

SLOW FLOWERS

Journal

AMERICAN FLOWERS WEEK | SUMMER 2024

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

SITE SPECIFIC

PETRICHOR IN DETROIT

FARM LIFE

IS FROM THE HEART

FLORAL TAKEOVER

LIVING WITH ROSES

GARDEN SURVEY

KEEPING IT LOCAL



BOTANICAL COUTURE

farm life.

| The future of farming is in community

The average lifespan of a farm is often reported as five years. I'm nearing one decade of farming and as I get closer to that milestone, it comes with a tremendous amount of reflection.

What I've learned again and again is that cultivating community is not only beneficial but absolutely essential to this work. Farming cannot be done alone. This is not a new or original concept, but I will shout it from the mountain tops as long as I'm able to farm. This is our lived experience at our three-acre flower farm in rural northeast Ohio.

If you have a choice in farming as a career (as a reminder, many do not), the first few years are run on passion and adrenaline. Witnessing the alchemy of a microscopic seed turn into a multi-layered bloom is something to behold. It's that unmatched high that keeps you going. You get to bring magic into this world and, even better, share it with others.

Then, you face the inevitable setbacks. Relying on income from a perishable, living product in a rapidly changing climate is not the most logical (or lucrative) choice as a career. I feel that I owe it to anyone willing to listen to be honest about what this truly means. While I indeed love what I do, love alone doesn't make up for the literal back-breaking work, or the emotional and financial toll required to face insurmountable challenges day in and day out. As a consumer or aspiring farmer, it's so easy to be enchanted by the fantasy that Instagram paints. As a farmer, it's so easy to ignore your impending burnout because of it. Flowers are especially effective in this illusion. Their beauty allures, and it's hard to imagine that something so delicate can also be so rough behind the scenes.

It can be isolating to feel the pressure of doing it all while also presenting flower farming as though it's effortless. I quickly learned that going at it alone in this work is wholly unsustainable.

This sentiment came into focus in Frayed Knot Farm's first season, when a dear friend asked me to grow flowers for her wedding. It catalyzed the business, and began a journey toward building relationships with our larger community and creating a community of our own. Unsurprisingly, I experienced a few crop failures and slower bloom times for that first wedding commitment, and because of it, started to reach out to other local farmers for support. It was the first step in understanding that "connection" is the most important tool I had.

In subsequent years, with every struggle, there was an abundance of community seemingly waiting to be brought into this venture. Struggles turned to successes and it became easier to form collaborations as a prevention to future challenges. It's now a part of every aspect of the farm, from soil to sales.



The Cut Flower Collab at Ransom Sage Farm.

FROM THE HEART



FROM LEFT: Frayed Knot Farm crew includes Jules Handley, Emily Pek, and Lexie St. Denis

Shortly after moving back to my hometown of Cleveland, Ohio, where I started Frayed Knot Farm, I was introduced to a group of scrappy young men (Rust Belt Riders and Tilth Soil) who were a few years into a food scrap-hauling and compost business. Today, their efforts have grown into a thriving worker-owned cooperative with a crew of 30. If you're a grower, you know the value of good compost! One of the co-founders and worker-owners is now also my husband, so we have a true closed-loop, full-circle family.

A chance encounter at a local business meet-up led me to Jess Boeke and Sarah Pottle, founders of Rust Belt Fibershed. We bonded over our shared dedication to creating more regenerative systems. Before I knew it, we were laying yards of compost

down from said scrappy men and planting flax with dozens of community members, with the goal of understanding where our clothing comes from. Flax is the crop that linen is made from, and it also makes beautiful dried arrangements!

When contemplating sales outlets in those early years, I had the great fortune of meeting Jennie Doran and Andrew Worm of Room Service Boutique, local shopkeepers and huge advocates for everything we were doing. They graciously took a chance on a new farmer by helping to launch our CSA Bouquet Subscription service, hosted at their retail space. We've since done multiple yearly partnerships and celebrated the fifth year of our CSA program in 2023. The program also evolved to include a partnership with a beloved Cleveland staple,

Ohio City Farm, which offer flowers as an add-on to their robust vegetable share.

You never know where your networking will lead. An interaction today could quite literally be planting the seed for something to come years later. What is officially called "The Collab" started as a handful of northeast-Ohio growers looking to share information about flower farming in the off-season. We now aggregate our collective product and sell wholesale to local florists. The organization has grown exponentially, fervently trying to meet the demand for locally grown flowers. It has proven to not only support our community of buyers, but also one another. Farmers are our number one customer and our group acts as a safety net for the predictable unpredictability.

Frayed Knot Farm started as a lot of singular dreams – and those dreams intertwined with others. While we were developing relationships outside the farm we were also cultivating an interpersonal ecosystem of our own. Jules Handley and Lexie St. Denis round out our unstoppable crew and are a critical part of day-to-day operations. Along with Zoe Apisdorf, Jules helps to manage stewardship of the farmland and each has plots of their own at our farm. I know for a fact that Frayed Knot would not have made it this far without them or have been nearly as fulfilling.

Farming is not easy and rarely, if ever, glamorous. It continues to be more difficult as the years go by and the future of this work remains uncertain. It's also an incredibly hopeful endeavor and one that I'm so proud to be a part of. As the seasons change, you learn to adapt. Strength is built in numbers and in community.

Emily Pek's passion for systems thinking and agriculture led to an apprenticeship in Brooklyn, New York, in 2016, where she learned how to farm while studying food justice. Upon returning to her deep roots in Cleveland, Ohio, she worked at various farms and started Frayed Knot in 2017. The land that Frayed Knot resides on was previously stewarded by her grandparents, who have been part of the community for close to a century.

[WEBSITE](#) [INSTAGRAM](#)

