

RIVER ROAD FARM

Life is Good and the Music is Sweet Down on the Farm



▲ Claire Benjack runs River Road Farm in Franklin, a 500+ acre farm that is home to a variety of animals including miniature donkeys.

A little girl's dream some years ago came true and turned into River Road Farm. Located in Franklin, the 500+ acre River Road Farm is home to cattle, chickens, miniature donkeys, some horses, four cats, and a variety of wild animals. Claire Benjack was ten years old when she told her father that she'd like a farm. "He actually started looking for a farm and this one came on the market in 1979," Claire explains. "He bought it and changed it from a pig farm to a cattle operation with about 1,000 head of cattle."

When Claire's father passed away in 2001, she had her hands full raising three little boys, so the farm took a back seat for a while. "I started a garden and raised some chickens all so I could make sure that my family had healthy food," Claire says. "Then I read the book *The Omnivore's Dilemma* that talks about cattle, and I said, 'I can do that!' I bought 5 head



▲ A beautiful setting in the country is home to River Road Farm.

of cattle and grazed them on our farm. We started small, and today, we have about 80 cattle that are grassfed and ethically raised. We then sell the beef to restaurants and individuals. We also sell eggs and beef at a market at the farm on Tuesdays and at the East Beach market on Saturdays. I take our products to where the people are."

River Road Farm also hosts concerts in the spring and fall, an idea that originated with Claire's husband David, who joined the TowneBank Norfolk board after TowneBank and Monarch Bank came together. While David stays busy as president of Chesapeake Drywall & Acoustics, Inc., his true passion is music. "My husband has always been an avid music lover. He plays guitar and calls himself a frustrated rocker," Claire laughs. "He's been able to get some great bands here." Some of the recent concerts at Music in the Country have featured Couch with Holy Roller; Friends of the Brothers – A Celebration of the Allman Brothers Band, with Buck Shot; and New Potato Caboose, with Kendall Street Company.



▲ River Road Farm hosts Music in the Country with outdoor concerts featuring a variety of entertainers.

"We have about 175 people at most concerts. We are hoping to get the word out so more people will come out to enjoy the music," Claire says. "It's family-friendly, where the kids can run around and see the donkeys and chickens. You can bring a picnic and we have food trucks available. We have two shows with an hour in between so there is plenty of time for a long walk around the farm."

All proceeds from the concerts go to the Foodbank of Southeastern Virginia and the Eastern Shore. For more information on River Road Farm and Music in the Country, visit RiverRoadFarmVA.com.