

May 2024

# GROWN IN PUTNAM

Local farms lead push  
for healthier foods

A Special Advertising Publication Of

PALATKA DAILY NEWS



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Couple's farm provides community  
with fresher food, valuable info

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Photo by BRANDON D. OLIVER/Palatka Daily News

ABOVE: A duck at Me You and the Chickens Farm looks up to receive food from owners Allen and Renee Franklin.



Photos by SARAH CAVACINI/Palatka Daily News

LEFT: A piece of Herrington Cattle beef sits in the cattle farm's freezer. RIGHT: Michael Scileppi sells James Ranch beef on April 27 at Hasting's Cabbage, Potato and Bacon Festival.

## CATTLE FARMS KEEP VENTURES CLOSE TO HOME

Family ranchers work hard to ensure the  
healthiest, best cuts of beef

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COVER: Submitted photo. A Herrington family member hears their family cattle.

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# THE QUEST FOR BETTER FOOD

## COUPLE'S FARM PROVIDES COMMUNITY WITH FRESHER FOOD, VALUABLE INFO

By Brandon D. Oliver  
PALATKA DAILY NEWS  
[boliver@palatkadailynews.com](mailto:boliver@palatkadailynews.com)

As more people across the nation crave fresher, more organic food, a Satsuma farm is doing its part to provide Putnam County and nearby residents with cruelty-free eggs, chickens and other animals.

Since opening in December 2020, Me You and The Chickens Farm, 209 N. Fifth St., has built up a client base that visits the farm for chickens to raise as pets or harvest for food. If chickens aren't their preference, customers can also choose from ducks, geese, turkeys, goats and, more recently, quail.

Renee Franklin – who with her husband, Allen Franklin, owns the farm – said the facility has more than 20 breeds of chickens, ranging from egg-laying to ornamental. The reasons people frequent the farm vary, she said.

“It's all different reasons why people might want to have these animals,” Renee Franklin said. “Some just like the experience of ... raising all these farm animals. And some actually want to be more self-sustainable and provide their own food and know what went into it and what they're eating.”

Renee Franklin said people have become more discerning about how their food is raised and from where they buy it. They don't want to eat animals that were grown in a lab or in crowded cages to the point of being sick, she said.

The couple said they started the farm during the COVID-19 pandemic when they and others began questioning what was in the food they ate.



Photos by BRANDON D. OLIVER/Palatka Daily News

TOP: Allen and Renee Franklin hold two of the many chickens at their Me You and the Chickens Farm in Satsuma.  
ABOVE: A flock of ducks drink and wander around their pen at Me You and the Chickens Farm in Satsuma.

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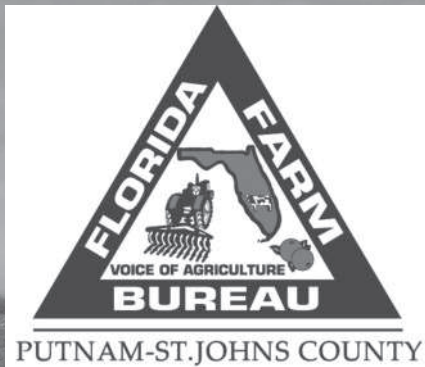
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Photos by BRANDON D. OLIVER/Palatka Daily News

LEFT TO RIGHT: A male turkey roams around the pen of female turkeys at Me You and the Chickens Farm in Satsuma.; Allen Franklin, the co-owner of Me You and the Chickens Farm in Satsuma, tends to some of his goats in late April.; Renee Franklin holds a clutch of chicken eggs at Me You and the Chickens Farm, which she and her husband, Allen Franklin, own in Satsuma.

**QUEST** *continued from page 4*

“It started with this big rush of everybody being scared to death that the stores were going to close down,” she said. “You know, the trucks weren’t going to be running. There’s going to be shortages and not enough food. And then everybody turned to homesteading.”

Since Me You and the Chickens Farm opened, she said, people have warmly welcomed the business and all it has to offer. The farm has built up a strong roster of return customers who want to raise chickens to harvest or to use for eggs. In return, the Franklins and other farm officials go out to the community for what the couple calls Chick Day.

Every Saturday, farm workers set up shop at Hill’s Hardware, 1770 U.S. 17 in Pomona Park, where they sell the baby versions of their animals for people to raise.

“We set up a tent beside Hill’s Hardware,” she said. “Whatever chicks, ducks, geese, turkeys, whatever we have available, we bring it up there. And we set up our tables and just sell to the public up there.

“A lot of people will raise turkeys. They’ll start early in the year and raise up the turkeys so that they can process their own turkeys at the end of

the year for Thanksgiving.”

Me You and the Chicken Farm sells live animals and hatching eggs, but they are preparing to sell harvested livestock, Renee Franklin said. She and her husband have received the go-ahead from the state to harvest animals for sale, and they’re in the process of getting all of the necessary equipment. The goal, she said, is to begin offering harvested animals by the end of the year.

People who buy hatching eggs and live animals with the intent to keep the animals at their property long term can turn to the farm to learn how to properly care for their pets or potential food.

Renee Frankly said they offer tours to teach people how to build coops, what supplies to use and which practices are most likely to keep animals safe.

“Sometimes, they’ll be buying more chickens,” she said about their customers. “Sometimes, they’ll buy some hatching eggs. Sometimes, they just come for a farm tour. As far as I see, they really love it and they enjoy coming out here. And they’re glad that there is a place that they can go to get birds that they know will be healthy.”

Me You and the Chickens Farm is open from 10 a.m. – 7 p.m. daily. To learn more about the animals for sale and other services offered, call 904-762-6513, email [meyouandthechickens@gmail.com](mailto:meyouandthechickens@gmail.com) or message the farm’s Facebook page.

Renee Frankly said she and her husband understand people’s desire for more organic food and will be glad to give information about how to raise the animals bought at the farm.


“We really do take pride in how we keep our animals,” she said. “They’re not raised like a poultry farm. It’s not anything like that. You can tell that we really care about our animals. They may be our breeders, but they’re also our pets.”



Photo by BRANDON D. OLIVER/Palatka Daily News

Romeo the goat eats leaves from a Mexican sunflower tree at Me You and the Chickens Farm in Satsuma.





# CATTLE FARMS KEEP VENTURES CLOSE TO HOME FAMILY RANCHERS WORK HARD TO ENSURE THE HEALTHIEST, BEST CUTS OF BEEF

Photos by SARAH CAVACINI/Palatka Daily News

James Ranch employee Michael Scileppi and ranch hand Marion June corral cows into a pen on James Ranch in April.

**By Sarah Cavacini**  
**PALATKA DAILY NEWS**  
*scavacini@palatkadailynews.com*

**I**t's a family affair for Putnam County cattle farms, two of which give residents some of the best options for farm-to-table meat.

Although the farmers at James Ranch in East Palatka have been there for only 11 years, they've got regular customers, as does the decades-old Herrington Cattle in San Mateo. Both families strive to give buyers the best quality meats by raising their cattle with organic feed.

**Retirement attempts led to booming business at James Ranch.**

As the sun rose above grassy fields of James Ranch in late April, a herd of hungry cows mooed impatiently. They want food, Annette Scipelli said.

She was right. The herd clopped behind ranch hand Marion June at the East Palatka farm as he rode on a golf cart from one end of the field to the other with buckets of feed.

Annette Scipelli runs James Ranch, 120 Dog Branch Road, with her husband, Ed, and their two sons, Michael and Joseph.

The Scipelli family moved to East Palatka 11 years ago from Fort Lauderdale to retire peacefully.

"We were going to retire and just have some cattle as a fun thing to do and just realized that it was more fun doing it and educating people on it," Annette Scipelli said.

They started with six cows and currently have about 150, Ed Scipelli said.

His sons learned all about the beef cattle business from numerous sources. They took classes at St. Johns River State College and the University of Florida and continue to network. The Scipellis raise their cows on the farm, send them off to a butcher under the regulation of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and bring the cuts back to James Ranch.

The family can sell the meat from the ranch, or they set up shop at local farmer's markets.

"With everything changing in our food, people took an interest in wanting to know what's in their food," Annette Scipelli said.

The family said customers sometimes buy the

*continued on page 10*



**CATTLE** continued from page 9

whole cow. At James Ranch, the cows are hormone-free and fed a mixture of peanuts and corn.

“It’s all-natural,” Michael Scipelli said.

Even if people aren’t looking for their next steak, the ranch is open to field trip groups, summer camps and people who want to learn.

People can visit the ranch Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. – 3 p.m. and Saturday from 9 a.m. – 1 p.m. Call James Ranch at 386-972-7513 for more information.

### A 70-year family trade at Herrington Cattle

Three-year-old Elzie Herrington giggled when the large heifers at Herrington Cattle scooped up a handful of hay with their tongues.

Although Elzie couldn’t compare to the size of the female cows, the child didn’t seem afraid when she stuck her hand out to them. Her mom, Sally Herrington, said Elzie wanted to feed Frieda, the one heifer the little girl was allowed to name.

“She likes to be a cowgirl,” the girl’s mother said.

Now, they must keep Frieda, but Herrington Cattle has many more cows on 270 East End Road in San Mateo.

The Herringtons said their cattle are pasture-grazed and fed a corn-based ration. This type of feed allows the meat to marble and increases its quality, the family added.

“Herrington Cattle uses many best management practices to ensure our cattle receive the utmost care,” Sally Herrington said in an email. “Our family feels that cattle that are raised in a low-stress environment help produce fine, quality beef.”

She said the cattle farm just got a new freezer trailer to start selling their cuts at local farmer’s markets, but they can also sell their meat right from their property. It’s a farm-to-table process for Herrington Cattle.

She said the most popular request is for meat for hamburgers, but in late April, customers had bought nearly every cut from Herrington’s on-site freezer.

The Herringtons have been selling and raising cattle on East End Road since 1963, and many members of the family still live next to each other.

“Bob Herrington, along with his sons R.T. and Charles, care for the cattle on a daily basis,” she said in the email. “You will also find the Herrington ladies and grandchildren



Photo by SARAH CAVACINI/Palatka Daily News

The Herrington family, Charles, Sally and Elzie, stand together in front of their cattle farm in April.

helping with the daily chores, such as feeding, sorting or hauling cattle. It is truly a family-run operation.”

Not only does the family have local customers, but the Herringtons ship meat to people nationwide every week. They have wholesale beef shares, retail packages and individual cuts.

People can always keep up with Herrington Cattle on social media, but they are encouraged to contact the rancher directly by calling 386-937-0860.



Photo by SARAH CAVACINI/Palatka Daily News

The Scilleppi Family, Michael, Annette, Ed and Joseph, stand with one of their cows at their James Ranch cattle farm in April.

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# Agriculture by the Numbers



## Farms and Land in Farms

### Putnam has 84,656

acres of agriculture. Ag lands are divided up the following crops, woodland and pastures.

**13,500**

acres of cropland used for vegetable production, with potatoes being the largest crop commodity.

**\$35 Million**

Average farm size  
**200 acres**

Florida ranks  
**18th**  
among all states in number of farms.

Tied at  
**32nd**  
in land in farms

## Livestock

Livestock in Putnam County consists mainly of beef cattle, but dairy cows, poultry, hogs, sheep and horses also contribute.

**4,000 head**

of beef cattle within cow-calf operations. Approximately 1/3 of the agricultural acreage is used as pastureland, and livestock brings in approximately

**\$11 MILLION**

annually.

*Source: UF/IFAS Extension (2017 Ag Census)*

## Florida |

### Vegetables, Melons and Berries

#### Acreage

The harvested acreage for 2017 for the published major berries, potatoes, vegetable crops and watermelons totaled 200,600 acres, down 5% from the 211,900 acres harvested the previous year.

#### Increased acreage

Cabbage 6%

Strawberries 3%

#### Less acreage

Potatoes -1%

Watermelons -2%

Tomatoes -3%

Bell Peppers -3%

Snap Beans -8%

Cucumbers -12%

Squash -13%

Sweet Corn -14%

#### Production

Production in 2017 of the published major berries, potatoes, vegetable crops and watermelon totaled 39.8 million hundredweight, down 6% from the 42.2 million hundredweight the prior calendar year.

#### Production increased

Sweet potatoes 41%

Cabbage 9%

Tomatoes 3%

Cucumbers 2%

#### Less production

Potatoes -1%

Strawberries -11%

Sweet Corn -17%

Squash -18%

Blueberries -18%

Snap Beans -23%

Watermelons -23%



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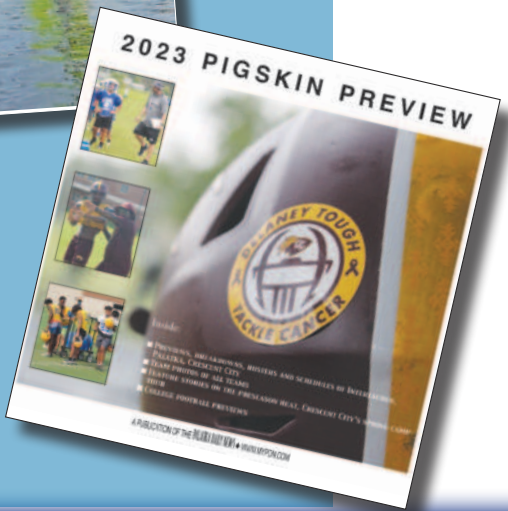
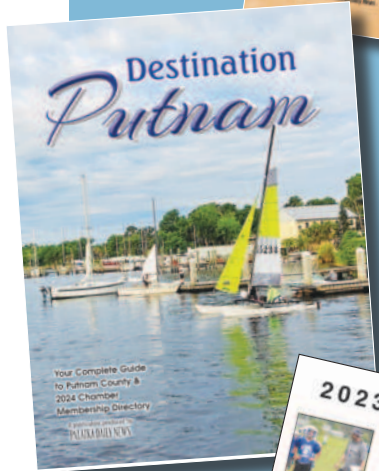
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