



Mother cows and their young roam the pasture at the Proffitt family's organic farm in North Carolina.

## SIMPLE LIVING

FRESH AIR, WIDE OPEN SPACES SUIT FARMER AND HER COWS JUST FINE // BY EMILY SMITH

**ON THE ROLLING HILLS OF KINGS MOUNTAIN,** North Carolina, Shelley Proffitt Eagan's cows have all they need: good grass, water, sunshine and their babies by their sides.

That's the only way to raise them, says Proffitt Eagan, who runs the 850-acre Proffitt Family Cattle Co.—the first certified organic beef farm in the state—with her parents, husband and two children: Dewi, 14, and Zoe, 13.

The family rotates the herd of about 200 cows as often as twice a day to make sure they have plenty of fresh grass to munch on. "If they won't eat it, then it's a weed in my book," Proffitt Eagan says. "Fescue, Bermuda, clovers, vetch, switchgrass—if it grows in the Southeast, we have it in the pastures." Calves stay with their moms until they are at least 9 months old, with acres of pasture to explore, woods for shelter and natural water features. "It's quiet and peaceful, so the momma cows can be easily heard if they moo for their young," she says.

That's a stark contrast to the lives of feedlot cows, who are confined in cramped spaces with only grain to eat, pumped full of hormones and antibiotics, never setting foot on grass.

"That's not the kind of food that I want to raise," says Proffitt Eagan, whose farm is certified by GAP (Global Animal Partnership) and the AWA program (Animal Welfare Approved), and sells directly to Whole Foods Market.

Proffitt Eagan worked as a teacher until 2008 in the Denver suburbs, where her kids fought over the one tree—a small one, at that—that grew in their yard. She and her husband, Brian, wanted them to have a different childhood, so they moved to help on her parents' farm.

"It's a simple life," she says in her kitchen, taking a quick break before heading out to check fences. "Taking care of an animal's needs is very rewarding."

**IN THIS ONGOING SERIES,** we feature farmers who raise their animals with high-welfare practices.



## INNER LIVES

DO CATS MONITOR OUR EMOTIONS?

// BY JONATHAN BALCOMBE

**AS INDEPENDENT CREATURES,** cats have developed a reputation for being aloof and enigmatic. But if you've lived with cats, you may have noticed that they appear sensitive to our moods. Here's one example related to me by a colleague:

When one of two 13-year-old brother cats died, their female owner was crushed; she suffered panic attacks and prolonged grief. Disturbed by her suffering, the surviving cat would retreat to the bedroom despite the woman's pleas for him to stay with her.

"It got to the point that I was picking him up and bringing him to the living room, only to have him dash back to the bedroom," she reported. It was not until she was advised to be more relaxed and positive around the cat, and to reward him with play and occasional treats, that he emerged from his refuge.

Now, researchers at the University of Milan, Italy, report that cats tune in to their owners for positive and negative emotional cues. When confronted with an unfamiliar object (an electric fan) on the other side of the experimental room, most of the cats alternated gazes between the owner and the fan, and they were more relaxed if the owner showed a positive response to the fan. (Studies on dogs have shown similar levels of attention to their owners.)

The take-home message: We may reduce our cats' stress by responding positively to new people, animals or inanimate objects in their environment.



*Jonathan Balcombe is director of animal sentience for the Humane Society Institute for Science and Policy.*