

She Wrote *the* Book

How this Virginia grower came to write a practical guide for other women wanting to get into the "business."

"PEOPLE SAY, 'YOUR GARDEN MUST BE BEAUTIFUL,'" says Audrey Levatino of her specialty cut-flower farm near Gordonsville, Va. It's not like owning a "landscaped country garden," she says. "It's work."

It's work she loves so much, she stopped teaching high school English to run the farm on the 23-acre property she and husband, Michael, bought in 2002. Michael's full-time book-publishing work means Audrey operates the farm—named "Ted's Last Stand"—mostly alone. The name came from a rooster that died because of the couple's inexperience. Without a guard dog, the rooster needed nightly protection. That didn't happen, and Audrey says, "A trail of feathers is all we found."

She includes such lessons in "Woman-Powered Farm: Manual for a Self-Sufficient Lifestyle from Homestead to Field" (W.W. Norton, \$24.95). The cover features her 1955 Massey Ferguson® 65 "workhorse" tractor, which she uses to plow, mow, haul and gain height for chores, such as putting up and taking down hoop houses.

Audrey delivers practical tips learned through mistakes and triumphs from farmers she knows, as well as those from her experience. Readers get instructions and photographs shot by Michael on how to build fences, chop wood and other practical skills, as well as advice on topics like obtaining land.

When she meets women who want to replicate her experience, Audrey recommends finding a supportive farming community. "You're going to need help, you're going to need to commiserate and," she says, "you're going to need to share your victories."

—Nancy Dorman-Hickson

■ For additional tips from Audrey and to learn more about her farm and book, see myfarmlife.com/wrotethebook.