall.

Expanding into retail, and continuing to grow the shipping program has proven pivotal for the farm’s success but Hall hopes that the model she created on the farm will also benefit the entire local flower industry.

“We’re trying to grab people who are not traditionally into farming or gardening and bring them into our world.” she explains. “They buy a bouquet from us one time and with all of our content, we start telling them about the world that exists in their own backyard. For us, it’s about bringing more exposure to the whole industry so that everyone can benefit from the brand we’re building.”



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