



This past weekend, School Director Laura Hayes welcomed our school community to the official Ribbon Cutting of The Farm at Ithaca Waldorf School.

"As we gather on the ancestral lands of the Gayogohó:nq¹ people, we inaugurate The Farm, our outdoor classroom for our Farm and Land Stewardship Program. We recognize the historical injustices, suffering and loss of lives due to colonization, racism and greed by white people. We remember and honor those who came before us, who walked and worked this land, and whose wisdom and contributions endure in the spirit of the earth beneath our feet.

As stewards of this land, we accept the responsibility to improve the soil's health, to support the healthy growth of plants and trees, to peacefully coexist and to lovingly care for the animals, and to foster understanding and community with all. When this land first was bought, the impulse and dream had been to involve students in farming and to teach them a love for the land and instill a responsibility of being stewards of the land.

We collaborated and still collaborate with farmers and the Youth Farm Project and relied heavily on our programming to have access to their resources. This year, we decided to create The Farm, our very own farmette designed to educate and offer a diverse range of farming.

A farm is not built in a week, a month or even a year.
A farm grows slowly like a tree.
A farm can start with garden beds, an orchard, or with animals.
We decided to start The Farm with cows!

Thus, we gather today at the cows' inaugural pasture to mark the beginning of our farm.

Our greater vision includes bringing in sheep, bringing back the chickens we hatched in Spring and expanding our flock. We envision garden beds, fruit trees, perennials like elderberries, hazelnuts, and other berry bushes. We see a pond - the aquatic component of a farm - and already have Christmas trees and will plant more every year. We have mushroom logs and we just finished setting up Worm City - our compost-producing indoor worm containers. We are also planning to run a Farm Summer Camp for grade students to continue our work on the farm with students during the summer.

Rudolf Steiner, founder of Waldorf education, also developed biodynamic farming. He encouraged farmers to develop a personal relationship with plants, animals, soil and even manure in order to think more holistically about agriculture.

Education happens only when we are in relationship with the teachers, the content, the world, and with ourselves. The Farm, will expand on this idea and want our students to learn real connections with nature, with each other and themselves.

Even though this Farm is not intended to make a profit in an economic sense, we want this to be a working farm and a farm where students learn to work. This is not a petting zoo nor a life-size diorama to be visited. Relationships are work. The profit of our working farm is relationship, connection, and education.

Life lessons have already been part of our learning when we started to get to know the cow Joyful only to let her go again so soon. Her sudden death from natural causes gave us a taste of the circle of life and how it will be part of learning to say goodbye. Relationships aren't always forever. We treasure the time we walk the path of life together, and as we want to improve the soil of the farm, we want to improve each other's lives including that of the animals in our care - no matter how much time we have together. We believe Joyful had some peaceful weeks with us.

The Farm is made possible by many. Today, we thank the founders and initiators of The Ithaca Waldorf School, those who first conceived the idea of a farm and land stewardship.

- We are deeply grateful to Nathaniel Thompson, Sean Waters, and all the help from the Remembrance Farm. Without them, we wouldn't be where we are today.
- We thank Caleb Schonfeld, who was the one to remind me of Nathaniel's offer to bring cows if we can prepare a pasture and shelter.
- We thank our Middle School teachers Victoria Dehan and ej George, and all the middle school students who picked up the rhythm of chores with ease and enthusiasm.
- We thank Chad Cully for advancing the farm and land stewardship program daily.
- We thank all those volunteers who came out to build the shelter and who donated materials.
- I thank David Hayes for being there to drive the tractor and move what needs moving. To clear the land and to be there for the many other small and big tasks to bring The Farm into being.

Let's mark the beginning of a new chapter of farm and land stewardship at IWS. Let's inaugurate the Farm!!"

