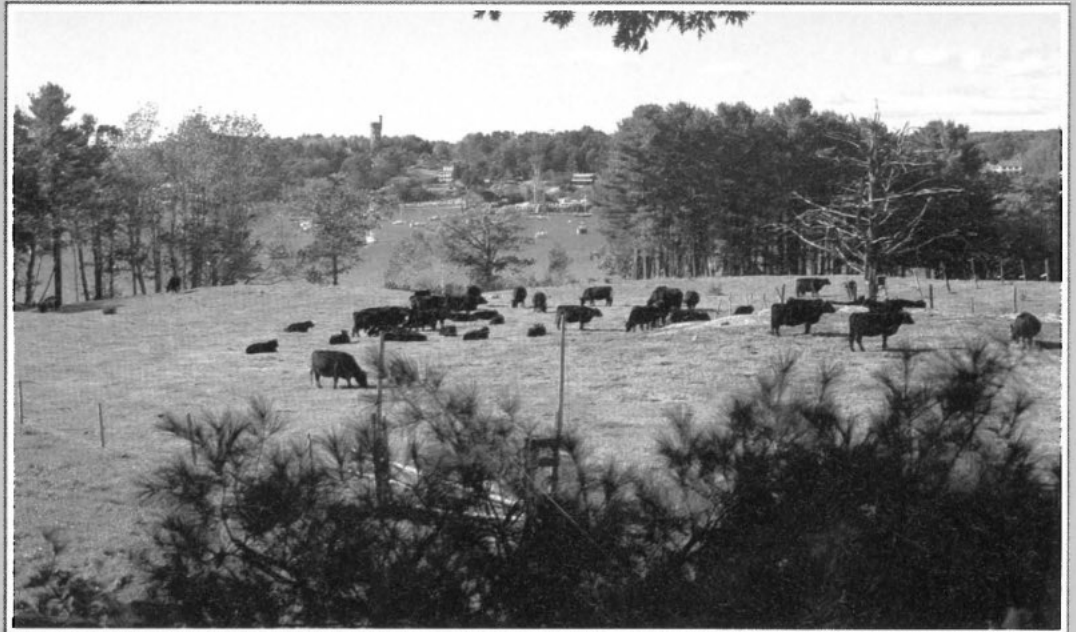


At Wolfe's Neck

Nearly postcard perfect scene of the Wolfe's Neck herd in its coastal setting.

Wolfe's Neck Farm has been the object of both a preservation and organic (read "natural") ethic for three decades.



Scenic values attract thousands of campers to Wolfe's Neck yearly.

by Janet Mayer
Johnstown, Pennsylvania



Farm, Maine

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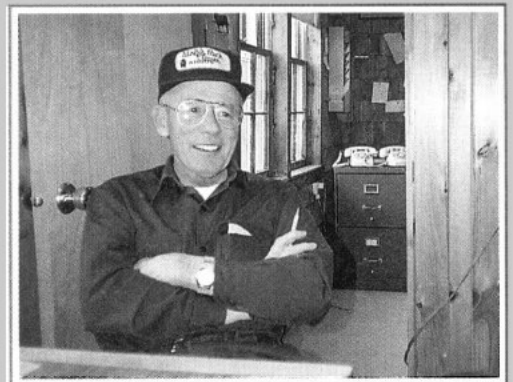
n recent years, an overwhelming number of health conscious Americans have shown a strong preference for chemical-free meats, vegetables, and fruits. The American consumer is becoming more aware of long-term health effects of the food they consume, and the demand for organic food is on the increase.

Those who buy organically grown foods maintain the products taste better, have more nutritional value, and are better for your body. Many people are willing to pay higher prices to get a naturally grown product, but at present according to the Department of Agriculture, the demand for organic food far exceeds the supply. To produce a *truly* organic product the use of all hormones, pesticides, and synthetic fertilizers must be abandoned. To farm organically means using only natural substances in every phase of producing a product. Actually, most farmers just don't want to take the extra effort and time to change to an organic operation.

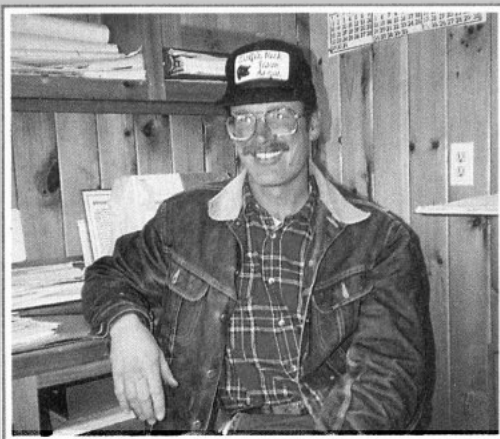
To the personnel at Wolfe's Neck Farm in Maine, the idea of producing organic food is nothing new. They have been producing and marketing organic beef since 1959. At present, the farm produces about 125,000 pounds of beef each year. The 900-acre saltwater farm sets along the Atlantic Coast, near the scenic village of Freeport. It's situated on a peninsula between the Harraseeket River and Casco Bay. The name Wolfe's Neck is derived from the shape of the peninsula which is said to resemble the head and neck of a wolf. The farm valued at more than \$2 million was originally owned and operated by the late

Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence M.C. Smith of Philadelphia. The first section of the farm was purchased in 1946 and later the Smiths bought four other farms which surrounded the original tract. At one time the farm consisted of 2,000 acres. Today, the farm is made up of three areas which are referred to by the staff as Little River, Salt Box, and Main Barn. Many of the buildings at the three locations are more than 100 years old and have a New England charm and history that is undeniable.

The late Mrs. Smith was a philanthropist and farmland preservation activist, and it was concern over the safety of farm chemicals that prompted the Smiths to begin farming Wolfe's Neck organically. Mrs. Smith was a charming, sensitive woman who intended to prevent the farmland from growing up in trees and brush. She described the farm as a gorgeous piece of land, and she felt it was very



Retiring manager Charlie DeGrandpre has been around Angus, organic methods, and farm-to-consumer marketing of high quality beef for most of his beef and farming career.



Steve Child, too, has been a disciple of sustainable agriculture and will assume management October 1.

important for people to be able to see the sea across their fields. She also maintained that "kids need a dirt road to walk on". Therefore, access to all sections of the farm are by a series of dirt roads.

After Mr. Smith's death in 1975, his wife continued operating the farm organically. The Smiths had six children but none were interested in farming. Consequently in 1983, Mrs. Smith began negotiations to donate the farm to the University of Maine. She wanted to preserve what she and her husband had built and also felt the farm could be used as a research and educational center. She resolved to keep the farm's craggy shore "from being overrun with little houses." One of the main problems encountered was the University of Maine was located at Orno which is 150 miles from the farm.

To solve the problem, it was decided administration of the farm would be handled by the University of Southern Maine, which is located about 21 miles away in Portland. After three years of

negotiations, the University took charge on January 1, 1986. Mrs. Smith's gift also included \$500,000 to cover the farm's operating expenses. She died in 1987.

Wolfe's Neck Farm also operates the Recompence Shore Campgrounds. The 90 campsites, which are open to the public, are situated among stately pine trees that border the farm's fields giving campers a imposing view of the ocean on one side and a beautiful vista of open farm land on the other. The campground is a real money-maker for the farm with 16,000 to 17,000 campers staying at the campground each year. Campers begin calling the farm office as early as January for reservations for the season which usually begins around May 20. The farm maintains a freezer at the campground office because many of the campers like to buy Wolfe's Neck beef.

Farm manager Charlie DeGrandpre is a staunch advocate of the organic method of farming. Charlie was born and raised on a farm in Massachusetts where he attended classes at various vocational agriculture schools and also took farm management courses at the University of Massachusetts. After a stint in the Navy and working a while in construction, he began working for Saracen Farm in Ipswich, Mass. where they farmed with organic methods. Saracen was basically a registered Guernsey operation, but they also raised beef cattle, poultry, sheep, and pigs. Charlie recalls the farm worked closely with some British who were influential in the organic agriculture movement, namely Lady Eve Balfour and Friend Sykes.

Charlie always felt the people at Saracen Farm overdid the organic avenue by composting all of the manure from the various farm animals. It was an enormous project. For planting, they would purchase only certain certified seed which was truly organic.

"The organic methods have a great deal of merit, but you have to have a happy medium," explains Charlie.

From there he went to Alfafa Farm in Topsfield, Mass., a non-organic, registered Guernsey operation. He spent 11 years working at Alfafa, and it was here Charlie got his first experience in marketing farm products. He managed and operated a country store where he sold the farm's high quality dairy products. He met Mr. Smith in the store and subsequently was hired to manage Wolfe's Neck Farm in 1968.

Charlie relates that Mr. and Mrs. Smith chose to raise Angus cattle at Wolfe's Neck for various reasons. Several of their friends raised Angus, and Mrs. Smith also felt that the Angus were a more hardy breed of cattle and would do well in the extreme cold of the Maine winters.

They also hoped the black cattle would be more resilient to pinkeye. The original herd consisted of 30 head of registered Angus cows purchased locally and in Pennsylvania.



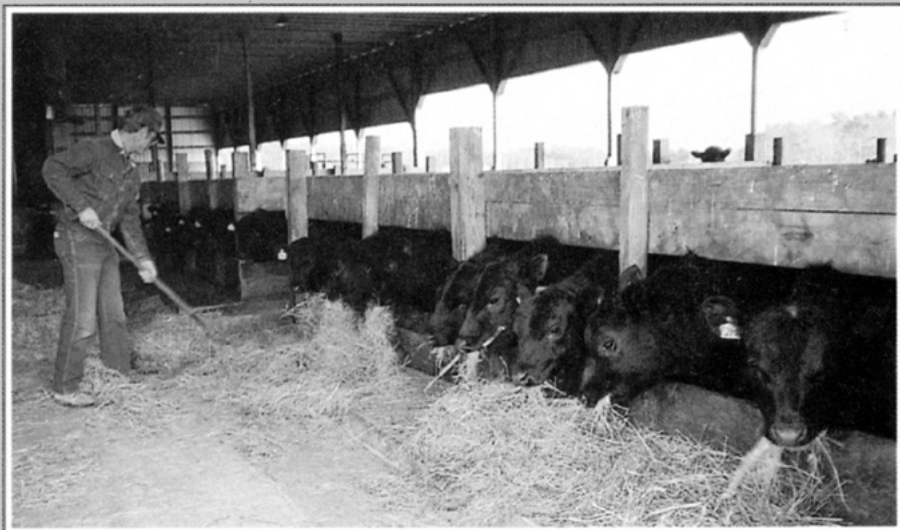
Claire DeGrandpre with the dog "Angus". (Yes, "Angus".)

A problem Charlie encountered many times over the years was not being able to cull the herd as he felt necessary. The Smiths had certain cows that were pets and therefore not to be culled. This resulted in a herd that wasn't keeping abreast of the times."

Charlie wanted to upgrade the breeding programs to get rid of the smaller, shorter cows, but Mr. Smith was content to keep the cattle as they were. After a great deal of persuasion, Charlie leased the Hedgerow Commander bull and the herd started to shape up. The university extension people were very helpful in assisting the farm locate cows and to add size and muscle to the herd. With their counsel, the farm purchased cows at local auctions and from Puzzle Mountain Farm.

Later, Mr. Smith thought crossbreeding the herd would be a good idea and purchased a Charolais bull. He soon changed his mind as the project turned into a disaster of calving problems. The herd has made considerable progress in its upgrading in the last six or seven years and will continually strive to update and improve genetically.

The present herd fluctuates between 275 to 300 head, with only about 10 to 15 being registered stock. According to Charlie most of the cattle could be registered, but because this is strictly



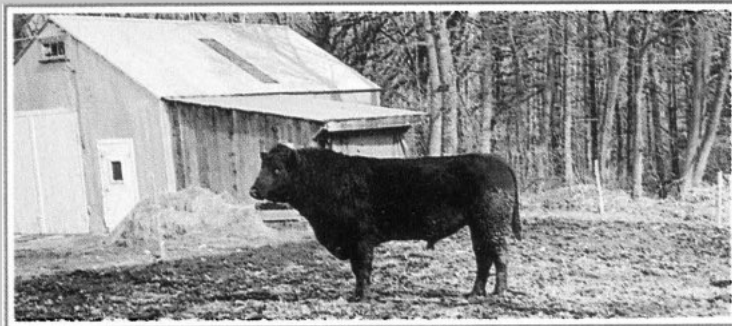
a beef operation and not seedstock, they chose not to register the cattle. The farm never uses artificial insemination because the beef is advertised as being 100 percent natural and the farm tries to follow through with that theme. They have used Bandolier and Fleetwood bulls in their program and last year they used a Traveler's Destination bull.

The desirable traits they look for in a herd sire are

Heifer replacements are appraised at least twice before decisions are finalized.

functional offspring, adequate milk, easy calvers, good muscling, and conformation. A cow must have the same traits plus no breeding problem, a good udder, adequate size, and be thrifty. Sound feet are also necessary in the herd since the farm has a problem with mud.

Wolfe's Neck annual vet bill is usually very low; there have been some years they haven't paid more than \$100. Charlie maintains they don't really do anything special. The cattle's good health and calm behavior reflect their healthy diet. To combat



A QAS Traveler son, Traveler's Destination, has been well-received by farm staff as a herd improver. No A. I. is practiced at Wolfe's Neck.

the mud situation, they use lime boxes and sometimes hire hoof-trimming when feet need it. "We do use the vet to do pregnancy checks. Our vet bill really runs very low and the reason for it I think is the way we keep the animals. We don't confine them. They are kept in a natural state, get plenty of sunshine and exercise," explains Charlie. "There is no medication in the feed, but we do follow a good worming program, which we administer ourselves. Iodine is applied to the newborn navels and to ears after tagging. We do not vaccinate the calves as the herd is isolated, and we do not see that it's necessary. The bull calves are castrated by banding when they are several days old, so again, we have no need of the vet for castrating."

The farm is made up of three different barn complexes. One is at Little River, where the DeGrandpres reside and the farm office is located. The second is the Salt Box where Steve Child, the new manager, lives, and the third is Main Barn where the Smith house is located. Since the University of Maine began supervision, the house has been empty.

During the winter, the herd is split into three groups at the farm's three separate barn areas. Calving season starts about March 10 and if all goes well, is completed in 60 days. Charlie decides ahead which heifers are to be bred to which bull and then the heifers are put in with the herd ahead of the bull so they get accustomed to the other animals.

They are reviewed again before going to pasture and if no changes are made, the bulls are turned out with the first-calf heifers first and the remainder of the cows come in slightly later. The calves are all weaned at one time. They are moved to the Little River complex where they are watched closely and handed to get them on a routine. Later they are wormed. The Wolfe's Neck calves are never creepfed.

The herd is on the Maine Department of Agriculture's weigh and grade program. The calves are weighed at weaning,

yearling, and again the following fall. This information is used to choose replacement heifers for the herd.

On this program, individual cattle are weighed and graded three times a year, eliminating age as a variable. This is used to compare each animal's progress and determine which dams and sires are producing the most desirable calves. In the spring, Charlie chooses the heifers the weigh and grade program lists as the best prospects as replacements for the herd. The heifers are placed in a different pasture and watched during the summer. They normally start with more heifers than will be needed to maintain the cow herd and will eliminate any which are found to be of undesirable type for their beef program.

Since Wolfe's Neck Farm is located on the Atlantic Coast, you might expect it to have sandy soil, but it is actually heavy clay. All the farm's fields are fertilized organically using cow and poultry manure, limestone, and phosphate rock. Buckwheat planted during the summer is also turned under for green manure. Another crop used in this way is winter rye. In addition to the manure from their own herd, Charlie hauls poultry manure from a Brunswick pullet operation about twice a year. The free manure is trucked to the farm in 16 five ton loads. Basically, the organic matter added to the clay puts air into the soil and holds moisture, which in turn produces superior crops. A question Charlie has been asked many times is how they can grow crops without chemical fertilizer.

"I can tell you this, through my experience both with having used chemicals and not using them, we can do really as good a job and a longer lasting job with our method.

"For example, once we get the fertility of the fields where they should be, even in a dry year, we don't have trouble because of the bulk and organic build up in the soil."

In a drought year, the roughage may be down, but they will still have plenty of hay when other farms in the area may be needing help to supplement their feed.



The Little River portion of the farm welcomes visitors or customers of the custom packed beef.

Manures are usually top-dressed and phosphate and limestone are added when fields are rotated and reseeded. For many years, Charlie tried to grow alfalfa, but never had much success.

"The fields would be planted, and I would feel a nice stand was established, then during the winter ice would sheet the fields, and the alfalfa would be wiped out in large areas. Last year we tried planting annual alfalfa, but it didn't do very well either."

Charlie says corn is another thing he would like to grow for the beef cattle, but if the area gets a late spring with a lot of cold weather and then early fall rains, it takes two tractors to tow the chopper through the heavy clay and it just isn't worth all the trouble. Charlie said, "Because of the soil being what it is around here, some years we'll probably reseed as high 75 acres and then another we might only reseed five acres. In other words, if you get the wrong kind of season, it's better not to get involved and get the land broken up because you're apt to be stuck with it for a long time."

The farm raises alsike and ladino clover—which do extremely well—mixed grass, timothy and domestic rye, oats, buckwheat, and winter wheat. Approximately 380 acres of hay is baled in both square and round bales and some is fed as greenchop. Two cuttings of hay are made, with each acre yielding three to four tons, after which the fields are pastured. Charlie sends samples of the forage crops to the University of Maine for testing so he knows what feed supplements he must use.

He only grains the calves when they are weaned and through the winter. The only other cattle receiving grain are the ones being finished for slaughter. The grain mix, which is about 16 percent protein, consists of kelp 100 pounds/ton, standard mineral mix 35-40 pounds/ton, salt 50 pounds/ton, dicalcium phosphate 20-25 pounds/ton, 25 percent soybean meal, and 65 percent corn meal.

A local feed company supplies the grain and soybeans and does the milling and mixing. In the past, Charlie was



The Smith home, epicenter of thought and activity behind Wolfe's Neck formative years.

not used for the Wolfe's Neck herd. Charlie estimates that about five percent of their total feed is bought, the remaining 95 percent is raised on the farm.

Wolfe's Neck Farm is a certified organic operation. Each year they must qualify for certification by filling out papers accounting all aspects of their operation. A team from The Organic Farmer and Gardener Assn. visits the farm to make sure they meet precise organic standards set forth by the organization. According to Charlie, a farm that's using commercial fertilizers for crops and implants and growth stimulants on the cattle would need a transition period of about three years to be certified organic.

In 1959, when Wolfe's Neck farm began to market their organic beef, many people said they were crazy and couldn't possibly have any success.

In the end, these same people were surprised at how well the endeavor succeeded. Smiths started to market their beef on a small scale by advertising in an organic magazine and through a radio station they owned in Philadelphia. The farm distributed fliers locally and to the campers who in turn bought beef and

able to buy grain direct from local growers, but now it is almost impossible to know exactly where the grain is grown. Although the grain is represented as organically grown, he takes no chances and sends samples to a laboratory in New Jersey where it is tested for pesticide residue. If it doesn't meet the standards, it's

DIRECT MARKETING is it for you . . .

How many times have you had conversations with other farmers lamenting the existence of the middleman in marketing your farm products? Have you ever considered cutting out the middleman and marketing your own farm products? Maybe now is the time to undertake such a venture.

According to Morris Fabian, Rutgers University Marketing Specialist, direct sales by the farmer to consumers have exploded in the last eight years. "Sales of farm-produced products directly to consumers accounts for approximately \$1.6 billion this year. That is about 68 percent higher than in 1980." Add to this the sale of

products that farm marketers buy then resell, and the total sales increase to \$3.2 billion. "That's probably a conservative estimate.

If you are an American farmer, you are sitting on top of one of the hottest, strongest marketing themes in many a year. "COUNTRY FRESH" or "FARM FRESH". Farm fresh products are being advertised in just about every supermarket, convenience store, and restaurant in this country. Who wants to have just plain old eggs and ham when you can instead partake of a feast of Farm Fresh Eggs and Country Cured Virginia Ham. The fresh market craze has to be one of the most underrated segments of the

agricultural industry in our country today. Many farmers may initially market just their own farm produced products, but they find consumers are so receptive to the farm fresh theme they inevitably add to their product line often including craft items, herbs, flowers, and firewood.

The American consumer is clearly on a health and nutrition kick which can only enhance direct marketing of farm products. They want their food to be natural and fresh. According to Larry Yager, Penn State marketing specialist, new market niches have been created for both fresh and processed foods that meet the low calorie, high

word-of-mouth accomplished the rest.

Originally, the beef was boxed in large quantities and customers had to buy the entire carton. Since the University has taken ownership, the beef is being sold in smaller packages which ultimately moves the beef more

quickly, but Charlie feels it gets away from the Smith's original concept of boxed organic beef.

Some years after the operation began, a large market in the Boston area wanted to become the exclusive outlet for the Wolfe's Neck beef, but Mr. Smith refused because he wanted to sell the beef as a service to a larger market of consumers who were seeking natural beef. The demand for organic beef grew so quickly that about eight or nine years ago, the farm actually had a waiting list for their meat.

Charlie likes to refer to the meat as "naturally grown" instead of organic. Their marketing concept of supplying a health conscious segment of the population with lean, completely chemical-free, federally inspected boxed beef, is not only unique but timely. Wolfe's Neck Farm is continually striving to improve their organic farming methods, and every effort is made to supply their customers with beef that is uniform not only in size and marbling, but consistently lean and flavorful. Uniformity is very important to the Wolfe's Neck operation, Charlie explains, "as we slaughter groups, we try to keep them uniform, because there is nothing worse than one lot being fatter or leaner than another. This is boxed beef that should be consistent in quality and size each time the customer



The new barn is a welcome facility and a contrast to many of the other century-old structures on the farm.

slaughter, the meat is aged in a cooler for 14 days, cut, wrapped, and flash frozen at -40 degrees F. The frozen beef is packaged in various combinations of cuts in convenient 20 pound, 30 pound or 42 pound cartons. It is then returned to the large walk-in freezer at the farm. A 20 pound Family Package containing steaks, roasts, stew meat and ground beef sells for \$55. A 42 pound Hindquarter Package containing steaks, roasts, and ground beef sells for \$115. There are 42 pound and 20 pound cartons of ground beef available as well as *A La Carte* selections. Steaks are cut 1" to 1-1/2", roasts three to five pounds. Stew beef and ground beef are wrapped in one pound packages.

The farm also offers the sale of lamb which Charlie buys from local sheep operations. Lamb legs or a whole cut lamb are available. He markets only the highest quality lambs and hopes to add organically raised poultry

purchases a different box.

"We strive for production of cattle of equal frame size with equal amounts of finish. Carcasses usually grade at Choice."

The cattle are finished to a desired weight of 1,000 pounds and are shipped in lots of eight or ten to the USDA inspected Oxford Abattoir in Norway, Maine. After

nutrition criteria of the health conscious consumer.

So is it time for you to market your own farm products? Some points you might need to consider before rushing out and setting up your store: the location of your farm can be critical; you should be easily accessible to customers or locate your market in a good locale. Be alert to any competition in the area in which you intend to market your product. Carefully plan your advertising and promotion campaign. Signs are one of the best avenues of letting the customer know what you are selling and where you are located. Newspaper ads are another good bet. Be alert to merchandising laws and regulations in your state and area before

opening for business.

We have all heard stories of farmers who have tried direct marketing and have succeeded beyond their wildest dreams. A prime example of such success is the Georgia sheep farmer who turned the sheep manure buildup on his 20-acre farm into a burgeoning barnyard business. His product is manure sold in 30 pound buckets and one pound bags. It is rightly named Baa Baa Doo, and it has become the preferred fertilizer of Atlanta's organic gardeners. The product has become so popular, its distributor is having a hard time keeping in stock. Not all of the customers are using Baa Baa Doo for fertilizing their gardens. One woman bought her husband a

bucket of Baa Baa Doo for Father's Day because he forgot to get her a gift for Mother's Day.

An amusing example, yes, but also an instructive one. You can market any farm product if you find the appropriate marketing strategy. Had this farmer just advertised SHEEP MANURE FOR SALE, how many buckets or pounds do you think he might have sold? Probably not many. He presented his product as being unique and found a very successful market niche.

To do direct marketing, all you need is imagination, a high quality farm product, courteous service, a friendly smile, and word-of-mouth usually does the rest.

Janet E. Mayer

to the line sometime in the near future.

Monthly, Charlie delivers meat to individuals, health food stores, and family co-ops in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island. He makes the deliveries from a three-quarter ton pick-up truck equipped with an insulated cap. The meat is covered with a heavy blanket and after 12 to 15 stops, it is still frozen solid, even in the summer. Customers also have the option of driving to the farm to purchase meat, or having it delivered by UPS or next day air shipments from the Portland Jetport to any sizeable airport in the customer's area.

After 20 years of managing Wolfe's Neck Farm, Charles DeGrandpre will be retiring on October 1, 1989. He and his wife Claire are planning to live in Freeport, and Charlie will be available to help at the farm when needed.

Steven F. Child joined the staff at the farm March 1, 1989. He will be assuming full management of the farm when Charlie retires. Steve is a native of Colorado where for the past 17 years he has been managing a cow, calf, and yearling operation about the same size as the Wolfe's Neck operation and has also been involved in many organic agricultural activities. He and Charlie will be working together during the summer to assure a smooth transition period.

What does the future hold for the Wolf's Neck operation since it is now a part of the University of Southern Maine? According to Steve, they are really feeling their way at this point, and the University and farm are considering many alternative programs. Several of the things being contemplated are increasing the size of the herd, incorporating a crossbred herd while still maintaining the purebred Angus, and raising and selling organic chicken, turkeys and rabbits. According to Charlie, "The latter is a very good likelihood. Many of our customers ask for organic poultry, and with the marketing system already established, it wouldn't be too difficult an area to develop. I wouldn't be surprised if we couldn't develop a good

organic chicken or turkey that would outdo what we are doing with beef without trying very hard because there is really more of a demand for poultry. There is still a little bit of feeling about eating red meat although it is getting better which is really good news for the beef industry."

The University of Southern Maine may be the owner of Wolf's Neck Farm, but for the most part they are going to leave the management to Steve and Charlie. The land grant university's acquisition of the farm has prompted the forming of a committee to examine the feasibility of offering a bachelor's degree in sustainable agriculture. According to Dr. Wallace C. Dunham, dean of life sciences at the university, "There are indications that current agricultural methods are not sustainable. I think it's worthwhile to take a look at it. Everyone on the agriculture college's faculty is interested in exploring sustainable farming." He expects interest in new farming methods to grow because of the public concern over the liberal use of pesticides. The university feels such an addition to the school's four-year curriculum would be of benefit to the agricultural community as a whole.

The land and cattle management methods at Wolfe's Neck may not be appropriate for other farms but they have certainly proved successful in this venture. Charlie said, "A lot of people say you can't farm this way, but I think it depends on how much ambition and interest you show. Most people think you have to work harder and I don't really agree with that. There is hard work in all farming, but it can be done and our crops and cattle are proof that it can be done successfully. Mrs. Smith had a deep commitment to preserve Wolfe's Neck Farm, and we intend to carry out her wishes."