

Laura Freeman is a farm entrepreneur from east central Kentucky. She founded The Laura's Lean Beef Company in 1985 and was the President and CEO for 23 years. In 2005, she suffered a severe horse-back riding accident, after which she and her partner sold the company. In 2008, she liquidated her cow herd, leased the farm, and moved to Martha's Vineyard Island, Massachusetts, her husband's birthplace, where he and his family maintained some notoriety. Try as she might, she couldn't stand it. So last summer she and her husband put their properties on the market and moved back to Kentucky, to stay.

Once again, they landed at Mt. Folly Farm, part of which her daughter had been overseeing. She had certified much of the crop land organic, and had qualified for KDA's hemp program, which Laura supported, though the organic hemp grain yields had been breathtakingly poor.

Making a silk purse out of a sow's ear, Laura had started fiddling with hemp chocolates, using interns to make them in her kitchen, and selling them at farmer's markets. She knew she had a winner, and so went to Ruth Hunt Candies in Mt. Sterling, for a marketable product. .

The day before Thanksgiving 2016, she and Ben Pasley, her COO, launched Laura's Mercantile, an online store selling hemp chocolates. Since then, her efforts have expanded to encompass a distillery in downtown Winchester, farm tourism, with a farm store and an air-B&B rental, and a heritage grain processing operation to open within the next six months. Her goal is to understand and develop the infrastructure for organics to thrive in east central Kentucky.

She is enthusiastic about everything, which can be a problem. But with Ben Pasley, they have put together a team which can pull it off.