

The Bowman Family

Producing Sweet Fruit & Smiles

By Jenna Caputo
Photos by Angela Mia Photography



For most of us that have grown up in the Capital Region, when we hear Bowman Orchards, we think apples and yummy treats. But there is so much more to this farm—both within the orchard itself and behind the scenes!

It all started in 1952. Ray and Bev Bowman decided they wanted to get into the apple business and bought an existing apple farm right here in Rexford. They were able to open for business that first fall season of 1952, and initially sold apples, cider, and baked goods off apple crates in front of their two-car garage. Things certainly have changed since then! Working side by side, they slowly expanded the farm and their services. Ray and Bev had five children—Danny, Dave, Jackie, Kevin, and Rick—and they all lived in the main brick and white house that still greets visitors as they come up the driveway to this day.

Their son, Kevin, took a special interest in the farm even from a young age and worked alongside his parents for many years. He also enjoyed horseback riding, camping, and water skiing, but his heart was always on the farm and the opportunity to serve his community face to face. “Every day is different, and I get to meet the people who consume what we grow,” he says. He met his wife, Martha, in church youth group, and they eventually bought the farm from his parents in 2004, taking over full responsibilities of running the operation.

Martha was born in Pittsburg, PA, but her family moved to the Capital Region due to her father’s job when she was three years old. She grew up enjoying riding bikes and swimming with her three brothers in their pool. Since taking over the farm, Kevin and Martha have been busy expanding the business and finding new ways to improve their operation. They now have 98 sprawling acres of fruits that they grow each year in hopes of a good crop to sell to the community. No longer just an apple farm, they also produce strawberries, raspberries, peaches, cherries, blackberries, blueberries, pumpkins, and sunflowers in addition to their 65 different varieties of apples. Each fruit is sustainably grown on an integrated pest management program,



using minimal amounts of sprays that target fruit-devouring pests at a specific point in their lifecycle. This procedure leaves the beneficial insects like lady bugs, honeybees, bumble bees, and lace wings alone to do their work to help the crops.

In addition to their you-pick schedule, each year the farm also offers a Strawberry Bash, Berry Bash, Blooms & Butterflies, and the End-of-Summer Butterfly Bash. The farm includes a Kids' Corner with a corn maze, apple cannons, farm animals, pony rides, playland, hayrides, and a fruit train. The Bowmans also offer options for event carriage rides for all ages through their side company, Bowman Carriages.

While Kevin oversees the whole organization and Martha takes care of the payroll, office work, hiring and scheduling of employees, and farm tours, their three children all play an important role on the farm as well. Their oldest, Kristal, developed a passion for horses and now works off the farm training horses and giving lessons to riders of all ages. Kristal's

son, Michael, works on the farm during his school breaks. He helps with the mowing and weed eating, and during the busy fall season, works as a runner performing the various errands needed.

Kevin and Martha's son, Kenny, is the orchard manager, overseeing the everyday maintenance of the orchards, machinery, and buildings, as well as leading the orchard crews during the peak seasons. He now partners with his parents, working full time on the farm as well as on his own snowplowing and lawn mowing business to help financially. Kenny met his wife, Megan, in 4-H. They now have four children. Megan is the bakery manager and office staff, in charge of making the ice cream and baked goods, purchasing, and phones. She says that most people don't realize just how much work a farm really is. "It is a 24/7 job," she explains. "It's not something you just can let go and then have apples. It takes studying, practice, and prayer!"

Martha and Kevin's youngest daughter, Katie, also works on the farm with her husband, Chad, whom she met

through mud bog days at truck pulls. Katie oversees all the activities like the hayrides and pony rides. She is in charge of running the websites and social media in addition to helping Megan in the office and at the registers. She's also a major horse gal! She could often be found out riding or showing her horses in her youth. Katie currently has four horses—Abbie, Libbie, Hailey, and Calie—and is involved with Bowman Carriages, providing beautiful carriage options for weddings and other events. Chad helps out on the farm on the weekends and busy seasons and has been instrumental in coming up with new ideas for the farm moving forward.

Having a farm of this size means there's no "typical" day, but there's always something to be done. This could range anywhere from feeding the animals, cleaning their pens, answering emails and phone calls, ground maintenance, repairs, weed sprays, fertilizer, harvesting, baking, and everything in between. People often see a well-run operation like the Bowmans' and assume that there is extensive cash flow. But as Martha says, "We are not rich! All of our profits are put back into the farm. We are asset rich and cash poor." The farm supports three separate families, and they must be sure that each year they can make enough money in only eight months to support





all 14 people. It takes a lot of time, effort, and cash to produce quality food, but that is not their only concern day to day. With so many visitors on the property as well, they have to also deal with the effects of large numbers of people, a declining awareness of work ethic, increasing hostilities, and abuse to the property.

The onset of the COVID pandemic brought a new set of challenges. In addition to huge expenses in health and safety products as well as increased costs for their supplies in general, the Bowmans have also seen a change in the visiting community. Some of the visitors seem more on edge and aren't as careful with each other or the plants. The Bowmans want to remind people that when they are picking their own apples, to remember that it's critical to leave the buds and leaves on the tree. These buds will become the next year's apple crop and will ensure a plentiful harvest the following year.

The Bowmans all have a passion for farm life and everything that goes with it. That passion extends to their work outside of the farm as well, with their involvement in 4-H, Cooperative Extension, and the NY Apple Association. They also volunteer with the fire department and are very active within their church. When not on the farm or out at the firehouse, they enjoy riding horses, hunting, snowmobiling, camping, boating, and traveling. In addition to traveling across the world for farming conferences and to see other ways of growing apples, they've also loved their trips to Italy, California, Louisiana, and Texas.

The Bowmans are grateful for the opportunity to bring up a new generation on the farm and revel in seeing all the kids, as well as the family dogs—Ruby, Rex, Marley, Pixie, Andie, and Hunter—play among the fruit and sunflowers. The kids also love to help

out when they can, and riding on the tractors is definitely a favorite activity! The Bowmans hope that one day the kids will want to take over and keep the family tradition going. In the meantime, they will continue heading out into the fields every day to produce the wonderful food and fun activities that have long been a community-favorite tradition here in the Capital Region!

For more information about the orchards, please visit www.bowmanorchards.com.

For information about the carriages, visit www.bowmancarriages.com.

