

DIANE PRICE

OWNER, MOLLIE'S BRANCH FARM



A BRWIA Profile Written by Tathel Miller

Tucked away in the serene area known as Todd, where the roads of Ashe and Watauga counties meet is the Farm at Mollie's Branch—a small farm named after Mollie, a beloved pet. And dating back to a little over 18 years ago, I met Diane Price, owner of the Farm at Mollie's Branch. Now as a writer and journalist—first-time meetings and interviews can be a bit unnerving—intimidating to say the least. But on this particular chilly morning in February 2005, Diane and I sat down to talk and before she would allow me to ask her the first question—she said this—“Please tell me about yourself.” And this was a first for me—something that left a lasting impression. And I soon learned this was and still is Diane Price—always welcoming—always willing to help and advocate for others, and always willing to share her wisdom, resources, and encouragement.

When conversations arise about the beginnings of Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture (BRWIA), the name Diane Price is a constant. Diane played a significant role as one of the founders, writing the first grant awarded by Z. Smith Reynolds. This grant allowed the organization to expand and with it began a strong foundation in which BRWIA continues still today.

In 2002, Diane Price was a graduate student at Appalachian State University in the Appalachian Studies program researching contemporary agriculture in Watauga and Ashe Counties. With Dr. Pat Beaver as her professor and mentor, Diane became interested in local agriculture and the lack of resources for the farmer, particularly the female farmer. And this sparked a conversation with Dr. Beaver. But what Diane and Dr. Beaver could not have known at the time was this—the exact conversation was taking place around the same time with Sue Counts, then Watauga County Extension Agent and organic farmer, Judi Scharns.



THEN (2008)

“I said to Sue, we need an organization for women,” Diane explains. “And Sue said she and Judi Scharns were talking about that very thing. So, I feel like it actually came from them, and I jumped on board their wagon. We were energetic and nobody could tell us that we couldn't do anything. We just moved forward on it and the number of women who responded was remarkable.”

While working to build and organize BRWIA, the Farm at Mollie's Branch grew into not only a working farm, but an educational farm, as well. The same year that BRWIA was awarded the Z. Smith Reynolds grant, Diane wrote and received several grants for projects to benefit her farm.



(CIRCA 2015)

Diane adds, “It was the year of grants for me—the grant for BRWIA and then I received another grant for my 4H children, one to grow shiitake mushrooms, and a national grant to grow sorghum. It was a joyful, joyful time.”

Over the years, the Farm at Mollie’s Branch has welcomed many college students, children and their parents, school groups and organizations such as the Watauga Youth Network, 4H, Upward Bound—just to name a few. And Rob Griffith, Diane’s husband, speaks fondly of her dedication to enhancing young lives and introducing them to the joys of agriculture and rural living.

“She had a lot of kids, those in their late teens, early twenties, college kids out here on the farm,” says Rob. “Some working, others doing internships, and living here in the

summers. She really got a lot of those people inspired and they still keep in touch with her. I think she opened up a world to them that’s really enriched their lives.”

When asked about BRWIA now and then, Diane was quick to answer with a sense of excitement and hope for the future, praise for what the organization has become, and grateful for the seeds planted in the early years.

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“In the beginning so many women believed in what we were doing and they just gave us hope,” Diane says. “The seeds we planted in the early days have actually grown and spread. I think if it wasn’t for organizations like BRWIA, there wouldn’t be the cohesiveness that exists now among many women-owned and run farms.

“And the leadership with the organization over the years has been so impressive. I was looking at the current leadership in BRWIA now and it makes me so happy because these are really well-educated women. I just love what it has become, and I hope in 20 years it’ll still be there and going strong. Because there’s a lot of work that still needs to be done.”

What once was home to llamas, goats, chickens, sorghum, and mushrooms along with a pig named Wink who thought he was a dog—the barn and pasture are silent now. The farm is no longer a working farm as Diane made the decision to retire from farming life. And in retirement Diane is revisiting her days as a writer where she will be penning her wonderful memories and sharing the story of this little girl who long ago dreamed of one day having her own farm—the Farm at Mollie’s Branch.

