

Working farm sends visitors back in time

BY MARGARET THOMPSON
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Wellington Farm Park in Grayling is dedicated to farming as it was done in the 1930s.

The park is one of only two working farms nationwide dedicated to depression-era farming, said Gloria Taylor, park founder and owner along with her husband Howard.

"We're a working, depression-era farm museum," she said. "We plant crops, raise animals, mill our own corn and wheat, operate a sawmill and even cook our meals just as it was done in the 1930s."

Visitors can watch many of these activities taking place, tour the farm's more than 20 buildings or just follow a meandering dirt pathway through fields and pastures and into the woods of the 60-acre facility.

The Taylors, both born and raised in Manton, purchased the land in the 1960s when Howard was hired as a teacher at Grayling Community School. He taught there for more than



Courtesy of Wellington Farm Park

The blacksmith's shop is one of 23 buildings on the Wellington Farm Park grounds.

30 years.

Gloria, who retired from the Michigan Education Association, said the idea to create a farm that preserved history while teaching the importance of basic farming didn't become a reality until the mid 1990s.

"We didn't know if the idea would be popular," she

said. "So we held a 'walk-through-history' day to display what we had."

Only about 100 people were expected to attend the trial run, but nearly 800 guests visited the event.

"It was a great turnout," she said. "So we decided to move ahead with plans for the farm park."

With the help of friends and neighbors, the Taylors organized local history and farm enthusiasts into a non-profit volunteer support group known as the Wellington Farm Folk. The farm folk assist in day-to-day operations of the park.

Much of the park was developed with assistance

from the Soil Conservation Service, the Michigan Association of Foresters and the Michigan Timbermen's Association. Donations, fund-raisers and sales from the farm support the farm market. Park admission fees also help defray costs.

Because the enterprise is a family farm, crops are planted in smaller areas than if it was a commercial farm.

Among them are a wide variety of produce and flowers, including a pumpkin patch that will serve as the focal point of a pumpkin festival to be held in October.

There also are several acres of corn in rows planted in the shape of a large maze. When the corn gets tall enough ("hopefully by the end of August," Taylor said), visitors can have fun trying to get through the maze without getting lost. When the corn ripens, it will be offered for sale, along with many other farm products, at the park's farm market located at the park entrance.

"We feature a variety of locally-grown goods at our farm market," Taylor said. "Much of it comes from our own fields, but some of it comes from neighboring towns. Our apples, for example, are grown in Elk Rapids."

One of the most popular attractions at the park is the children's petting zoo. Barnyard residents include pigs, chickens and peacocks, emu, llamas, sheep, rabbits and pygmy goats.

Other highlights include a working gristmill where the Taylors mill their own corn and wheat for use in recipes prepared in the outdoor kitchen.

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