



Isabel Prescott

Connecting Farms, Food & Family

BY JENNA CAPUTO
PHOTOS BY TARA WILEY PHOTOGRAPHY

"A farmer is not only the owner of the land, but the land and farming permeate every aspect of life." This statement certainly is true for Isabel Prescott, owner of Riverview Orchards. Her lifelong passion not only turned into a career, but a lifestyle – a lifestyle that has earned her recognition from her beloved hometown multiple times.

Farming in the Mohawk Valley can be traced back through Isabel's family at least to the 1800s. Throughout the years, her family produced a variety of crops and animals. Her parents originally had a poultry farm in Charlton, but her father's true love was growing apples. He wanted to make the switch to fruit farming, so in the early

1940s, they looked for an affordable place with good soil and land they could farm. Their search brought them here.

Isabel says it was a perfect way to grow up. "I truly did not appreciate what a wonderful life I was living. We were not at all well-to-do, but I was part of a loving family surrounded by farm life. My grandparents soon moved into part of our farmhouse, as did the hired man. All of us ate our meals together, worked together, went to grange and church together and experienced a quality of life like no other."

While it was indeed a wonderful life, Isabel's father didn't want his girls to be dependent only on farming or their spouses, so he encouraged

them to pursue a good education. Isabel received her BA in English Literature from Hartwick College in Oneonta before working for over 20 years in Information Systems, Computer Operations and Finance at General Electric and United Artists Cable Systems. But her heart was in farming, and in 1983, she bought the farm from her aging father. "I couldn't stand the thought of a development on our land, and at that time, I knew the only realistic option would be to continue my parents' life work."

The farm has changed over the years. Initially selling most of their crop wholesale to supermarkets, they have since expanded their services and opened their doors to the public. Today, they depend on the community to regularly visit the farm and to experience the harvest and enjoy the ambiance of open space. "For many of our customers and their families, it has become tradition to make a pilgrimage to the farm for apple picking and to enjoy apple cider doughnuts and homemade pies," says Isabel.

Hearing Isabel talk with ease about the work on her farm makes it sound easy, but it's really quite the opposite, especially with the unpredictable conditions that can affect it. Just like any other small business, there's not a lot of leeway between profit and loss. Besides such impacts as variability of sales due to a pandemic, apple growing conditions can affect the quality and quantity that are produced. "Some people believe that 'apples just grow on trees,' but in reality, there's a lot of work and risk involved," Isabel explains. "We have to prune, spray, mow, fertilize, thin and get the apples picked, and most importantly, we have to get them sold. Farming is not all that easy!"

Isabel is passionate about not only educating the public about where their food comes from but also in preserving open space. In the early 2000s, the Town began to develop potential options for protecting the land left in the area. Isabel decided to participate with a Purchase of Development Rights, which allows the farmer to receive the difference between the value of the farm for agricultural purposes and the value for development of the land. In return, the deed to the farm stays in her name but has a limitation for usage, prohibiting the land from ever being developed in the future.



Since this is a cause close to her heart, Isabel was honored to receive an open space award in 2016 for all her efforts in local land preservation. Passionate about local and family history as well, Isabel is a very active member of the Friends of Historic Grooms Tavern; the Saratoga County's Agriculture Promotion Group and Sundae on the Farm; Town of Clifton Park's Open Space, Trails, and Riverfront Committee; Farm Fest Committee and Winter Fest Committee.

This year she received the 2020 Women of Distinction Award. Assemblywoman Mary Beth Walsh honored 17 women from the 112th Assembly District for their accomplishments in honor of the 100th anniversary of women's suffrage in the U.S.

"I genuinely welcomed the opportunity to recognize these women, who each in their own way have enriched their communities through their compassion, talent and volunteerism. Truthfully, it was difficult to choose this year's honorees, as my office received an outpouring of

nominations, each one heartfelt," said Walsh. "We often unintentionally take for granted the women in our lives who quietly and without fanfare keep their homes, neighborhoods, workplaces, schools and places of worship running smoothly. Each of these women is an inspiration and a role model, and I thank them for all of their work to make the 112th Assembly District the special place that it is."

Isabel's family continues to be an important aspect of her life as well. She shares the responsibility of the farm with her son and his family, who also live on the farm. Her nephew works there as well, and her sister lives with her family next door. She loves to attend her grandchildren's events and partakes in many of the ongoing activities in the community.

As a lifelong resident, Isabel has seen her town change dramatically over the years. Originally a student of one-room schoolhouses, Isabel was one of the first in the area to attend our modern-day school structures. But the changes obviously haven't stopped there. "As I was growing up, our community center was the grange hall in Grooms Corners. We went there for Halloween and Christmas parties, covered dish suppers and to enjoy other social events. We frequented Klingbeil's Store in Grooms Corners and Olsen's in Vischer Ferry for

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groceries. We saw the onset of television; the building of the Northway, the mall, housing developments, a centralized school system; and an increase in traffic. Nothing could have prepared us for the onset of the computer age and the abilities that have come with it. Although there will always be negatives in growth and development, almost all that I've seen in the area has been good. We need to keep this continued trend as we strive to maintain the quality of life that we have achieved during the last 50 years. I am completely convinced that when we see the good in our community, we help to maintain it for the future."

So what does she want to see for the area in the future? Most importantly, maintaining a good balance between development and open space so that future generations can continue to enjoy the many benefits of the area. "Development is okay as long as it is planned," she says. "To be able to sustain and bequeath to our descendants that which we consider to be the best part of our lives is a privilege." It is a privilege that she takes full responsibility for by advocating for local policies that help to retain land in agriculture as well as of historical significance.

Residents from all over the Capital Region look forward every year to enjoying all the fun on the farm. In addition to picking your own apples, Riverview Orchards also offers an array of other local products and crafts including their prize-winning apple cider doughnuts, over 35 kinds of homemade pies, fresh eggs, Adirondack maple syrup, local honey and delicious apple butter. Normally, they also offer school visits, birthday parties, weddings, hayrides, an observation beehive, a doughnut robot, and a variety of animals to visit, however, many of those activities are currently on hold due to COVID-19. As things begin to clear up and businesses are allowed to resume their regular activities, be sure to check with them to see when their other activities will be available. In the meantime, visitors can still enjoy their trip to the farm with plenty of fresh air, breathtaking views, yummy doughnuts & pies, the country store, and of course, munching on a fresh, juicy apple!

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