



View of Rowantree Farm from the entrance. The farm is preserved through the Pennsylvania Agriculture Conservation Easement Program (ACEP).



Broiler hens on pasture inside a "chicken tractor"

# Profiles in Soil Health: Rowan Miller

Rowantree Farm sits on 104 acres in Cumberland County, PA. In mid-July, the farm is an idyllic scene with vibrant fields surrounded by woods; a historic barn, milkhouse, and farmhouse complete the picturesque setting, along with the goats, pigs, chicken, sheep, and highland cows scattered throughout the property. Farm owner Rowan Miller runs the farm mostly by herself. The farm was established in 2014, when Rowan bought what she now calls the "small farm" and began raising sheep, chickens, and pigs, growing vegetables, and homesteading. For Rowan, farming was directly connected to her interest and background in health. Rowan worked as a home health nurse and a licensed massage therapist and was trained in Functional Medicine. Through farming, she knew she could provide nutritious food to support her own health and the health of her family and her community, and this is still what motivates Rowan today.

After several years on her 5-acre farm, Rowan wanted to be able to offer more to her customers, so she began searching for available land. In 2021, she purchased 104 acres down the road and made the decision to dramatically expand her operation, most notably adding more livestock. Farming animals is not new for Rowan. She grew up on a sheep farm in the Falkland Islands, where her family raised over 30,000 sheep. So, when Rowan returned to farming as an adult, sheep were naturally the first animals to be introduced to Rowantree Farm. Bringing animals onto her farm was important to Rowan because she wanted to provide healthy, humanely raised protein to her community, in addition to the fruits and vegetables she offered. But also, through rotational grazing, Rowan's pastured livestock operation plays an integral role in regenerating the land and building up soil health on her farm.

The 104 acres that Rowan moved onto in 2021 were previously conventionally tilled row crops.



Rowan Miller poses for a portrait with her tomato plants inside a high tunnel.

For the first two seasons, Rowan continued to plant commodity soybeans and corn. Even though she transitioned to no-till, she was shocked and disheartened from the amount of inputs the crops required; "The soil was so depleted," she recalls. In 2023, when the third growing season at her new farm began, Rowan took on the challenge of making the soil healthy again. She planted cover crops, along with harvested crops of barley, wheat, and alfalfa, and will also rotationally graze her sheep on the alfalfa field. Rowan also left one field fallow this season; though this field will be seeded for forage shortly, she wanted to keep the ground covered in the meantime. "I decided to just let whatever's going to come up, come up... the weeds growing in that field are what the soil needs, even if they're obnoxious," she says. "They're helping the soil recover, keeping it covered, and their roots are building the soil beneath the surface." Rowan did soil testing on this field in the spring and will test it again in the fall before seeding it. The next step on Rowan's new acreage is incorporating more rotational grazing. Rowan intends to have all the fields seeded for forage by next year. With

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**Farm at a Glance**

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**COUNTY:** Cumberland County, PA

**WATERSHED:** Susquehanna

**CROPS:** Vegetables, fruits, eggs, pastured meat (chickens, pork, lamb, beef), wool, and cut flowers

**FARM SIZE:** 104 acres

**SOIL HEALTH PRACTICES:** Cover crops, no till, rotational grazing

**SALES OUTLETS:** Direct-to-consumer including CSA, online store, farmers' markets

Rowan Miller takes down temporary fencing in an area of woods where she had pastured pigs.







*Pigs wander near the barn at Rowantree Farm.*

guidance from her local NRCS office, she received funding from a [Countywide Action Plan Implementation Grant](#) through Cumberland County to install perimeter fencing, and once fences are up, Rowan will be ready to bring more grazing animals onto her pasture.

Rowan is already seeing the soil improving on her farm, and she has taken soil samples to measure the changes in her soil. “You can tell by just looking, there’s worms everywhere” she marvels. She is excited for what’s next. Rowantree Farm is undergoing significant transition and growth, driven by Rowan’s dreams to make the land not only a productive, thriving farm, but also her home, and a place for others to enjoy. Currently, her sons are hard at work restoring the old farmhouse that came with the new acreage, and Rowan will move onto the farm permanently when the house renovation is complete. Rowan will also add a commercial kitchen with plans to host farm-to-table dinners. She dreams of bringing people onto the farm and offering them the chance to connect to the food more deeply.

Rowan Miller embraces the journey of building a diverse, viable, and regenerative farm, and has found the process incredibly rewarding. “I feel grateful to be able to do it... to be outside all day, it’s such a healthy environment.... It’s very empowering but can be stressful.” Rowan has faced challenges, especially when it comes to operating her farm mostly independently.

She admits that she has had to build up the courage to do things herself instead of asking for help, but also has realized that there are certain things she needs an extra hand to do. It can be daunting, and this is why she was happy to find comradery and community in Women for the Land.

In 2022–23, Rowan participated in a [American Farmland Trust Women for the Land Cohort](#), funded by a [Conservation Innovation Grant](#) from Pennsylvania [Natural Resources Conservation Service](#) and a [Northeast Sustainable Agriculture and Education](#) program grant. The cohort, a group of nine women farmers all located in the Susquehanna watershed, came together in person and virtually over the course of nine months to focus on advancing soil health as part of whole-farm systems.

Rowan and the other farmers met for learning circles and field days, completed soil health management plans, and received financial and technical assistance to further develop their soil health practices. In April of 2023, Rowantree Farm hosted a learning circle for the cohort. The women toured Rowan’s farm, presented their soil health management plans, discussed soil health practices, and shared about their struggles and successes. Rowan emphasizes how

meaningful the cohort was to her. “Having comradery, being with other women who are also passionate and dedicated about soil health and farming... there is a wealth of knowledge amongst the women... I would do it again in a heartbeat.” She hopes to continue to stay connected with the group of women moving forward. And, with funding provided through the Women for the Land program, Rowan was able to make improvements on her farm, such as upgrading electric fences.

Whether it’s participating in Women for the Land, talking to other farmers, reading books, or just experimenting on her farm, Rowan is continuously learning and working to make Rowantree Farm better. “I want to make the farm the best it can be,” she says. Rowantree Farm provides customers with a variety of products, from fruits and vegetables to pastured meats and eggs; customers can find these products at farmer’s markets, on the farm’s website, or by signing up for a CSA. On the Rowantree Farm website, you’ll see the motto displayed across the home page, “Our food is our medicine”. For Rowan, healthy soil is not only making the land and animals healthier, but it also contributes to human health; by nourishing the soil, she can then provide nourishing food to others.



*A mobile chicken house on newly seeded pastures at Rowantree Farm*

**For more information on this profile, to learn more about Women for the Land, or to discuss soil health practices, please contact**

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**or visit [farmland.org/project/women-for-the-land](https://farmland.org/project/women-for-the-land) and [farmland.org/soil-health-case-studies](https://farmland.org/soil-health-case-studies)**