NO-TILL ORGANIC MARKET GARDEN

Producer Case Study

Rebuilding a Legacy One Acre at a Time

The Story of Marianna Langston, Ivan Langston, and Whippoorwill Farms

Union Parish, Louisiana



USDA United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

NO-TILL OMG! Organically Managed Gardening

CAMP'I Field of DREAMS

Producer Profile

For Marianna Langston, Whippoorwill Farms is more than a farm—it is a family legacy.



Located in rural Union Parish, the farm is situated on a homestead that has been in her family for generations. When Marianna and her son, Ivan Langston, began restoring the property, they inherited more than twenty acres of land and history. They also inherited the challenge of bringing a neglected landscape back to life.

No one had lived on the property for nearly thirty years. Trees, brush, and undergrowth had overtaken much of the site, while decades of weathering and past land use had left the soil compacted and depleted. What remained was a place filled with potential, but restoring it would require patience, persistence, and a long-term vision.

As a Southern University Extension Agent, Marianna understood the importance of healthy soil and sustainable food production. She was drawn to regenerative agriculture because it offered a practical approach to rebuilding fertility while working with nature rather than against it. Through the No-Till Organic Market Garden project, she found an opportunity to apply those principles on her own farm.

> *"This is my piece of happy."*
> *— Marianna Langston*

Together, Marianna and Ivan began transforming the property one section at a time. Their vision included vegetables, cut flowers, fruit trees, nut trees, livestock, and healthy soils capable of supporting future generations.

Rather than rushing the process, they focused on steady progress, understanding that meaningful restoration takes time.

Learning Through Innovation

The first step in rebuilding Whippoorwill Farms was understanding the condition of the land.

Years of neglect had resulted in compacted soils, low organic matter, and limited biological activity. Rather than attempting to restore all twenty acres at once, Marianna adopted a deliberate strategy: focus on small areas, improve them thoroughly, and then expand.

Each quarter-acre became a learning laboratory. Using soil tests, field observations, and project training, Marianna and Ivan began implementing regenerative practices including deep mulch, compost applications, livestock manure, cover crops, and reduced tillage. The goal was not simply to grow crops, but to rebuild the living soil beneath them.

One of the most valuable lessons was the importance of observation. By working in manageable sections, they could monitor changes in soil structure, fertility, and biological activity while adapting their management practices as conditions evolved.

The project also provided access to educational opportunities, technical assistance, and a network of fellow producers who were facing many of the same challenges. Those relationships helped reinforce the idea that successful regenerative agriculture is built on both science and shared experience.

Over time, soil tests began showing improvements in organic matter and fertility. The results confirmed what Marianna was beginning to see in the field: healthier soils create healthier farms.



Key Findings

- Restored previously neglected homestead land through phased development
- Increased soil organic matter and fertility
- Reduced soil compaction through no-till practices and deep mulch
- Reintroduced biological activity, including earthworms
- Established diversified production systems including vegetables, flowers, and perennial crops
- Demonstrated successful restoration through incremental management



The return of earthworms signaled that biological activity and soil health were beginning to recover.

Building Healthy Soil

Healthy soil became the foundation of everything happening at Whippoorwill Farms.

When restoration efforts began, the soil was light-colored, heavily compacted, and showed few signs of biological activity. Earthworms were notably absent, a common indicator of poor soil health.

Rather than relying on intensive mechanical tillage, Marianna focused on biological solutions. Deep mulch became one of the farm's most effective tools. Layers of organic material protected the soil surface, moderated temperature fluctuations, reduced moisture loss, and gradually decomposed into organic matter. Compost and livestock manure added nutrients while feeding soil microorganisms responsible for nutrient cycling.

The results became increasingly visible over time.

The soil gradually developed a darker color, improved structure, and greater moisture-holding capacity. Even during periods of drought, mulched areas retained moisture and continued supporting biological activity.

Perhaps the most encouraging sign was the return of earthworms.

Their presence signaled that soil organisms were returning and that ecological processes were beginning to recover. Improvements in soil health also translated into improved crop performance and greater resilience under challenging growing conditions.

For Marianna, building soil health is not a one-time project. It is an ongoing commitment to stewardship and continuous improvement.

Growing a Farm and a Community

The vision for Whippoorwill Farms extends beyond the farm gate.

Located in a rural portion of Union Parish, the farm serves an area where access to fresh, locally grown food can be limited. For many residents, the nearest grocery store is more than thirty minutes away. Increasing access to nutritious food became one of the primary motivations behind the project.

Marianna believes that small farms can play an important role in strengthening rural communities. By producing vegetables, flowers, fruit, and livestock locally, Whippoorwill Farms contributes to a more resilient food system while reducing dependence on distant supply chains.

Education also remains central to the farm's mission.

Through her work in Extension and her participation in the No-Till Organic Market Garden project, Marianna has shared knowledge about soil health, conservation, and regenerative agriculture with other producers and community members.

The farm's future has been strengthened through conservation planning as well. Participation in USDA NRCS programs resulted in approval for Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) practices including cross-fencing, livestock pipeline installation, and a high tunnel. These investments will support improved grazing management, water distribution, season extension, and long-term farm viability.

Throughout the restoration process, Ivan has remained an important partner, helping carry forward the vision of rebuilding both the farm and the family legacy it represents.

"If we can become a consistent source of nutritious food for our community, then we're helping rebuild something important." — Marianna Langston

Looking Forward

The work at Whippoorwill Farms is far from complete. Marianna and Ivan continue to restore the property one section at a time, guided by the belief that healthy ecosystems develop through patience and stewardship.

Future plans include expanding fruit and nut tree production, strengthening livestock integration, improving grazing systems, and maintaining portions of the property's forested areas to support biodiversity.

Rather than maximizing short-term production, their focus remains on building a resilient farm capable of supporting future generations.

The goal is not simply to reclaim a piece of land, but to create a thriving landscape where agriculture, conservation, and community can coexist.



Key Lessons Learned

- Healthy soil is built through patience and consistent stewardship.
- Small improvements accumulate into significant long-term change.
- Biological processes can restore degraded land.
- Diversity strengthens farm resilience.
- Conservation and production can work together.

Key Themes from Marianna's Journey

- Land Restoration
- Family Legacy
- Soil Health
- Stewardship
- Biodiversity
- Rural Food Access
- Regenerative Agriculture
- Conservation Planning
- Farmer Education
- Patience and Persistence

Closing Reflection

Marianna Langston's journey demonstrates that regenerative agriculture is ultimately an act of restoration. Through patience, observation, and a commitment to working with nature, she and her son Ivan are rebuilding a family homestead that had nearly been lost to time. Their work reminds us that healthy farms are built one acre at a time, and that the investments we make in soil, stewardship, and community today create opportunities for generations to come.