

The Farmers Shaping Loudoun's Future

BY: Christina Nifong

Holly Chapple calls herself "flower obsessed." Each month in spring and summer, Hope Flower Farm & Winery chooses a seasonal flower to highlight. June's is lavender. "I love having a place where people can come and be inspired," Chapple says. Photo courtesy of Hope Flower Farm.

At first glance, it can be difficult to reconcile the two sides of Loudoun County: winding country lanes flanked by hand-hewn stone walls and the thriving digital ecosystem that powers much of modern life.

A third of Loudoun County is still devoted to agriculture. Fields of grapes and grasses stretch across rolling hills dotted with cattle, horses, and sheep. Roads lead to old-timey front-porch farm markets like Georges Mill outside Lovettsville, where locals linger over ice cream, honey, and just-picked vegetables.

Loudoun is also one of the wealthiest counties in America, anchored by Washington Dulles International Airport, fast-growing suburbs, and the digital infrastructure that has made it a global technology hub.

Many believe these two sides of Loudoun strengthen one another, creating a place where the local population helps sustain a

robust agricultural economy built around local food, wine, craft beverages, agritourism, and independent businesses—and where that agricultural identity, strengthens the county's broader economy and sense of place.

Across its 520 square miles, Loudoun is home to roughly 1,200 privately owned farms, an impressive array of farmers' markets, one of Virginia's largest horse populations, and the highest concentration of wineries in the Commonwealth—earning it the moniker "DC's Wine Country." Its soils are considered among the most productive in the country having fed surrounding populations since George Washington's era. Many farms welcome visitors throughout the year and twice annually, the countywide Farm Tour offers a special opportunity to explore dozens of them in a single weekend.

Farming in Community:

FIRESIDE FARM, LOVETTSVILLE

Stacey Carlberg and Casey Gustowarow have spent the last two decades cultivating the local ecosystem that helps sustain their farm. Fireside Farm supplies its sustainably grown vegetables and grain to DC restaurants, sells at regional farmers' markets, and collaborates with breweries, chefs, and bakers across the region. Locals flock to roving opportunities to enjoy the farm's wood-fired pizzas, which are built around Loudoun-grown ingredients.

Their pies reflect the farm's philosophy: The dough is made from wheat they grow and have milled by regional partners, creating a crust that is nutty, lightly processed, and pleasantly rustic. Toppings are seasonal and local.

"We want people that live here to have an easy way to access local food and understand that it's being grown here," Carlberg says.

Fireside grows a diverse range of produce using regenerative, soil-building agricultural practices, but like many younger farmers, Carlberg and Gustowarow have faced the challenge of securing affordable land and room to expand.

After years of moving from one leased property with the help of Loudoun Economic Development, Fireside finally found, permanent ground in Loudoun: 42 acres that give the farm a more sustainable future. Carlberg says the deal came together because the county's agricultural community remains deeply connected. The seller wanted the land to continue as a working farm and saw Fireside as the right steward for it.

"That network still exists here," she says. "Once you lose that infrastructure and community, it's much harder to rebuild."

A Passion for Growing:

THREE CAP FARMS, LEESBURG

When Ian Triplett was in elementary school, his father moved their family from Alexandria to Loudoun County to grow grapes for area wineries. It was 1995, and Loudoun still felt deeply rural: Triplett remembers smelling cow manure on the ride home from school.

Teenage Triplett didn't love farmlife. In 2003, he escaped by joining the Marines. His way back included an economics degree from Longwood University and work in Loudoun's wine country. But once he became fascinated with mycelium, he never fully let it go. In 2021, he began growing gourmet mushrooms full time a stones throw from his father's vines.

Triplett built the business slowly and largely through trial and error.

"I am 100 percent self-taught," he says. Margins are thin, customers unpredictable, and 60-hour weeks are common. But mushroom cultivation feels less like a business than a calling. "Now, I have almost a spiritual connection," he says. "Not just with the land, but with polyculture growing."

Top: Fireside owner Stacey Carlberg tends cucumber plants in the high tunnel on rented land that she and her partner Casey Gustowarow currently work. Fireside Farm plans to move their operations to recently purchased land in Waterford. "There's a pretty vibrant farming community in Loudoun County and I wanted to be close to that," Carlberg says.

Bottom: Three Cap Farms' owner Ian Triplett grows gourmet mushrooms in a controlled indoor environment. He changes the varieties he raises depending on the season, but harvests lion's mane mushrooms year round. "They're insanely reliable," he says. Growing mushrooms is a business that has been "developed by hobbyists," Triplett explains. "There's no really hard and fast rule on how to do it."



Inside a red barn with a poured concrete floor, Triplett carefully controls temperature, light, and growing conditions. In peak season, he harvests 150 to 200 pounds a week across several mushroom varieties—flame orange, silky beige, fuzzy ecru—otherworldly in their zipped-up tents with textures and flavors that can still surprise skeptical customers.

Triplett's passion propels him to keep sharing what he's learned—through customer conversations at the farmers' markets where he sells, presentations in his barn for small groups, and the spring and fall farm tours. "I have to constantly do this," he says. "If I stop then people will stop caring."

Sharing Beauty:

HOPE FLOWER FARM & WINERY, WATERFORD

To take the tree-lined turn into **Hope Flower Farm** is to enter a dreamscape of seasonal blooms: tulips, peonies, dahlias, cosmos, hydrangeas, poppies, and zinnias. Across 25 acres, formal gardens and pick-your-own fields surround centuries-old houses, weathered barns, a gift shop, and a tasting room.

Owner Holly Chapple and husband Evan bought the land in 2015 as a place to grow flowers and host conferences. Chapple is a renowned wedding and event floral designer who traveled the world teaching professional florists. A decade ago, she decided to bring the events to her, using the beauty of Loudoun County as the backdrop.

Then COVID shifted her plans, and at the end of 2021, Evan died of lung cancer. Before he passed, he fenced the property, planted orchards of apple and plum trees, and helped secure the farm's winery license.

Today, the space is open to the public Thursdays through Sundays, with regular bluegrass jams, on-farm weddings, and healing retreats. Once a month, a riot of cut flowers covers every inch of the property's 1820s manor house, as Chapple leads design workshops and offers food, drink, and inspiration.

"I love exposing people to the beauty of flowers," says Chapple, dressed in a white crochet skirt as she steers her utility vehicle across the fields.

But she knows firsthand the pressures on growers. "When you are looking over your field and you know a frost is coming, there's nothing worse than that. And you're wondering if you're going to be able to fulfill people's wishes and dreams if you lose your product."

That uncertainty, she says, is why diversification has become essential. "You have to do all the things if you're going to make it."

Preserving History:

THE AG DISTRICT AND CHRYSALIS VINEYARDS, MIDDLEBURG

Jennifer McCloud is a legend in Virginia wine. A successful businesswoman and wine connoisseur, she took her earnings after selling her computer business in 1995 and plowed them into the fields outside Middleburg. Since then, she has helped shape the modern Virginia wine industry.



Hope Flower Farm & Winery

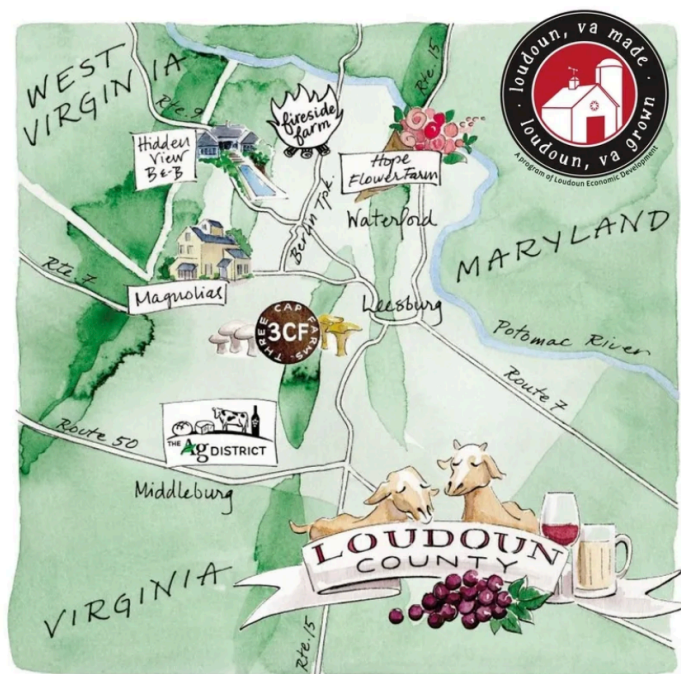


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In the Wild West days of Virginia winemaking, McCloud championed Norton—a native Virginia grape nearly lost after Prohibition—while also helping introduce European varieties like Petit Manseng to American growers.

"Originally, every cutting of Petit Manseng [in the U.S.] came from this farm," explains McCloud, from her home office, handcrafted with field stones and walnut trees from her land.

By 2005, 90 acres of her 412-acre property were planted in vines. McCloud's vision extended beyond wine and, determined to preserve working agriculture in Loudoun County, she steadily expanded the farm's operations. Eventually she added a dairy herd, milking barn, and creamery.

In 2015, McCloud crafted a modern rustic tasting room at the top of a bluff, with roof decks and patios and a stunning 360-degree view of the Bull Run Mountains. She added a pizza oven, refrigerators stocked with cheese, and—more recently—a farm market that sells eggs, cheese, and cuts of meat. She called it all **The Ag District** and invited the public to gather, eat, and drink.

Today, 15 Jerseys and Holsteins are milked there every day; it's one of the few working dairies in Loudoun County. **Chrysalis Vineyards** produces 5,000 cases of wine each year and has won three gold medals at the 2026 Virginia Governor's Cup.

Growth on the Ground

Each of these farms helps define modern Loudoun County—not as a relic of the past, but as a working landscape continuously reinventing itself. Together with the county's distilleries, restaurants, inns, wineries, and small food businesses, they form an economy rooted as much in experience and stewardship as in agriculture itself.

For many here, preserving Loudoun's open land is not simply about nostalgia or scenery. It is about protecting the network of farms, businesses, craftspeople, and gathering places that give the county its identity—and make people want to live, visit, and invest here in the first place.

"I'm ensuring that there will still be farming here for all of the people that are moving in," says Hope Flower Farm's Chapple, who has lived in Loudoun for 55 years. "It connects me to the Loudoun I knew and the Loudoun I want to preserve." ✕

To learn more and plan your own exploration, visit loudounfarms.org or visitloudoun.org, for more resources highlighting agricultural and visitor experiences throughout the county.