



Beyond The Law: Marina Sideris

Interview and Photos by Daniel J. Murphy

Descending the hill at Dooryard Farm in Camden, Marina Sideris passes a long row of garlic scapes piercing through the cover of hay. Because garlic is planted in the fall, it invariably is the first to emerge from the deep sleep of winter, providing needed confirmation that summer indeed will return. In the weeks ahead, the adjacent fields will be filled with wide variety of fresh produce that will be made available to local restaurants and farm stand customers. With her husband, Cooper Funk, Sideris is among the new generation of young farmers who have committed themselves to carrying on Maine's celebrated agricultural tradition. In her other world, Sideris is a solo practitioner specializing in criminal law, with a special emphasis in restorative justice. Sideris recently met with the Maine Bar Journal to discuss her interest.

MBJ: Please tell us our readers about your farm.

MS: Our farm is called Dooryard Farm in Camden, which is right in town—less than a mile from downtown Camden. It is a certified organic vegetable farm. We also raise pigs and broiler chickens, but that's on a pretty small scale at this point. The bulk of what we do is vegetable production. My husband Cooper is a full-time farmer and I help out wherever I can in different ways.

MBJ: How has the reception been in the community to Dooryard Farm?

MS: Great. Cooper and I have been here for a little over two years, but this farm is very well known in the community. Before we bought the farm, nothing was happening here for a few years, but for the prior 50-plus years, it was run as an egg farm. Many people in the community remember those days. Hay has also been sold here for years and years, and still is. In its later years, there was a farm stand as

well. People were very excited to see us reopen the farm stand and to see the farm preserved.

MBJ: How is the farm being preserved?

MS: The farm is being preserved under a conservation easement. We bought it from Maine Farmland Trust (MFT), whose mission is the preservation of agricultural lands. MFT facilitates passing along agricultural lands to new generations of people who want to farm them. Many people supported Maine Farmland Trust's fundraising campaign to preserve the farm. People tell us how happy they are to see the land in production again, and they are eager to buy things at the farm stand. It has been a very warm welcome.

MBJ: What are some of the things grown by Dooryard Farm?

MS: We grow a wide variety of products, including lettuce and salad greens, onions, peas, summer squash, tomatoes, peppers, okra, eggplant,

cucumbers, winter squash, kale, sweet corn, radishes, spinach, carrots. We need a wide variety of things so that we can have as well rounded a farm stand as possible. Half of what we grow is sold at our farm stand, and we also sell





to several markets and restaurants. In addition, we grow some specialty items at the request of a couple local chefs.

MBJ: What are some of those items?

MS: There's a Southeast Asian restaurant here in Camden called Long Grain, a really fabulous restaurant. Last year, the farm started selling things to them, mostly just what was already being grown, such as lettuce, green onions and some different pepper varieties. This year, the chef made a few specific requests, such as for negi (Japanese scallions), gai lan (Chinese broccoli), and ngo gai (a Vietnamese herb). We are also in trials for a few things for a local caterer.

MBJ: What are some of the enjoyable aspects of farming?

MS: Well, being outside is awfully enjoyable. We both enjoy physical labor. It's a whole other way of working and being. Working outside has some meditative qualities, and it just feels good to get out there and work with your hands and work in the soil. It's also rewarding to have so many people be so excited about what we're doing and so happy to be eating the food that's grown here. And, it's wonderful for us to grow so much of the food that we eat. We also are raising our two-and-a-half-year-old son, and I really can't imagine a better place to raise kids. It's beautiful and rewarding to watch the farm go from where it is now in spring, where the only growth is in the greenhouse and the land looks

bleak, to seeing plants emerge from the ground. There are so many phases a farm goes through over the course of a season, and it's pretty awesome to watch that transformation.

MBJ: What are some of the biggest challenges in farming for Dooryard?

MS: It's tremendously hard work for a very uncertain financial reward. The schedule is challenging because there are times of year that are just incredibly busy, and you can't buy yourself more time. There are often very long days and very few breaks. It is always a bit of a tradeoff to figure out whether to hire more help, which cuts into whatever small profit you might generate. It's a real balancing act. We do hire people, but you don't want to do that any more than is necessary. And then there are lots of factors beyond our control, such as the weather, the market, and crop pests. It tends to be a bit of an emotional rollercoaster.

MBJ: How did your family become interested in farming?

MS: My husband Cooper has had a long-time interest. He's from California, and has extended family who are farmers. He originally got into agriculture because he was doing international development work, including sustainable agriculture





program development in Tanzania. He decided that he wanted a bit more experience in agriculture, so he found a program at the University of California, Santa Cruz. They have a farming apprenticeship program called The Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems. It is a six-month program where you live on their 25-acre farm and learn all manners of farming



methods. He went there thinking he wanted more experience to inform his international development work, and about halfway through, he decided that he completely loved farming and that's what he wanted to do. In the process of being there, he also met a community of farmers, other people who were at the program at the same time but also more people who had been through it in prior years. So our eyes were opened to the fact there were actually a lot of young people like us who are choosing to get into farming.

MBJ: Any intersection between my legal work and farming?

MS: I had a funny day last fall. I had to be in court first thing. But Cooper was slaughtering a pig that day, and didn't have anyone to help him. So, as soon as I finished in court, I hustled home, changed into my grubbier clothes, and went out to help. By this point, the pig was dead and we were scraping the hair off the pig. It's not the most pleasant task but we believe in eating meat that we grow, or that's

grown by farmers we know. I helped for a couple of hours and then put my suit back on, and headed out for another court appearance that afternoon. Most days aren't that exciting, but that was a fun one.



Daniel J. Murphy is a shareholder in Bernstein Shur's Business Law and Litigation Practice Groups, where his practice concentrates on business and commercial litigation matters.

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