

Caroline Ranch

Nestled in between foothills leading into the Elkhorn Mountains of Montana lies this picturesque 140-acre sheep ranch. Once part of a much larger operation, Caroline Ranch hadn't been worked for 40 years. "Nothing was here when we arrived in 1987," says Karalee Bancroft, owner. "No fencing, no well, no power, no house!" But the good news was there were no residual pesticides, herbicides, or chemical fertilizers on the land either. "We were able to start with clean soil and build it into something incredibly fertile and productive, even if it was mostly clay and decomposed granite to begin with." Biodiversity was the secret, cycling back into the soil rich compost and composted manure twice a year. "We never would have been able to grow vegetables or put in an orchard without the wonderful, organic sheep manure to enrich the soil," she says.

Karalee lives on the ranch with her daughter and son-in-law, and four grandchildren, and has been certified organic since 1996. "I feel so blessed to be able to experience this lifestyle and share it with future generations. While the life of the farmer can be characterized by back-breaking hard work, invariably its success is by the grace of God. The closer one gets to the earth that sustains us all, the closer one often gets to his Creator. It's humbling to find yourself a steward of something as important as the land, and know your actions affect the health of people, the environment, and wildlife."