

## Glenwood Farms Hillsboro, Oregon

By Jodi Helmer

### A Journalist Comes Back to the Farm

After graduating from college with a degree in journalism, Kendra Neveln landed a job in banking and planned to spend her career climbing the corporate ladder. Being stuck in an office from 9:00 to 5:00 made Neveln eager to return to her family farm.

“Even though I grew up on a farm, I wasn’t interested in farming growing up,” she recalls.

Her parents, Deke and Molly Tietze, balanced full-time jobs while raising livestock, berries, and garlic on Glenwood Farms in Hillsboro, Oregon. In 2001, the couple built a shade house and planted a 1 ½ acre plot of hydrangeas—their first foray into flower farming. Their wholesale flower business was small but successful.

“My parents were both working full time jobs and the business plateaued,” Neveln explains. In 2011, Neveln left her banking job to work on the farm and help her parents tap into new markets.

Not long after she returned to the farm, Neveln lost her mother to cancer. Together with her dad, who works in agricultural finance but, as Neveln explains, “has the heart of a farmer,” she pushed forward, taking solace in the flowers and dreams of what Glenwood Farms could become.

### A Successful Father-Daughter Team

Although hydrangea varieties like ‘Limelight’, ‘Pink Diamonds’ and the iconic mophead remain popular with wholesale customers, Neveln has worked tirelessly to expand the flower farm to include bulbs and herbaceous perennials such as red twig dogwood, caryopteris, vitex, Ilex verticillata, lavender, and cotinus, expanding to six acres of production.

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Kendra Neveln and father Deke Tietze

She cites trumpet vine, beautyberry, witch hazel, deutzia, hellebore, coreopsis, and winter honeysuckle as her favorite experiments.

Neveln splits the farm chores with her dad. Deke Tietze handles pruning, irrigation, and equipment maintenance while Neveln oversees planting, cutting and sales. The father-daughter duo collaborates on long-term planning.

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“The farm Dad and I envision offers a little bit of a lot of different stuff,” she says. “It’s great to be doing this together.”

Since she earned a degree in journalism and had no experience growing flowers, Neveln had to do a lot of homework to get up to speed. She continues spending time researching new varieties and growing techniques online, reading books, and asking other growers for advice.

“Because I like it so much, I’m able to spend a lot of my free time working and learning and it doesn’t feel like a chore,” she says.



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As part of the education process (and to exemplify the farm's commitment to the environment), Neveln took a workshop through the Seattle Wholesale Growers Market to earn Salmon Safe Certification, a designation that endorses cut flower growers that use environmentally sustainable methods of production.

#### Exploring Market Options

Even though Neveln loves growing cut flowers, she's also the first to admit that building the business is not without its challenges.

In an effort to expand the family company, Neveln experimented with direct-to-consumer sales, setting up a booth at local farmers' markets in 2013 and 2014. While she liked interacting with customers and witnessing their joy at picking out a bouquet, the business model didn't make sense.

"At the end of the day, we were getting better prices selling wholesale," she explains. "People weren't willing to pay what florists were willing to pay."

Rather than considering the farmers' market foray a failure, Neveln chalked it up to the kind of trial and error required to build a business, the same way she views experimenting with new varieties: there are hits and misses. For Glenwood Farms, wholesale sales are a hit.

After finding success at the Seattle Wholesale Growers Market, Glenwood Farms established a booth at the Portland Wholesale Growers Market in 2014 and Neveln has gone to great lengths to develop relationships with local florists and designers which happens to be one of her favorite parts of the job.

"Over the past year, we've been able to develop great relationships with florists and designers in Portland," says Neveln. "We rely on them for feedback on what's working and, as long as we're selling them our grade A product, we know they'll keep coming back."

Both father and daughter want to expand the farm, putting additional acres into production, growing several more acres of popular cut flowers like armeria, quince, witch hazel, and flowering dogwood. But, with Tietze working fulltime and Neveln juggling farming and family, raising two small children with her husband, expansion plans are on hold.

"In the future, I hope to have more time to spend at the farm and the market but, for our current lives, we're at the threshold," she says.

For now, Neveln enjoys every minute she's working on the farm. "I like to be outside getting my hands dirty," she muses. "Every day I'm out there picking, it feels like what I'm supposed to be doing."



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