

Shared Dream, Hard Work, and MARBIDCO's Next Gen Program Helps Young Farmers Create Unique Space



Jacob Buchanan and Victoria Robinson, relatively new to the world of farming, launched their distinctive agribusiness at Black Rock Farm in Myersville, Frederick County, with the support of family, a shared dream, and MARBIDCO's Next Generation Farmland Acquisition Program.

Jacob attributes his career path to his grandfather. As a child, his grandad would take him to tractor pulls, sparking Jacob's fascination with tractors, which eventually led him to work as a mechanic for Caterpillar. His love for the outdoors also drove him to take on various jobs at local farms in nearby Wolfsville, where he could further develop his passion for land cultivation.

Victoria, who had a background in horseback riding as a child, became involved in 4-H programs and in her Sykesville school's FFA program to explore agricultural

career options. Her talents guided her towards the marketing side of agriculture, where she plans and develops programs to educate others about farm life.

"The horses were the gateway to agriculture and farming as a career," Victoria shared. Jacob's parents bought the farm in 2017.

In 2023, the couple embarked on their business venture and decided to bring the family farm to life. By 2025, they were ready to go ahead and purchase the farm.

They learned about MARBIDCO's **Next Generation Farmland Acquisition Program** from the Frederick County Office of Agriculture. The Buchanan's applied to the program and were granted approval, enabling them to buy the 2-parcel, 55.5- acre farm from Jacob's parents in 2025.

The Next Gen Program is essentially a farmland conservation easement option purchase program that is designed to help facilitate the transfer of farmland (that is typically over 50 acres in size) to a new generation of farmers while also effectively helping to preserve the agricultural land from future development.

Under the Next Gen Program, MARBIDCO will pay up to 51% of the Fair Market Value (FMV) of the land only (with a cap of \$500,000) to be used as a down payment.

Following the land sale transaction, the Next Gen farmer has several years to sell the permanent easement to a rural land preservation program that is able to hold the permanent easement, thus extinguishing the development rights on the property forever. In their application to MARBIDCO, the Buchanan's stated, "The Next Generation Program would allow us to financially carry-on sustainable farming practices and allow us to grow

our operation to provide affordable, locally grown products for not only our generation but many to come. We plan to continue to grow our pumpkin operation, raise Highland cattle, and free-range poultry on pasture. Additionally, we hope to grow our hay business to provide affordable feed and products sold locally.”

“Without them (the parents) and MARBIDCO we couldn’t have afforded the farm,” said Jacob. Besides the acreage, the farm has four pole barns for storing hay and equipment and to shelter the cattle. To increase crop yields they rent an additional 50 acres nearby. Jacob and Victoria have fully embraced an agritourism model by offering tours, craft days, and a variety of special events featuring their Highland cows as the main attraction, all while successfully managing a profitable business selling hay, cornstalks, and pumpkins for the fall decorating season.

In 2023, Jacob and Victoria grew their first pumpkin crop from seeds they had saved from different pumpkin varieties they liked.

“We didn’t purchase any of our original seeds,” Jacob mentioned.

Although they initially held full-time jobs outside the farm, they were enthusiastic about selling their products to the local community but faced challenges due to limited “free” time and the inability to hire an employee.

This situation inspired them to set up a “self-serve” stand on their property, as well as another one in town; essentially, a hay wagon converted into an honor system pumpkin stand. They devote the entire summer to cultivating the pumpkins, hand-picking each one, and take pleasure in being part of many families’ fall decorations every year.

“Simple and wholesome is the goal,” said Jacob.

Without the Next Gen program, the couple wouldn’t have been able to establish the kind of farm business they envisioned. Every step has provided them with a practical means to generate income from their hard work. The benefits of their farming endeavors have been growing as they move forward.

Jacob manages all aspects of the farm that involve hay and crop production. They also produce mini-straw bales to create a complete look for those decorating during the fall season. Black

Rock Farm sells its harvest to a wholesaler that services Maryland and Virginia retailers. He also ensures the land remains sustainable by rotating crop rows each planting season. His full-time job off the farm as a mechanic makes him the go-to person for repairs, welding, and equipment operations in the area as well.

“My co-workers don’t get it when I say I’m going home to work,” he jokes. “It’s incredibly rewarding to see your hard work and efforts come to a fulfilling conclusion.”

Currently, Victoria is working full-time at the farm, focusing on marketing, and leading the Highland breeding program while organizing events at Black Rock Farm. With a background in agritourism, she is committed to creating opportunities for others to learn about and engage with agriculture firsthand.

In the beginning, Victoria started sharing pictures of the Highland cattle on their social media accounts.

“We had a lot of inquiries about the cows,” said Victoria. “It was never on our radar or a goal.” Initially, they were reluctant to let the public visit the farm to see the cows, but as the inquiries increased, they decided to take the plunge and create a new source of income.

“We have monthly year-round private visits and seasonal events,” explained Victoria.

“Most of the people who visit are from the DMV. It is a chance to get out of the city and see a cow in real life. People enjoy the opportunity to do something different.”

The Highland events include an opportunity to brush the woolly cows and spend some time with them. The Highland cattle have name tags suspended on cattle panels in the cow barn to help familiarize visitors with the individual cows.

The farm originally had angus cattle, but Victoria was interested in the Highland breed, that generally have a docile temperament and are good with farm visitors. They sold the angus cattle and purchased two Highland cows, and today they have 20 with one more on the way.

“Breeding the Highlands is solely a niche industry, generally selling to those who are homesteading. We only sell live animals,” explained Victoria.

She said they sell the cows on a case-by-case basis. If a family already has another cow, a single Highland will be sold, if there are no other cattle, then they sell two at a time. “A little bit of vetting goes into it. It’s like an adoption process,” she added.

Black Rock Farm also collaborates with a K-12 educational program via a virtual field trip for students across the country.

This engaging lesson highlights the Highlands and provides students with an exclusive glimpse of life on a Maryland farm. Victoria said the sign up for the event was around 1,000 with about 500 students participating.

They transported some of their Highlands to the Great American Farmers Market during National Farmers Market Week in August on the National Mall in Washington D.C. There they encountered people who had never seen a Highland cow and asked if it was a bison or a horse.

“A lot of people have no connection to farming,” noted Victoria.