



Land Ethic Mentorship

For Historically Underserved Farmers & Ranchers

MEET THE MENTEES

**Tiffany Schilling, Sunset Ridge Vineyard
Marlow, Oklahoma**



Tiffany Schilling

“.....

I feel like I am supposed to be a steward for the land. It makes me feel connected to the greater good. Knowing that whatever comes off of the farm hasn't been sprayed with something I wouldn't eat. It's a responsibility I have.

.....”

Tiffany Schilling is working to make the 10-acre vineyard she inherited from her father economically viable and ecologically sustainable. Her primary goal has been to reduce chemical usage, and is focused on restoring soil health and implementing regenerative practices.

Her Story

In 2005, when Tiffany's father purchased 10 acres of land in Oklahoma, she worked alongside him to plant vines for the vineyard. Tiffany loved working with her dad, and would make the 150-mile round trip to help him prune the vines, harvest the grapes, and deliver the fruit to wineries until his death in 2017.

That's when Tiffany learned to drive a tractor.

She and her four brothers tried to keep the vineyard going after her dad died. Tiffany and her mother provided most of the labor, but the work was hard, and Tiffany still lived 75 miles away. They made the difficult decision to sell the farm.

“We put it up for auction, and a couple bought it, but before the sale was finalized, they became overwhelmed and backed out of the purchase.” Her family kept the land, but the tractor and other farming equipment had already been sold.

That was a turning point for Tiffany and her husband, Michael. She had always wanted to farm, but Michael was hesitant. When the land sale fell through, Michael felt like it was a sign that they were meant to have the vineyard. The loss of the equipment became an opportunity to make a shift and explore new practices. Tiffany started talking to her brother about soil health and started researching equipment that would work for her.





ADVICE FOR NEW FARMERS:

Research and research more. There are tools and people who have experience who will help you. You also need to define your goals. I knew what I wanted to do, but as I move forward, those goals get more specific. I used to say that I wanted to improve soil health. Now I say that I want to improve soil health by grazing Gulf Coast sheep.



Tiffany sees the vineyard as a legacy she's inherited, and she wants to improve upon it. "The way my dad managed it was the way we were taught to do it. But I would like to use less chemicals. The land has been sitting dormant for three years, and very little has been done to it. I want to build soil health by incorporating livestock—sheep and pasture-raised ducks."

Her Mentor

Paul Muller, co-owner of Full Belly Farm in Guinda, California. Organically certified since 1985, Full Belly Farm received the 2014 California Leopold Conservation Award in recognition of their diverse, regenerative agricultural practices. Though his farm and climate are very different from Tiffany's Oklahoma vineyard, Paul knows what it's like to start from scratch, and how to manage a low-to-no chemical system.



Lessons Learned

"Paul connected me to a vineyard who is grazing sheep. And they helped me with specific questions

about effective trellises for a grazing system, and even shared the way they were built." Tiffany has already implemented some of those new practices, and part of her vineyard is designed with electric fencing. Based on Paul's recommendation, she plans to plant a diversified cover crop that utilizes 10-14 different varieties and will inoculate those seeds to support healthy microbial life in her soil. Under a Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) contract, Tiffany also seeded one acre of native pollinator habitat on her land.

What is Next?

Tiffany and her husband are currently building a home on the vineyard, incorporating a farm structure built by her dad. Her goal is to be farming full time this year, with little or no debt. In the next three years, they hope to integrate sheep into the operation to assist with weed and grass management.

Enroll Now!

Learn more and sign up for this free mentorship opportunity at:
sandcountyfoundation.org/mentorship
or contact Nikki D'Adamo-Damery at:
nikki@sandcountyfoundation.org



Natural Resources
Conservation Service

The Land Ethic Mentorship program serves historically underserved (socially disadvantaged, beginning, limited resource, and veteran) farmers and ranchers with resources to support their conservation and production goals. Sand County Foundation's network of Leopold Conservation Award-winning farmers and ranchers, who have been recognized for extraordinary conservation achievement, serve as program mentors. Mentors support their mentees as they develop their conservation and agricultural practices to balance farm productivity, ecosystem health, and community wellbeing.



Sand County Foundation inspires and empowers a growing number of land owners and managers to ethically care for the land to sustain water resources, build healthy soil, enhance wildlife habitat, and support outdoor recreation.

www.sandcountyfoundation.org