

Autumn 2017



# The Merry Leaflet

Merry Lea Environmental Learning Center of Goshen College

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## Kinderforest: New Explorers Discover Merry Lea's Trails

Jodie Jordan, a kindergarden teacher at Wolf Lake Elementary School, is prepared to spend time in the woods. Maybe even roll in the mud. She's been through two days of Kinderforest training and practice at Merry Lea, she's got her Frog Toggs® and she's got a boatload of enthusiasm.

"I can't say enough good things about this program!" Jodie says. "The children are different people in the woods. Shy children will begin to take risks—stepping in the mud, climbing up a log—and restless children can be more focused."

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### Nature immersion:

*"unstructured free time in nature resulting in an intimate, deep and personal connection to the natural world."*

*—from a forest kindergarten website*

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Kinderforest is a European model of education for young children that stresses immersion in nature and lots of free play. In an era when many children don't even get to go outside for recess, children in forest schools spend every day, all day outside with their teachers. In Wolf Lake's pilot program, the kindergardeners will spend a full day each month in the woods at Merry Lea.

Over the years, Merry Lea's environmental educators built a relationship with Wolf Lake Elementary, which is just a mile or two away. Fifth graders came for field trips several times a year at one point, and Merry Lea's Tom Hartzell organizes PROWL, an after-school nature program for Wolf Lake students that runs several weeks a year. This time, the initiative came from Wolf Lake Principal Robbie Morgan who encountered the kinderforest idea at a conference. And much of the leadership will come from Wolf Lake teachers.

"That's the most exciting piece for me— watching teachers embrace the outdoors as a setting for trying new pedagogies," says Marcos Stoltzfus, director of the Environmental Education Outreach Team at Merry Lea.

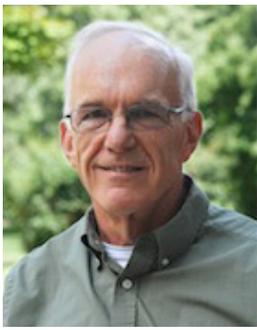
Merry Lea's educators need to adjust to a different role on kinderforest days as well. For one thing, they are not the ones planning all the activities; instead they work in partnership with the teachers who may at some point take over.

Kinderforest is also less structured than Merry Lea's other school programs. Educators have less need to watch the clock and keep groups on schedule. The pedagogy is inquiry-based and student-directed, beginning with questions and problems rather than facts and answers.

One practice the kindergardeners will know well by the end of the year is observation at a "sit spot." On their first visit, children spent several minutes alone with their notebooks just observing their surroundings and jotting or drawing what they sensed. One boy staked out a spot on a bridge and devoted himself to the millipedes crawling across it. Scrunched over his notebook, attempting to trace their shapes, he looked every inch a scholar. Who knows what he'll discover next month? Ω



Jodie Jordan, a kindergarten teacher at Wolf Lake Elementary School, trades a high five with a child in exchange for her nature observations. "I love this program!" Jodie reports.



## Director's Desk

# Building on a Vision, Part Three: Land

**Land** is central to making Merry Lea a vibrant entity. The first step in forming Merry Lea was the purchase of 80 acres in 1964. In the late 1990s, Mary Jane Rieth frequently recounted to me how Lee came home and announced, "Today I bought 80 acres to start an environmental center!" I know there were more details in the process, but that is how she liked to tell the story. As time went along, she and Lee became very invested in the emerging vision for creating a place where "Earth and People Meet."

I am grateful for the work that was done by the original Merry Lea board in the early 1970s to craft a vision for the organization. This is my third reflection on the visionary statements they developed in that era. When I recently examined board minutes from 1972-73, I found the list of dreams and aspirations that each board member contributed. It is clear that Dr. Alton Lindsey's list provided the core framework for the vision statements. One of the four points named in the final piece published in 1974 focuses on the importance of the land itself. The following excerpts illuminate the board's thinking.

### Nature Preservation and Conservation

*The opportunities for future development of good environmental education centers are suffering continual attrition throughout the region. All participants at MERRY LEA Environmental Center will be shown the legitimacy and importance of the intangible (intellectual, spiritual, and ethical) values of natural ecosystems, as well as their more generally recognized practical utility. The failure of formal education to teach the former has resulted in the public misconception that "preservation" is antithetic to "conservation" (wise use of natural resources).*

*Ecosystems may be divided into three types: Independent or Natural systems; Dependent or manmade systems; and Compromise systems. The Center's land will be managed to provide the best possible blend of the three systems. A clear distinction between the areas, each suitable for certain specific uses, will be recognized. Some areas will be untrammelled; others will show several stages in the natural succession. In addition, certain areas will be maintained to reach certain objectives, such as diversity of plants and animals. No area will be permitted to deteriorate because of abusive, uncontrolled use.*

*Therefore, the Center will be designed to accommodate a certain number of people (a number that will allow non-consumptive use) in order that the utmost in quality can be maintained. The Center will illustrate the harmony of man with nature; most importantly, it will make clear man's dual role as an integral part of the earth ecosystem and as its steward.*

What a visionary set of parameters for our work! When these statements were written, Merry Lea consisted of about 650 acres. This vision outlines expectations for what should happen within this landscape. The guiding principles continue to inform us even as the Merry Lea property is now comprised of 1,189 acres.

We regularly discuss the "intellectual, spiritual, and ethical values of ecosystems" as we design and deliver our array of programs. Our land management efforts and educational programs seek synergistic ways to "provide the best possible blend of the three systems" that the 1974 document describes. Our commitment is to have Merry Lea "illustrate the harmony of man with nature." We believe we as humans have a "dual role as an integral part of the earth ecosystem and as its steward." These visionary statements are truly life giving. The foresight they record and the calling they embrace will be relevant for decades to come. Ω

#### ABOUT MERRY LEA

Merry Lea was created with the assistance of The Nature Conservancy and through the generosity of Lee A. and Mary Jane Rieth. It is operated by Goshen College. The center provides a comprehensive program of environmental education and recreation.

The *Merry Leaflet*, published in spring, summer, fall and winter, provides news about programs and developments at Merry Lea. Jennifer Halteman Schrock is its editor and the author of articles without bylines. See the news tab at [www.goshen.edu/merrylea](http://www.goshen.edu/merrylea) for more updates.

#### TEAM MEMBERS

Luke Gascho, Executive Director  
 Kerry Goodrich, Property Supervisor  
 Carol Good-Elliott, Environmental Educator  
 Tom Hartzell, Coordinator of Undergraduate Programs  
 Jane Litwiller, Environmental Educator  
 Bill F. Minter, Director of Land Management  
 John Mischler, Director of Agroecology  
 Ruth Mischler, Assistant Professor, SEED  
 Dave Ostergren, Director of Graduate Programs  
 Joel Pontius, Director of the Sustainability Leadership Semester  
 Ellie Schertz, Assistant Farm Manager  
 Jonathon Schramm, Associate Professor, SEED  
 Jennifer Halteman Schrock, Communications Manager & MCCN  
 Katie Stoltzfus, Public Program Coordinator & Environmental Ed.  
 Marcos Stoltzfus, Director of Environmental Education Outreach  
 Maria Tice, Administrative Assistant/Volunteer Coordinator  
 Doug Yoder, Building Manager  
 Jon Zirkle, Farm Manager

#### BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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# Farm Now Fully Staffed with Livestock

Animals are part of all natural systems. On a farm, they provide not only meat, milk or wool; they also reduce off-farm inputs by contributing their waste to the nutrient cycle. In educational settings like the Merry Lea Sustainable Farm, they give students exposure to a broader range of agricultural practices: namely, how to raise chickens, turkeys, pigs, goats and beef cattle. For all these reasons, a full barn is something to celebrate.

At Merry Lea, it took years of hard work to design fields, improve soil, manage crops and create infrastructure with limited staffing. Caring for animals morning and evening had to wait. Chickens came first; then turkeys; then pigs. The cattle and goats are 2017 additions. Managing the current menagerie will keep the farm crew occupied for quite some time.

Ruth Mischler, an assistant professor in the Sustainability and Environmental Education Department oversees Merry Lea's livestock. Next summer, she will also teach the Agroecology Summer Intensive's first course on animal husbandry. Ruth describes this field as the art of understanding animals' behaviors in order to create environments where they can flourish. It also involves planning for all life stages.

"I think it is important to raise animals in a humane manner because we are the ones who brought them into this context," Ruth says. Careful observation is the key to keeping animals healthy and letting them express their natures even in a domestic setting. "You can tell how they're doing by observing the land and their behavior," Ruth says.

Below is an introduction to the livestock that live at Merry Lea.

**Belted Galloway** is the correct name for the breed, but they are also known as "Oreo cookie cows": black, with a broad white band circling from back to belly. Small in stature and naturally hornless, they look friendly rather than threatening. Their shaggy fur enables them to tolerate outdoor living in cold weather.

Belted Galloways are hardy and do well on rough forages like those in the



Ruth Mischler, assistant professor in SEED and livestock manager, milking Ruby, a Saanen-Nubian goat. Ruth has instructed many students and staff on proper milking technique in the past month.



Two of the Merry Lea Sustainable Farm's three Belted Galloway steers graze in the woody perennial polyculture acreage.

five acres of the farm devoted to woody perennial polyculture (WPP). This area mimics a Midwestern oak savanna, with a mixture of nut trees, fruit trees, vines and brambles. Grazing cattle in the WPP increases the fertility of the land and reduces labor by providing a mowing service. The cattle are confined by portable fencing and moved regularly to help distribute their manure. It is also

a way to derive income from perennial plantings that are still years away from production. Starting in the fall of 2018, Merry Lea will have beef to sell.

**Two Saanen-Nubian goats** named Diamond and Ruby arrived this summer thanks to the generosity of Linda Davis of Ginger Hill Farms. Linda sold most of her herd, but wanted these

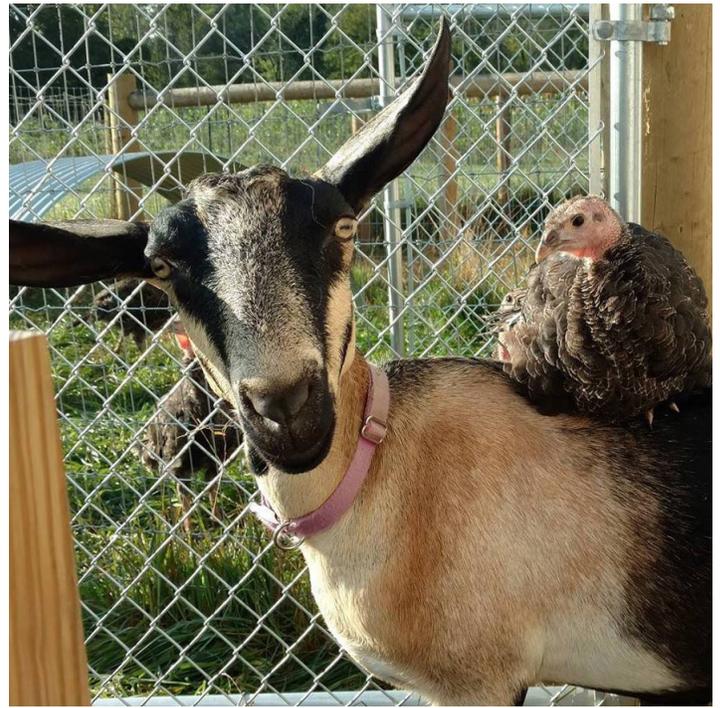
two sisters to contribute to an educational farm. They each give about a half-gallon of milk a day which tastes best frosty cold. Saanens are a Swiss breed known for high production. They are the Holsteins of the goat dairy industry. Nubians contribute a higher butter fat content to the milk.

Ruth has prior experience with milk goats and lightning fingers to prove it. The rest of us are not so skilled and struggled to match our milking speed to the goats' attention span while Ruth was on vacation. Ruby was patient with the many unfamiliar hands on her udders, but Diamond was not. Ruth hopes to breed the goats this fall and have kids in the spring.

**Merry Lea's pigs** have been Durocs, Red Wattles and Large Blacks. Ruth values breeds that are good foragers with dark colors and droopy ears to protect them from the sun. At present, the five pigs root in a pen adjacent to the barn, but Ruth's plan is to open up an area of forest behind the barn and let them forage there. The farm crew also plans to plant the lower field in turnips and let the pigs root for them. Their manure should help with the fertility issues this soil has.

**Poultry:** Forty-plus Buff Orpington laying hens are the most visible livestock. Their portable coop migrates around the property but is most often stationed in the orchard so that the chickens can eat grubs that might damage the fruit trees. This is a chatty breed known for its consistent production of light brown eggs. In addition, two dozen Thanksgiving turkeys are stationed in the barn and some broilers were recently butchered.

This month another life form will populate the MLSF: dozens of curious children, many of whom have little sense of where food comes from or how it is grown. The Environmental Education Outreach Team has tweaked their curriculum and is prepared for a second great year of farm programs. Ω



Ruby the goat keeps company with a Broad-breasted Bronze turkey. The two milk goats were a gift from Linda Davis of Ginger Hill Farms. Ruby's looks represent the Nubian side of her family tree, while her sister, Diamond, is a white goat like their Saanen relatives. Photo by Ruth Mischler.

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## Purchasing Meat

The Merry Lea Sustainable Farm has pork and chicken for sale. The animals are raised using organic practices and are fed organic grains. Expect high quality, great-tasting meat.

To see what's available or pre-order a Thanksgiving turkey, email [ramischler@goshen.edu](mailto:ramischler@goshen.edu).



## New Arrivals

**The Sustainability Leadership Semester** kicked off August 28 with a new group of Goshen College students. Their first assignment was to draw a path map showing people, places and experiences that led them to Merry Lea.

**Front row left to right:** Laura Hochstetler, an Interdisciplinary Major focusing on Sustainability, Music, and Entrepreneurship; Seth Lapp, an Environmental Science major; Reena Ramos, an Environmental Science major and Jose Chiquito, a Sustainability Studies and Sociology double major.

Their professors in the back row are Luke Gascho, Jonathon Schramm, Dave Ostergren, Joel Pontius and Tom Hartzell.

# ASI Bids Farewell to Two Long-Term Faculty

The 2017 Agroecology Summer Intensive (ASI) was the last year for two faculty members who have served the program since its inception in 2006. Larry Yoder and Melissa Kinsey were honored for their contributions at the concluding celebration of this season's ASI in early August.

Larry Yoder, who retired from his role as assistant director at Merry Lea in 2007, continued to play a role in the ASI's course on soils each year. Larry's training as a botanist, his experience as the proprietor of the Yoder Family Farm and his passion for geology enriched the students' experiences. His contribution was especially critical in 2015, following the death of Dale Hess, the first director of the ASI. With the coming of John and Ruth Mischler in January 2017, the ASI is now fully staffed, enabling Larry to attempt to retire once again.

"Wherever you begin, you will find—after many decades—that creative work will draw others to your endeavors," Larry told the students during his final remarks.

Melissa Kinsey, alumni and career networks coordinator at Goshen College, taught a course entitled Small Farm Management and Marketing. A former business professor whose expertise is in entrepreneurship and the management of nonprofits, Melissa guided students through the process of designing a business plan for a farm they could imagine owning someday.

"I love seeing where students go next. It is exciting to see the impact you have," Melissa said.

In Melissa's case, the changes came about because of the new Sustainable Food Systems major that Goshen College launched this year. Courses were shuffled as a result, and the marketing course that Melissa taught will now take place on campus, not in the ASI.

"Our students are often missing much of that business piece, and it's inspiring to see how much care she puts into meeting students where they are," observed John Mischler, director of the ASI. John sent the two faculty home with jars of homemade blackberry jam to remind them of the Merry Lea Sustainable Farm. Ω



Larry Yoder and Melissa Kinsey concluded their service to Merry Lea's Agroecology Summer Intensive this year. Each made remarks at the 2017 ASI celebration on August 4.

## Parting Gifts



**"We're all complicit in the things we may be trying to oppose. I'm complicit in the things I'm trying to oppose."  
— Wendell Berry**

Jenny Nelson and Emily Dobson, students in the 2017 Agroecology Summer Intensive cohort, model the T-shirts they received as a send off. Jenny joined the program from Taylor University in Upland, Ind., and Emily came from Bethel College in Mishawaka.

The Wendell Berry quote above is in the fine print on the back of the shirt. It exemplifies the nuanced perspective the ASI attempts to instill through wide ranging discussions and visits to many different farming operations.

# Merry Lea Alums: Where are they Now?



Kaitlyn Bradley, class of 2017, sports her new company gear on a boardwalk at Chain O' Lakes State Park, Albion, Ind.

## Kaitlyn Bradley

Master's in Environmental Education, 2017

Noble County has been good to Kaitlyn Bradley. She found both a job and a fiancée here during her stay at Merry Lea.

Kaitlyn is now an interpretive naturalist at Chain O' Lakes State Park, Albion, Ind. She is the first year-round naturalist the park has hired. Chain O' Lakes is just nine miles from Merry Lea, so Kaitlyn's new landscape is very similar to Merry Lea's, except for the eleven interconnected lakes that give the park its name. Because of them, Chain O' Lakes is a popular canoeing destination.

As a naturalist, Kaitlyn is in charge of the educational programming Chain O' Lakes offers its guests. She plans and leads natural history hikes and programs on topics such as snakes, monarch butterflies and seed collecting. One popular event involves a "floating campfire." The staff prepares a

fire on a roasting pan supported by PVC pipe, and campers can then canoe or wade to this floating structure and roast marshmallows in the middle of a lake.

When asked what aspects of her training from Merry Lea applied to her new job, Kaitlyn's response was, "Geez, what have I not used in the last two weeks?" Daily, she draws on the natural history components as people ask her about plants, birds or other features of the park. The teaching practicum prepared her to deal with the public, and the research components will be helpful for program design.

Kaitlyn's goals for the next year are to develop more off-season programming and to increase the number of local people using the park and its programs. "Local people often forget we are here and think they need to drive somewhere to get away," she observes. Like Merry Lea, Chain O' Lakes is a local treasure that both travelers and residents can benefit from.

## Maddy Herron

Master's in Environmental Education, 2017

I am currently the camp manager at Fossil Rim Wildlife Center located in Glen Rose, Texas. Fossil Rim is dedicated to the conservation of species in peril. It conducts scientific research, trains professionals and provides public education on conservation. The park is home to many endangered or vulnerable species from around the world, such as the Arabian oryx, African spurred tortoise and the Japanese crowned crane.

Fossil Rim is located on land known as the Comanche Plateau which is in the cross timbers ecoregion. This area forms a boundary between forested areas and the Great Plains. It includes juniper-oak forest where Ashe juniper, live oaks and sumac mix. Rivers, lakes and ponds create a patchwork with the surrounding woods and meadows. Like the meadow and prairie ecosystems in Northern Indiana, the Texas prairies and meadows have been drastically affected by agriculture and the absence of fire. Without fire, the shrub layer succeeds into forest.

My days are focused on running and scheduling educational camps. The camps range from day camps to two-to-three-day overnights. My other big responsibility is hiring, training and managing the education department's interns. I also assist with other education department programs including outreach booths, birthday parties, field trips and tours of the park.

Merry Lea taught me strategies for evaluating programming which will become a critical component of my position in advancing the current programming.

Over the next year, I hope to establish an organized training program for the interns. I am also working toward becoming a certified Texas Master Naturalist. Over the next few years, I hope to reestablish weeklong overnight camps to better serve communities from outside our immediate area. Ω

—Maddy Herron

## Institute for Ecological Restoration:

# A Striking Encounter Rewards Years of Research

The cornfield looked like any other cornfield in Northwestern Illinois. But the group tramping across it was an extraordinary combination of people: Two past presidents of the Ho-Chunk Nation, leaders of the Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation, an archaeologist and Merry Lea's Dave Ostergren.

"I wish I could do those three days all over again," Dave says, reflecting on the week he dropped everything to walk in the woods and visit burial mounds in the rolling hills near Galena, Ill.

The group from Jo Daviess was seeking input from the Ho-Chunk elders on how they should manage a land donation they had received. They hoped to collaborate on a management plan related to Native American mounds and artifacts. What would the Ho-Chunk like to see happen? How could their organization be respectful to the land and its cultural history?

"We'll hike across this cornfield and then we'll get to the sacred area," the director of the foundation said at one point.

"It's all sacred," John, a member of the Ho-Chunk, responded. The group paused at this and laughed at themselves for needing reminding that indeed, all land is sacred. It was a profound moment for Dave as they realized that all this land—cornfields, pastures, parks, burial mounds and woods — was and is still part of the Ho-Chunk culture.

"Why are you doing this?" John asked later. Over food and during windy walks in the sunshine, the conservation organization representatives explained why it is important to them to take care of the land, and the Ho-Chunk representatives listened. When the Ho-Chunk talked, the conservationists listened.

These shared stories and experiences are building the foundation for collaborative management and restoration. Jo Daviess will provide the labor and funding, while the Ho-Chunk offer advice and information from lessons learned elsewhere.

Dave came to be part of the Illinois gathering because Traditional Ecological

Knowledge (TEK) is his primary research area. TEK is the kind of understanding of a landscape that Indigenous Peoples possess through living in one area for centuries.

"The thing I am interested in is not the knowledge itself but the dynamics between Western trained ecologists and people who hold TEK," Dave explains. "If people want to do holistic ecological restoration, why aren't they doing it? How can they work with tribes?" He knows how rare it is for trust and mutual respect to align in ways that allow Indigenous Peoples and Westerners to collaborate, even when both care about the health of the land.

### Important work for peacemakers

"TEK is an important area for Merry Lea and Goshen College because of our historic roots in peacemaking," Dave says. There is also a justice angle: Tribes have frequently had their knowledge appropriated and trampled on.

For the past five summers, Dave has worked with master's and undergraduate research assistants to answer those questions. Ben Shelly (GC

2016), Hannah Barg, (GC 2016), Naomi Gross (GC 2017) and Kaitlyn Bradley (MAEE 2017) have worked with him on this project. In a state where there are no tribal lands, simply figuring out who to talk to and where the action might be was a challenge. They began by making contacts with national parks and local Potawatomi members. One year they surveyed the attitudes of Western-trained ecologists. Other projects involved updating bibliographies and working with the National Park Service on its TEK webpage.

Once in awhile, this kind of background work yields priceless encounters. The fact that Hannah Barg's father was the president of the Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation was the unlikely link that brought Dave into the Ho-Chunk encounter.

"It's all sacred," Dave muses, recalling the cornfield incident. "I think we would manage the land very differently if that's how we thought about it."

See <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/tek/index.htm> for more information on Traditional Ecological Knowledge. Ω

## Merry Lea Serves as Collection Site for Pollinator Partnership



**Monarch Wings Across the Eastern Broadleaf Forest** is a project of **Pollinator Partnership** designed to increase monarch habitat in this ecoregion. It is. The organization's goal is to create over 4,000 acres of new monarch habitat by organizing seed collection and sowing.

Volunteers are trained to recognize 20 key plant species and learn best practices for collecting seed. Merry Lea will serve as a collection site for this project.

Learn more at <http://www.pollinator.org/MWAEBF>



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Organization  
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“ Where Earth and People Meet ”

## Upcoming Public Programs

### Firsthand Fest

Friday, September 29, 6 to 9 p.m.  
Farmstead Barn

Merry Lea’s Firsthand Fest focuses on hearing from people who have firsthand experiences with environmental problems or their solutions. Brick oven pizza, sides and desserts are part of the evening. Among the speakers are the following people pictured in this Merry Leaflet:

- Dr. Dave Ostergren will discuss his experiences with Traditional Ecological Knowledge. See page 7 to learn more.
- Students in Merry Lea’s Sustainability Leadership Semester will share vignettes from their canoe trip through the Elkhart River Watershed. See a photo, page 4.

The cost is \$10 adults or \$5 for students.

### Enchanted Forest

Friday/Saturday, October 27 - 28  
7 to 8:30 p.m., Farmstead Barn

The Enchanted Forest is Merry Lea’s longest running tradition. It is designed for children ages K through 3rd grade, but the chance to be outdoors at night appeals to all ages. Visitors and their favorite children take a night hike by lantern light and meet costumed native animals who describe what their lives are like. A deer, a bat, a frog, a turtle and a spider are among the animals typically represented. Snacks and live music in the barn are also part of the event. The cost is \$3.50 per person.

### Purchasing Meat

The Merry Lea Sustainable Farm has pork and chicken for sale. The animals are raised using organic practices and are fed organic grains. Expect high quality, great-tasting meat.

To see available cuts or pre-order a Thanksgiving turkey, email [ramischler@goshen.edu](mailto:ramischler@goshen.edu).