

A WOMAN FARMER PROFILE

A MASSACHUSETTS FARMER PROFILE SERIES

SPRING 2025

Featuring

KAT CHANG

she-her-hers



REED FARM



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As the co-owner of one of just two state-inspected poultry processing farms in Massachusetts, Kat Chang has taken a leading role in transforming how the Bay State as a whole cares for and consumes chicken.

This influence holds particularly true in western Massachusetts, where Kat, who co-owns Reed Farm in Sunderland with her husband Peter Reed Laznicka, encounters “not only ... people who have been raising chickens for years and are excited to have a local processor, but (also), people coming who are saying they’re starting (new poultry farms) now because there’s a local option.”

Whether she’s advising people who raise just a few chickens to support their household, or those who raise several thousand chickens in a year, Kat serves as a reliable source of professional wisdom: Reed Farm is licensed to process up to 20,000 chickens per year as a state-recognized poultry farm.

“BECAUSE THERE’S A LOCAL OPTION.”

Despite this track record, and a strong base of local customers, Kat has noticed that at first glance, even people who know she works on a farm are often taken aback by her day-to-day responsibilities.

“I think people are often surprised when they realize that I also work in the plant,” Kat said. “I’m not just doing the paperwork and taking the checks.

“I’m also wearing an apron, and I sometimes get covered in guts, and I’m putting my hands in a chicken,” she added. And the reason for this surprise, “I think, is **because I’m a woman**,” Kat notes. Even within the farming community, the lower incidence of women farmers — and **even more so, women farmers of color** — has always stood out to Kat.

“IT’S INCREDIBLE HOW LITTLE PEOPLE KNOW ABOUT WHAT IS HAPPENING TO THEIR FOOD, AND IT’S JUST ACCEPTED BECAUSE THAT’S HOW IT IS”

“When I was starting out, it was very clear that the person leading a workshop or giving a presentation was probably a white, older gentleman,” Kat said. “And that’s ..., maybe not obvious to all other farmers — because that’s the norm.”

But through her farm work, Kat consistently works to challenge norms, whether they’re based on identity, chicken farming standards or the state’s poultry processing profile.



Kat did not come from a family of farmers but always had a deep appreciation for animals. She started her farming journey as a homesteader in Massachusetts, growing her backyard flock to include both layers and meat chickens.

When Kat met Peter, he ran a mobile processing unit and raised a large flock of chickens on his mother’s farm in Amherst. After a few years of running the mobile unit, Peter realized that the paperwork and certification involved was not sustainable, though their community had a high need for this resource.

So, when they approached starting their own farm, both Kat and Peter were committed to creating an **education-oriented farm and processing facility that would give back to the community in multiple ways.**

This education involves not just advising people on how to raise and process chickens, but teaching them about where their chicken comes from, how the animals are raised and the role that local processors play in **ethical food production and consumption.**

“It’s incredible how little people know about what is happening to their food, and it’s just accepted because that’s how it is,” Kat said. And, she notes, “If they did, maybe they would think more about what they’re buying.”

While Kat would like to see a significant increase in this awareness, she also talks to customers who know and appreciate Reed Farms’ processing efforts. For instance, Kat recalls a customer who asked whether Reed Farm bathed its chickens in bleach during processing.

When Kat explained that Reed Farm does not use this process, the customer **“loved the transparency** and said, ‘I will continue to buy your chicken,’” she recalled.

With commercial sellers “depending on people just not knowing,” Kat said, Reed’s educational mission feels particularly pertinent.

PUTTING MASSACHUSETTS POULTRY ON THE MAP

The wellbeing of Reed Farms' chickens plays a central role in its mission and success, Kat says. This success goes beyond the farm's financial health and works into Kat's overall philosophy around farming and poultry. "Having that connection to your food and the earth, I feel like it's really circular and it's really powerful," Kat said of processing.



At Reed Farm, fostering this connection means upholding standards such as giving the chickens plenty of space, using as much of the animal as they can whenever possible, and closely monitoring the chickens' habits and wellbeing. "Because we only do chicken, we can pay really close attention to our chickens," Kat said. For "a lot of farms out there, chicken is an additional thing ... And when it comes to something like a meat chicken, they're very sensitive."

She added, "**being able to pay such close attention to them is what enables us to have a really high-quality product in the end.**" At its current scale, Reed Farm manages about 1,500 chickens at any given moment, and has a ubiquitous reach in the Pioneer Valley: "I think at this point, a lot of the local chicken you find around here is processed here" on the farm, Kat said.

Still, she's looking for more opportunities to grow the farming options, and through unprecedented means in Massachusetts: Reed Farm is currently in the process of applying to become the state's only United States Department of Agriculture-certified poultry farm, which would allow it to sell poultry out-of-state and significantly raise its yearly processing cap.

Between the farm's growth plans and advances in educational resources for farmers and customers, Kat hopes to see an increase in people eating local chicken. "That's the general overarching goal, more local chicken that's accessible and affordable for everyone," Kat said. "The way to make that affordable is scaling up a little bit, keeping our processing costs low ... And just having more of it around, it'll become more mainstream and will become something more people want to spend money on."

REED FARM

SPOTLIGHT ON SOIL



While the average consumer may not immediately associate chicken processing with soil health, Kat knows that running a successful poultry operation goes hand-in-hand with caring for the soil. Reed Farm relies on soil health in pastures to support livestock, for instance, and Kat would also like to see “a more heavily developed composting system.”

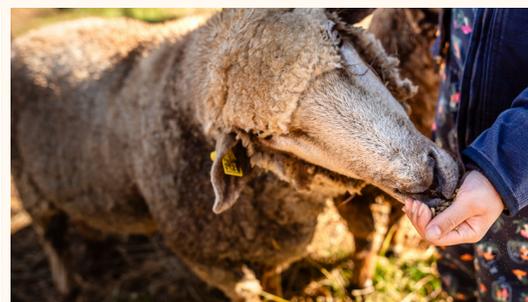
But early in her career, even Kat encountered the common learning curve associated with soil health.

Kat recalls that she was aware of soil health “in the general sense that things grow out of the soil, and so if you have bad soil, (the results) won't be as good.”

“But the complexity of what goes into soil health is something that I've learned and continue to learn now through my journey,” Kat said. While pursuing her own soil health education, Kat has sometimes turned to traditional resources, such as a workshop held at Woven Roots Farm & Community Center in Tyringham, or the Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture nonprofit — at the latter organization, she's since become a board member.

Kat has also found a wealth of resources online, ranging from written instructions on web forums to visual demonstrations posted to YouTube.

This relationship between the farm and its soil will continue to grow, as Reed Farm prepares to expand its processing outside of poultry. In 2022, the farm received an American Farmland Trust New England Farmer Microgrant Program award of \$5,000 for materials to establish a sheep operation. These funds allow Reed Farm to pasture their sheep on a section of the property where they couldn't pasture chickens. Throughout this process, soil health remains, **“for me, about respect for where that land came from first,”** Kat said, **“and then not only maintaining it, but striving to improve it.”**



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Written by Jacquelyn Voghel – Photography by Katie Goodall – Designed by Charline Xu 夏临

Supported by funding from Mass Humanities, USDA's NRCS MA, MDAR, and an anonymous donor.