Steckle Heritage Homestead

Annual Report

2025

Education Programs

At the beginning of the year, in January we launched registration for all of our programs and Agriventure Summer Camp. Each program had a price increase from the previous year, due to rising operating costs. By mid February 8 out of 9 weeks of summer camp were sold out, with the remaining spots filled by May. The total revenue for Agriventure was $235,227. Our Volunteer Junior Leaders and Leaders In Training programs gained popularity again after not being offered as we revamped the programs to be more fulfilling. We saw over 25 high school volunteers throughout the summer with our Junior Leaders program.

Little Farmers and Rise & Shine sold out in the spring and fall. Farm Explorers remained a half filled weekday program, offered on Wednesday evenings. During these programs we offered a variety of engaging seasonal activities including pickling, baking with apples, processing sheep wool, playing with clay, working in the gardens and caring for our animals. In the spring and summer months (May-August), we offered a new mini horse program, Tots and Trots, on Saturday mornings. This program brought in $3000, with 3 out of 4 sessions sold out.

Due to renovations in our teaching kitchen we did not offer March break camp in 2025. We did host PD Day Camps, which became popular and sold out in October and November (12 children per camp).

We hosted seasonal school tours in the spring, bringing in $16,385 and in the fall, bringing in $10,150. Children enjoyed tractor rides, animal interactions and honey tasting in the spring and apple cider tasting in the fall. We also hosted evening tours for Girl Guides and Scouts, along with the WCDSB student exchange program, with students from Columbia visiting the farm.

Lastly, we began offering seasonal homeschool tours on the farm again, after a few years' pause in this offering. Children and their families enjoyed coming to the farm throughout the year and seeing how things change depending on the season.

Weddings & Events

In 2025 we hosted seven weddings, with four of them being booked within the same year. Beyond that, eight more weddings were booked for the years 2026/27. Along with offering wedding tours during the weekdays, we accommodated couples' busy schedules and offered tours in the evenings and on weekends, twice per month. We also introduced group tours on Saturday afternoons, inviting couples to tour around, have a snack and spend some time envisioning their special day. We also gave our wedding brochure, lookbook and decor book a refresh at the beginning of the year, which are handed out to couples during their tour.

We continued to offer birthday parties on Sundays, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, in the upper barn from May - October. We also hosted numerous events on the farm throughout the year. Some highlights include the Google staff appreciation event in June, the Fall Craft Market hosted in October with WonderfullyMade Markets and Rockway Mennonite Collegiate's anniversary party hosted in exchange for a favour from years previous.

Open Tuesdays were very popular with our community from May-October and brought in over $12,000 in ticket and BBQ sales. We welcomed some fun additions like BreCreative face painting, irish dancers and live bands in the barn. Most evenings saw between 30-80 families depending on weather. Open Tuesdays were fully run by volunteers, including staff who volunteered their time after work hours to help make the evenings run smoothly. In 2025 we had just over 70 Friends of the Farm members and the price for memberships went up to $65 from $50 in previous years.

With all of the weddings, events and birthday parties throughout the year, we received many positive google reviews, which helped us recover our reputation from some negative feedback in the previous year.

Staff

Amber Baptiste was the Executive Director for 2025. During the winter months we had minimal staff and from spring-fall we welcomed two Education Coordinators (part-time), an Events Co-ordinator (part-time) and two Farm Hands (full-time). We also had a staff member on the weekends to care for the animals. In the fall we had a Program Assistant to help with tours and weekend programs (part-time).

During the summer, we welcomed six Camp Counselors to the team for one week of training and nine weeks of Agriventure Summer Camp. We were grateful to have four returning counselors from the previous summer.

Throughout the year we mentored two high school co-op students who had a strong interest in pursuing a career in Agriculture.

Fundraising, Donations, Grants & Volunteers

In 2025 our three Steckle holiday events were deemed fundraisers throughout the year as they are fully volunteer led, bring in additional funds for the farm and are made possible by donations from local businesses. In April our annual Easter Egg Hunt brought in $6250, followed by our Spooktacular Halloween event in October bringing in just over $5000 and lastly our charming Wake Up Santa Christmas event in December brought in $2000. We also sold half dozen cartons of eggs, bundles of lavender and Steckle calendars featuring our beloved animals that had total sales of $1000 throughout the year.

People continued to donate to the farm through the Canada Helps and Benevity websites totaling $1700 throughout the year, with monthly donations and one time donations at the end of the year. The Waterloo Education Foundation Incorporated (WEFI) donated $5000 to the farm and we used some of the funds to purchase mud kitchens and market stands for the children to play with outside during programs and events. The remaining funds are earmarked for renovating the play area floor in the upper barn. Lastly, we received a very generous donation from the late Ina Martin, an old friend of Jean Steckle, who passed away in 2024. She left $33k to the farm and we planned on using the funds for new fencing in the front paddocks, along with two new pens in the upper field. We will also purchase three new shelters for the animals.

We received a Trillium grant in 2024 and the work was completed in May 2025 by Frey Contractors. With this grant we winterized plumbing in the teaching kitchen, added an accessible bathroom, accessible main door, painted the kitchen, constructed an accessible concrete walkway to the building and made many improvements in the teaching kitchen. We hosted the grant recognition event during an Open Tuesday in September and submitted the final reports for funding.

We also received a Love My Hood grant in 2024 and completed the spending for the Community Garden project and hosted a recognition event during an Open Tuesday in the fall, where the Kitchener mayor attended.

In 2025 we applied for the Canada Summer Jobs grant to help pay the wages of our summer staff. We received $27k for three Camp Counsellors and two Farm Hands for eight weeks of wages each.

We had many wonderful volunteers throughout the year who helped on weekends and during the week. We saw lots of UofG students looking for farm experience for vet school, high school students figuring out their future education/career paths, retired adults with an experienced green thumb and a few adults with special needs with a true love for animals.

New Connections & Community Partnerships

Wisahkotewinowak continued to maintain the crop fields and beehives at the farm. They also hosted their annual Tap Off event in the barn in April.

Reep Green Solutions continued to store their backyard tree planting trees and supplies on the farm and also stored additional supplies for their roadside tree planting project. In exchange for the storage space, they pruned our apple trees in the early spring, maintained the mini forest by McIntyre Drive and planted bareroot cherry and pear trees by the orchard.

A new partnership with Sheridan Nurseries was formed and we received a large donation of pumpkins and Christmas trees for our events, along with veggies for our education garden. We also accepted pumpkins and trees after the holidays to feed our animals and help them with their leftover stock.

Another new partnership with artist Agnes Niewiadomski was formed. Agnes planted a patch of willow at the farm in April. All of the willow grew happily during the year and was harvested in December during the winter solstice, with many volunteer hands. All of the willow was stored on the farm and will be used for basket weaving projects offered in 2026, along with a living willow archway for our ceremony garden next year.

Members of the KW Spinners and Weavers Guild continued to come out for demonstrations on Open Tuesdays, offered drop spindle lessons during summer camp and taught our staff how to properly process wool to use in fibre art projects.

A project that has been in the making for many years, the Community Garden, opened on the May long weekend in 2025. We hosted three community groups, the African Community Wellness Centre, a Sudanese community group and a Syrian community group. With lots of help from Dave Skene, we were able to get the gardeners planting and harvesting throughout the year. The garden has water totes, a garden shed, tools and two picnic tables for people to gather.

Around the Farm

The farm looked beautiful in 2025 with the gardens being tended and the grounds being kept tidy. We removed several dead trees from around the farm, planted strawberries and asparagus in our Education Garden to use in future programming, planted the garden to the kitchen with spring bulbs donated from the City of Kitchener and shade tolerant perennials from Colour Paradise.

Our big old Oak tree at the front of the farmhouse was nominated for 'Tree of the Year' by Tree Trust and Reep Green Solutions. It was fun to be part of a lighthearted competition and hear stories from people about the old oak.

Our animals received timely farrier visits and appropriate care from our vets throughout the year. Marshmallow, a mini horse, battled an eye ulcer and Kyle, the donkey, got through a bout of laminitis. We kept up with vaccines for everyone and adjusted their diets as needed to stay healthy and thriving.

In the spring we incubated eggs with our programs, welcomed two mini horses, Gem & Joy, two pigs and two calves from Kelsey & Pete and two lambs, which children really enjoyed bottle feeding and playing with. Kyle stayed with us throughout the winter and the mini horses happily stayed outside in the front paddocks. In the spring we lost Renee, the llama,

who was euthanized after suffering from heart disease and an inflamed esophagus. We also lost our barncat, Milo who was unfortunately killed by a car on McIntyre Drive, behind the farm.

Wisahk purchased two garden sheds for the farm; one for their supplies between the two fields and one for the community garden. We also had Frey contractors pour concrete steps to the farmhouse from the parking lot. Amber moved into the farmhouse with her children in mid-December and the bridal suite was moved up to the former classroom space. After a second flood from the well pipes running into the basement of the farmhouse, we disconnected the pressure tank and no longer use the well water to eliminate flood risk with the old pipes deteriorating. After the new propane furnace was ruined due to flooding, a heat pump was installed and we received a $5k rebate for this purchase.

Lastly, we brought back our seasonal newsletter for Friends of the Farm and subscribers to read more about the farm buildings and history, try out old homestead recipes, read about our animals and get some gardening tips. It has been fun to write and well received by families.