

We believe that veterans possess the unique skills and character needed to strengthen rural communities and create sustainable food systems.
~ Farmer Veteran Coalition



Farmer Veteran Coalition

Mobilizing Veterans

By Meyla Bianco Johnston, originally published in the Autumn 2020 issue of *Alpacas Magazine*

In 2006, a report out of the University of New Hampshire proved that “rural families are paying a disproportionately high price for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.”

In 2007, veteran and farmer Michael O’Gorman started a job creation initiative in California, and over the next year, volunteers searched for others interested in creating agricultural opportunities for veterans.

In 2008, O’Gorman left his agriculture career to make help for rural and farming veterans a reality.

In 2009, his group of volunteers received funding from the Iraq + Afghanistan Deployment Impact Fund (IADIF) and Farmer Veteran Coalition (FVC) was born.

The FVC is dedicated to cultivating a new generation of farmers and food leaders from the ranks of those who have served in the U.S. Armed Forces. Today, they are supported by the USDA, Farm Credit, Kubota, Tractor Supply Company, Newman’s Own Foundation, Altria and Prudential.

FVC helps veterans identify farm-

ing and agriculture jobs and career opportunities that use their unique skills.

To become a member of FVC, individuals must have served in the U.S. Armed Forces and must be able to verify their service with ID.me during the FVC membership application process. With the membership, veterans can access many powerful benefits with practical results.

Branding

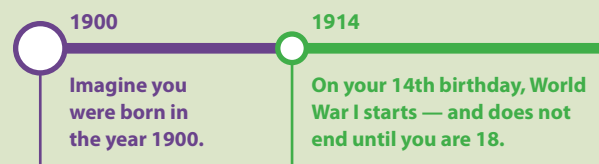
One especially popular FVC benefit

Gaining Perspective from Veteran Experience

COVID-19 has presented an unprecedented crisis across the world. It has changed our behavior and worldview in profound ways. When we can finally look back on it, it will become a generational marker. Veterans have been on the front

lines of historical events throughout history. This is a challenging time for everyone. As we navigate it together and strive for positivity and inner strength, we can look to our nation’s veterans for leadership and forbearance.

— — — — —
“A Little Perspective.” Email by Sandpoint Men’s Group, A Little Perspective, 12 May 2020.



The FVC is dedicated to cultivating a new generation of farmers and food leaders from the ranks of those who have served in the U.S. Armed Forces. The HBH logo can be used by member veterans who have met the FVC requirements.

Logo courtesy FVC.



is access to the Homegrown by Heroes (HBH) brand, the official FVC product branding program.

Founded by the Kentucky Department of Agriculture in January 2013, the HBH label has been used nationally by FVC since Veterans Day of that same year. Since its inception, the program has expanded to include members in all 50 states plus Puerto Rico.

The HBH label is only allowed to be used by certified individuals, and it signals to consumers that the agricultural products bearing the logo are exclusively produced by U.S. military veterans.

Several state departments of agriculture have officially partnered with the HBH label to produce a merged

label combining elements of the state's own "Buy Local" label and the HBH label. Each state can build on the standard national HBH design to incorporate imagery relevant to their state, creating a unique state HBH logo.

In order to display your state's merged logo, veterans must first become certified with the HBH label, then get certified with their state's department of agriculture.

Grants

FVC also operates the Farmer Veteran Fellowship Fund, a small grant program that provides direct assistance to veterans who are in their beginning years of farming or ranching. Awards range from \$1,000 to \$5,000.

Networking

One of the most useful tools FVC offers is networking connections within the ranks of members.

The most recent Farmer Veteran Stakeholders Conference took place in March 2019 in Austin, Texas and featured three days of education, speakers, guest panels and networking. ●

Visit farmvetco.org to learn more or become a member.



- Personal interview Paul Marshall.
- "Home." FARMER VETERAN COALITION. April 28, 2020. Accessed June 19, 2020. <https://www.farmvetco.org/>.

On your 29th birthday, the Great Depression begins, unemployment reaches 25% and the World GDP drops 27%. The Great Depression does not resolve until you are 33.

1918

The Spanish Flu pandemic affects the world and 30 million people lose their lives. The virus rages until your 20th birthday.

1929

1939

When you turn 39, World War II starts.

1941

On your 41st birthday, the U.S. is fully enmeshed in World War II. The conflict finally ends when you are 45.

1950

At 50, the Korean War starts.

1955

At 55 the Vietnam War begins.

1962

When you are 62, the Cuban Missile Crisis threatens to end life on our planet as we know it.

1975

When you turn 75, the Vietnam War finally ends.

Farmer Veteran Coalition Alpaca Farmers' Experiences



Cheri Seiler at Good Time Ridge Farm in Augusta, West Virginia.

Cheri Seiler of Good Time Ridge Alpacas in Augusta, West Virginia served in the Marine Corps two separate times, in 1973-75 and then again 1980-83.

"I was stationed at Paris Island, South Carolina for boot camp, Camp LeJeune North Carolina for school and then Headquarters Marine Corps Arlington, Virginia. I was a disbursing clerk and travel clerk," Seiler says.

"I grew up in the city and always loved animals. We purchased property in West Virginia in 1986. Wanting to have some kind of livestock, we looked at miniature breeds of cows, sheep and goats but none really hit us. I stopped at an alpaca farm one day and fell in love. Alpacas have a unique personality, and each is different. I have learned about fiber-to-clothing, what makes good fiber, alpaca health care, and I do all of my own medical treatments on the animals. When the animals are no longer productive for breeding or fiber, they are culled for meat."



Lawrence Brown at Feathers and Friends Alpaca Farm in Franklin, Tennessee.

Lawrence Brown of Feathers and Friends Alpaca Farm in Franklin, Kentucky served in the U.S. Army, 2nd 83rd Field Artillery, in Babenhause, Germany.

"The alpaca is an earth-friendly livestock that leaves behind no footprints upon the earth. They are a sustainable and renewable source of wool.

"I'm passionate about my animals. When spending time with them, I have an inexplicable sense of tranquility and profound relaxation."





@Courtesy Brett Villeneuve

Brett Villeneuve at Dry Well Farms in Blairstown, Iowa.

Brett Villeneuve of Dry Well Farm Alpacas in Blairstown, Iowa was a medic in the Army. He served in the National Guard for both Massachusetts and Arizona from 1983-1986, then joined the regular Army in 1986 and served until 1992.

"My duty stations were with the 4th ENG. BN, 4TH Infantry Division, Ft. Carson, Colorado and USA MEDDAC at Fort Huachuca in Arizona," Villeneuve says.

"In 2019, I was one of 50 recipients to receive a \$1,000 grant from Tractor Supply, a sponsor of the Coalition. The Coalition has also been a driving force in getting me to sit down and spend time thinking through and putting on paper a business plan and then keeping it current. They are another resource for information for veterans getting started in farming/ranching. They are also, as our meeting shows, big on networking within the ranks. I also use the Coalition branding 'Homegrown by Heroes' in our farm's marketing. I feel it makes our small farm part of something much bigger and is a great conversation starter, and you can't gain a client without first having a conversation.

"The benefits of being a member are many; grants, networking, branding. There is someone to talk to about questions with your business plan or what other resources you may be eligible for as a veteran. A big benefit is their annual grant... This is a grant that you can re-apply for every year whether or not you have received a grant in the past. Kubota teamed up with the Coalition and gives away five tractors a year, another benefit. Again, me spending hours researching information and rerunning spreadsheets for my grant submission is a huge benefit, even if I do not enjoy doing it."



@Courtesy Roberta Kluthe

Roberta Kluthe at Mainely Cali Alpacas in Middleton, Maine.

Roberta Kluthe of Mainely Cali Alpacas in Middleton, Maine was in the Navy, serving in the U.S., Turkey and Portugal.

"The alpacas are important to me because they keep me entertained and motivated. Motivated because they have to be cared for, and so even in the worst storms, I am out checking, feeding and caring for them. Being away from my family can be depressing, especially here in the winter, but the alpacas help me from getting depressed. Each alpaca has a personality and knows its name. Interacting with them is fun because they are curious animals and their reactions can be quite funny.

"They are sheared once a year, and there are many ways to use their fiber. I have put fiber in a fiber bank at a local mill, and they give me discounts on alpaca products. I buy socks, hats, gloves, scarves and other products to sell online and at local stores. I have had my fiber made into yarn which I will dye and sell. I have also sold alpaca manure to customers for their gardens. It is better than most manures because it's lower in phosphorous and can be used sooner than other manures.

"I have received discounts for belonging to the Farmer Veteran Coalition, and there are lots of resources on their website that are available to members. I want to attend some conferences, but I have to hire a farm sitter to attend.

"I enjoy reading the emails from them. I have not had a chance to take full advantage of the resources, but it is in my plan to discover everything they assist with." ●