



FROM FARM TO FORK

*Waterloo market supports
over 100 Nebraska businesses*

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY TIM TRUDELL

A NNOUNCING SUNRISE, the rooster's crow awakens 40 hens in the coop and the Ellsworth family in rural Sarpy County. The day begins with daughter Cailin heading out to the pen, opening the gate and watching the chickens scramble as they begin a day of free-range scouring. The eggs will later be sold alongside hundreds of other Nebraska-based products at Ellsworth Crossing, a farm-to-fork market near Waterloo.

On a five-acre farm southwest of Springfield near the Platte River and Schramm State Recreational Area, Tony and Amber Ellsworth pinch themselves to remember that life is not only good for them and their six children, but it's also not a fantasy.

The Ellsworths realized their dream-come-true when they opened Ellsworth Crossing in 2021. Beginning with 10 farmers, Ellsworth Crossing now works with more than 100 Nebraska-based vendors to provide all sorts of goods, from Plum Creek Farms chicken to honey-based jams.







Tony Ellsworth

Tony and Amber Ellsworth own Ellsworth Crossing, a farm-to-table market featuring over 100 Nebraska farms and businesses. Local shoppers and farmers come to their store in Waterloo to find homemade and small business goods from across the state.



Daughter Cailin, a budding foodie, handles the daily chores of releasing the chickens – and ducks – to their daylong freedom of roaming the pastures. Unafraid of the ducks flying away to sights unseen, instead, the colorful fowl line up like soldiers in formation and march off to explore the day.

These fowls aren't destined for the plate – they're egg layers. Cailin peruses the coops in search of eggs like a shopper at a grocery store hunting the best cut of meat. In the end, she will add a few dozen chicken and duck eggs to her basket.

Soon, they'll be sold at the market.

While the Ellsworths longed to live in the country, running a store of their own was never part of their life plan. Instead, Amber, a Nebraska native, spent part of her youth in rural Colorado, where her family raised cattle and bison.

Tony grew up in Fort Calhoun.

Wanting to experience something new after high school, he enlisted in the U.S. Navy. Family and friends assumed he'd stay in Southern California after the Navy, but Tony longed for the fresh air and friendliness of Nebraska.

Both single parents when they met, Amber and Tony fell in love, married and combed two households. They sought a new home together in the country near Springfield.

The Ellsworths' farm originally raised chickens for market, butchered at Plum Creek Farms near Beatrice. When Dean and Amy Dvorak, owners of Plum Creek Farms, decided to open a farm-to-fork store near Omaha, they asked Amber to run it. When the pandemic hit, the Dvoraks sold the store to the Ellsworths, and Ellsworth Crossing was born.

The market has grown from an original 10 farm-to-fork partners to include more than 100 Nebraska-based small farms and businesses. Branded L Longhorns from Wisner brings the beef; bison steaks come from Central Nebraska Buffalo, a three-generation ranch in Hordville; Burbach's Countryside Dairy in Hartington provides fresh milk; Jisa's Farmstead Cheese in Brainard adds their specialty cheeses; and honey-based products come from It's All About Bees in Ralston.

Gathering around a small horse trailer on a sunny Saturday morning, people anticipate the opening of the gate, as Adam Wackel, owner of Plum Creek Wagyu in Crete, brings live animals for Ellsworth Crossing's meet-your-farmer Saturdays.

As promoters of Nebraska agriculture, the Ellsworths enjoy connecting customers to their Nebraska farmers with animal encounters and corporate tours.

Tony often discusses the importance of agriculture to Nebraska – a \$31.6 billion industry – and shares the role that humane and holistic farming plays across the state.

Supporting small and family-owned farms is vital to Nebraska's future, Tony said.

Watching shoppers pick up frozen chicken, beef and bison steaks, fresh dairy and cheese, as well as Ellsworths' eggs, Tony smiles, acknowledging the positive impact their store has on fellow Nebraskans.

An even bigger boost for the store is a visit from a particular type of customer.

"We have farmers come in to get their steak and cheese. And they buy our eggs," Tony said. "Farmers supporting farmers."

While supermarket shelves may be stocked with a variety of groceries, customers stopping by Ellsworth Crossing know they're going to find products unavailable elsewhere – freshly picked eggs, homemade pico de gallo and even cinnamon apple rings.

It's a country life that honors the Ellsworths' roots, paying it forward for other Nebraska farmers and businesses. 🐮

Ellsworth Crossing started in 2021 with 10 farm-to-fork partners. Today, their business supports farmers, ranchers, producers, makers and more – all from Nebraska.



Tony Ellsworth