

The 13-acre Historic Hopewell Vineyard in southeast Pennsylvania sits near Amish country. Owners Karen and Tony Mangus plan to start a winery soon.

## THE mangus FARM



# First-gen farmers

BY ROGER MORRIS FOR USA TODAY

### IT ALL STARTED GRADUALLY.

In 1999, Tony and Karen Mangus relocated from Pittsburgh to an old farmstead in southeast Pennsylvania. Four years later they planted two acres of vines and found eager customers for their grapes among the area's growing number of commercial wineries. Today Tony still

works as an airline pilot and Karen as a corporate purchasing executive, but they also tend 13 acres of wine grapes. Both in their late 40s, they expect to open their own winery within a few years.

"Karen and I are both first-generation farmers," Tony says as he walked between rows of healthy sauvignon blanc grapes on a recent afternoon, "and this is our first attempt at it. But it's already in our blood."

The Manguses represent a growing number of couples in the prime of their corporate and professional careers who are easing into a rural, farming lifestyle.



COURTESY OF SCENIC CONCEPTS/RODERMORRIS/USA TODAY



Koorosh Zaerpoor feeds 1-day-old calf Shasta.

## THE zaerpoor FARM

### TONY AND KAREN MANGUS HISTORIC HOPEWELL FARM OXFORD, PENN.

The Manguses' vineyard is a bucolic enclave on the edge of Amish country. Horse-drawn buggies often drive along the narrow road between the Manguses' renovated farmhouse and a meandering creek.

The Manguses, who also raise exotic chickens for eggs and tend to an aging rescue horse and a donkey, are very modern farmers. Last year, they installed a solar energy system that contains 11 pedestals, each with 12 solar panels. The system generates enough energy for the farm and farmhouse—about 36,000 kilowatt-hours annually—and even allows the Manguses to sell power back to the regional grid. Tony sprays for mildew and hedges the rows using a modern Antonio Carraro tractor made in Italy especially for vineyard work.

Tony flies three or four days a week, usually from Philadelphia to European cities such as Paris, Lisbon, and Madrid. "But," he says, "I'm usually in the vineyard when I'm home, as is Karen on evenings

COURTESY OF THE ZAERPOORS

and weekends." The farming business is successful enough that the Manguses have hired a local farmer as an off-site vineyard manager, but the couple puts in long hours at harvest, often with the help of family and friends, picking grapes and delivering them via rental truck to winery customers over a wide area.

"A winery is the natural progression," Tony says, "and it's the thing that we planned."

That's the next step.

### KOOROSH AND CHRISSE ZAERPOOR, KOOKOOLAN FARMS YAMHILL, ORE.

Theirs wasn't a romantic start.

"Our first conversation was on the phone," says Chrissie Zaerpoor, "about screening procedures at Intel, where we both worked. Then Koorosh became part of an engineering team I headed. I was his boss." That was six years ago. Both had previously been married with children. And when they became romantically involved, corporate rules stated they could no longer be business teammates.

"We were looking for something we could do together," Koorosh says, "but the catalyst came when I had the opportunity to move from Intel's corporate headquarters in suburban



Portland to Los Angeles. Chrissie didn't want to go. We decided that if we wanted to live together, we would have to start a farm."

Koorosh, 50, still has his day job at Intel while Chrissie, 46, is the manager of their six-year-old Kookoolan Farms in the wine country around Yamhill. With a staff of three full-time workers, they raise about 1,500 pasture-raised chickens for meat. They also have a produce-based CSA (community supported agriculture) farm; sell pork, beef, and turkeys; and offer cheese-making classes and supplies. Long an amateur maker of mead, Chrissie has recently added the ancient brew to Kookoolan's product list.

If all this sounds like a very complex operation, it matches the couple's intricate background.

Koorosh was a first-year university student in Iran, with ideas of becoming a farmer, at the time of the revolution against the shah. A member of the out-of-favor Baha'i faith, he was thrown out of the university and worked at odd jobs until he, his wife, and child fled Iran when he was 28. He gradually gained his university degrees. He had his own landscaping business while working on his doctorate at Oregon State University before joining Intel.

Chrissie grew up in the middle of soybean and corn country in central >

The Tysons (from left: Mason, Cameron, Scott, and Nicole) focus on organic and sustainable farming at 180 Degree Farm in Sharpsburg, Ga.



THE  
*tyson*  
FARM

Illinois. She married young, had children, and eventually got her bachelor's degree after a somewhat nomadic career.

At Intel, both managed very complex operations from factory design and startup to long-term equipment planning and procurement.

"Things are not as much in your control in farming as they are in manufacturing," Koorosh says somewhat ruefully, and he cites the need for a variety of business abilities, not the least of which is evaluating your personal capabilities and desires while trying to square them with market demand and competitive capacity.

"I'm still more of a manager like I was at Intel than a farm laborer," Chrissie explains, but the farming environment very much agrees with her. "And I no longer need asthma or allergy medications."

**SCOTT AND NICOLE TYSON**  
180 DEGREE FARM  
SHARPSBURG, GA.

"My experience since I've become a full-time farmer has been very rewarding

and overwhelming," says Nicole Tyson, 37, who for 16 years traveled a week a month as a merchandising executive for a food company. "But if you had asked me five years ago if I'd ever be a farmer one day, I would have told you 'no.'"

A lot has happened to the Tyson family in those five years.

Five years ago, the Tysons bought a 10-acre farm in Sharpsburg, south of Atlanta, with expectations of building a house for their family of two young boys and having a small vegetable patch. Four months later, they discovered their younger son, Mason, then 4 years old, had neuroblastoma, a cancer that often strikes children.

"We put everything on hold and started using our savings to fight Mason's cancer," says Scott, who manages a warehouse for a beverage firm. Both Nicole and Scott became convinced that environmental chemicals might have been a cause of the cancer. When the cancer became non-progressive, they had a 180-degree change of plans—and opened 180 Degree Farm, which produces pasture-raised meats, pastured eggs, and organic vegetables.

"Mason is a miracle, and I refuse to take that for granted," Nicole says. "We have to give back." The Tysons formed a nonprofit 501(c)3 corporation to grow chemical-free food for the community



and to be a learning resource for others similarly interested in organic and sustainable farming. "When we decided to really start farming in 2009, we visited local farms and got help from [nonprofit] Georgia Organics," Scott says. "We're still learning from their and our mistakes. Nicole sort of got thrown into the fire. She was only mildly interested when we bought the farm, but, with our son's illness, she was eager to jump in."

The first crops were planted in 2010. They yielded enough to sell at local farmers' markets and to start a CSA, providing produce on a weekly basis to five families who pay an annual subscription fee. This year, they are fully subscribed and providing vegetables for 25 families. Next year, they expect to grow larger.

Nicole manages the farm with the help of a volunteer intern. Scott says that after a day at the office, "It's a break for me to work hard at the farm, and I love what I'm doing."

Eight-year-old Mason and his older brother, Cameron, who is 12, chip in. "We don't want to burn them out on farming," Scott says, "but Cameron especially enjoys working with the animals. Both boys have their own vegetable gardens with raised beds.

"We moved here to be closer to family," Scott continues. "Now, it's family day every day." ■

COURTESY OF SARA ANTHONY

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