



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on April 21, 2016

Veteran-run Michigan Farm Opens Training Program for Returning Veterans

According to a 2012 study from the Department of Veterans Affairs, approximately 20 U.S. service veterans take their lives every day. And some experts contend the figure could be even higher than that. What's more, a 2014 update to the study shows that the rates have increased among younger veterans returning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Thankfully, there are people who have made it their business to try to reduce those tragic figures. One example is Mark and Jill Baker of Marion, Michigan.



The Bakers have been running the [Bakers Green Acres](#) farm in Michigan since Mark retired from the Air Force in 2004. The farm employed returning veterans, some of whom had no experience farming but who nonetheless enjoyed the work.

Unfortunately, a run-in with Michigan's Department of Natural Resources six years later very nearly shut the farm down. In 2010, the Michigan DNR [outlawed feral swine](#) — pigs classified as non-native, invasive, and said to be carriers of disease and overall harmful to the environment — and mandated that Baker destroy all his pigs.

The Bakers refused and were dragged through a lengthy legal battle against the state of Michigan, which nearly bankrupted them and cost them their farm.

But Mark Baker contends it was worth the fight. "When I was in the Air Force, I took an oath to defend and protect the Constitution," he told *The New American*. "I refused to give in because I knew that my farm and animals were protected by due process, and the Michigan government was not executing due process."

Baker indicated that after years of litigation, the state eventually dropped all charges against him and moved to have the case dismissed because it became clear that they had no legal standing.

But despite the generosity of donations from people all across the country to help keep the farm afloat while they engaged in the lengthy and expensive legal battle with the state of Michigan, the Bakers decided in December of 2015 to close the farm.

But when word got out that the Bakers were closing the farm, they began receiving phone calls from the families of the veterans who had been employed at the farm begging them to reconsider. The callers claimed that the farm had been a haven to the veterans who otherwise would have had difficulty transitioning from military life to civilian life, and Mark had an epiphany. "I thought I was in the business of producing food, but as it turned out, I was in the business of healing people and didn't know it," Mark recalled. "My wife and I decided that we would keep the farm open, but would shift our focus from production to transition — that is, to help returning veterans transition from warfare to civilian life



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through farming.”

By the beginning of 2016, the Bakers decided to open up a farming program for returning veterans that would teach them farming techniques. They even opened up a dormitory on their property where some of the veterans would live.

Additionally, they extended the program’s services to include providing consultations for veterans who were interested in opening their own farms. In many cases, the consultation also included donated equipment and livestock for the aspiring farmers.

Mark Baker has also developed a following on YouTube, where he has placed training videos on some of his farming techniques. And all of this has been financed by the Bakers themselves, through the income they receive from Bakers Green Acres and Mark’s military pension.

“It is the duty of non-commissioned officers like me to help the young people who have a hard time returning from war,” Mark explained. “A lot of them have injuries that will prevent them from being in the workforce, or have difficulties transitioning from the harsh realities of war to civilian life. This is just one way I can help.”

Mark noted that generous contributions from others have also made his program possible. He has received donated equipment, such as a wood-burning stove and a dishwasher, both of which have been placed in the dormitory for the farmers-in-training. A truck was also donated to the farm, enabling them to execute their outreach program, and various farm tools have been donated.

In an effort to expand the program and assist more veterans, the Bakers are asking for additional donations and have placed a [link](#) on their website where interested donors can offer financial contributions.

But Mark adds that even without financial donations, the farm will continue the program. “We have to look out for each other,” Baker told *The New American*. “Anything I can do to redirect a veteran to something positive reduce the number of veteran suicides is worth it.”



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