



# 10

**TIPS TO HELP YOU DECIDE  
what animal to  
get first on your  
farm or homestead**



**Abbagail + Mackenzie @ Sage & Shepherd Farm**

# SO YOU HAVE FARM OR HOMESTEAD now what?

Planning your farm or homestead can be super exciting, but daunting. Chances are you want animals but don't know where to start, sound familiar? Well, these best 10 tips will help you decide which animal to start with, and don't worry because it won't be long before you have more. Diversifying your farm is key! Remember to have fun along the way.

*-abbigail + mackenzie*



# 1 Topography

How much pasture do you have? What kind of pasture grasses are there? Or is your property all forest? All of these things play a factor in determining the best animals for your farm or homestead. For example, if you do have all forest, chances are raising sheep won't be a great fit since they need lush, legume-rich pasture, but goats, on the other hand, eat more browse. You could also think about rotating pigs through the forest, as they eat everything!

Keeping in mind how much land you have in general, is also important. If you only have 1 acre, raising cattle won't be an option, as chickens or rabbits might be a better fit.



## 2 Make It Mobile

This is a key principle in starting a pasture-based, regenerative farm or homestead. If it's not mobile, it's not doing its job! Any livestock infrastructure you build should be mobile; chicken tractors, rabbit hutches, shade/rain shelters for sheep, pigs, cattle, etc. it should all be able to be rotated around your whole property. The benefit is that you're spreading the animal goodness (manure) to all extents of your property, and allowing the animals to graze fresh new grass constantly.

## 3 Excitement

If you've always dreamed of raising chickens, or turkeys, but everyone is telling you to raise cattle, while cows are great, chances are you won't be as excited and motivated to go outside and do chores every day. Start with what you want (if your land allows) and then go from there. You might really want cattle months from now after getting used to poultry. Plan to add more and diversify your land eventually, which brings us to the next point...

# 4

## Plan to Diversify

While these tips are to help you figure out what animal to start with, having a plan to diversify your land is so important - another contributing factor to a pasture-based, regenerative farm or homestead. Diversifying your animals and having both poultry and ruminants on your land creates ecosystems, builds topsoil, and sequesters carbon. They all benefit one another. Even having a garden can help create an ecosystem, food can be grown for your animals, manure from them helps the garden grow, and chickens can scratch and help make plantable areas, cool right?

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## 5 Climate & Breed

Be sure to do some research about which breeds do best in your climate, as there are definitely breeds made for the cold and for the heat! Breeds like Icelandic chickens, Icelandic sheep, or Highland cattle will all be tolerable of the cold. While they would do poor in warmer climates because they would get too hot! We always recommend heritage breeds of everything, for hardiness and flavour.

## 6 What Do You Like To Eat

This is something that can be overlooked. If you are starting a homestead, think about what you would want your freezer stocked with... chickens for the year, or perhaps a variety of lamb cuts? On the other hand, if you are looking to sell your products, do some research to see what's already in the area, look into niches or get into the competitive market.

## 7 Local Restrictions & Bylaws

Another thing that sometimes can be overlooked is the quantity restrictions and local bylaws. If you're on a micro-scale in suburbia and want pigs, chances are the bylaws say no, and some crazy neighbours might not approve. But chickens, on the other hand, are now allowed in most backyards now! If you live in a rural setting on acreage, the rules turn from what you can and can't have to how many you can and can't have. For example, in Ontario, you're only allowed to have 300 chickens (and are only able to sell them to your friends and family with farm gate sales) before you have to apply for a quota and get inspected. Do your research!

# 8

## Money

This goes without saying, while you can do stuff on the cheap, buying animals, fencing, feed, and building infrastructure, all costs money! So make a budget and a priority list, as you don't have to do it all at once.

# 9

## Breeding & Grow Out Schedule

You should also do some planning in regards to breeding and grow out time. If you think you will be able to have eggs tomorrow, think again. For example, if you choose to buy day-old chicks, meat birds take 8-12 weeks (depending on breed), and layers won't start laying eggs for 6 months. Same goes for rabbit, it's harder to find weaned rabbits, so you'd have to breed them, which takes 5 months from birth to harvest. While finding weaned pigs is easier and they take 4-5 months to grow out. Keep in mind timing of the year as well, if you choose to breed animals you'd want them to birth in the warmer months rather than right in the middle of the winter!



# 10

## Predators

Figure out what predators are most prevalent in your area. Livestock guarding animals and fencing are the best preventatives. Livestock guarding animals such as dogs, llamas, donkeys, or guard geese all help in keeping your animals safe. We use guard geese in with our chicks and poults for our pastured poultry operation. Fencing that is electrified will do wonders, they have solar and plug-in energizers that will keep the fence hot! We use electric fencing and animals. Have multiple ways to protect your animals - one is none, two is one.





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# ABOUT

## Sage & Shepherd Farm

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We're Abbagail & Mackenzie, the husband and wife duo running the farm and those are our 2 dogs Aslan & Levi.

We started this journey with a few chickens for ourselves, and fell in love with the ability to control where our food comes from and the act of farming itself. Since then, our operation has expanded greatly. We sell direct to customers, at farmers markets, to restaurants and small grocers, and ship across Ontario.

We practice regenerative agriculture methods, which build top soil, sequester carbon, and create polycultures. We want to share the message of regenerative ag, and want to inspire and help people who want to opt out of normal living!

Follow along and visit our website for more info and other resources to help your farm or homestead be successful.

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