FAITH / FAMILY / STEWARDSHIP

Sustainable Country Living

A way that works

A family reflection on purposeful rural life,
practical planning, and the beauty of simplicity.

COUNTRY LIVING • PART ONE

“Faith is not reckless or devoid of thought.”
— A lesson from our family’s journey



A personal testimony and practical guide

A different reason for moving

Not everyone who leaves the city for the countryside intends to enter commercial agriculture or build a large farming enterprise. That was not our family's motivation. We moved primarily because of our religious convictions: to give our children a morally grounded upbringing, nurture better health, and strengthen the bonds within our family.

We wanted to step away from the relentless pursuit of material possessions. We longed for a closer relationship with God through His creation, deeper family connections, and a life we could one day look back on with gratitude—a life lived with purpose, conviction, and meaning.

Yet we had to be realistic. A beautiful vision does not, by itself, pay for food, education, transport, clothing, or the everyday needs of children. We were not deliberately choosing poverty. Our genuine concern was how to sustain life away from the conveniences of the city, employment opportunities, and the economic activity that makes it easier to establish a business.

> Faith and planning must work together. Trusting a God-inspired conviction does not mean abandoning careful thought.

That is a lesson we learned through experience. We share it to show that country living can be achievable without operating a large commercial farm. Every family's circumstances are different; our experience is not a universal template. What follows are adaptable principles that may help you think through your own journey.

1. Develop a plan

The familiar saying "When man plans, God laughs" reminds us that our intentions do not always align with God's higher purposes. His path may be more demanding—or unexpectedly easier—than the one we imagined. We have experienced both. But does that mean we should avoid planning? Certainly not.

> "Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established."
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> — Proverbs 16:3 (KJV)

Begin with the place itself. Visit prospective areas and learn about their character and culture. Consider safety, crime, the habits and values of the surrounding community, and whether the environment will help or hinder the kind of home you wish to build.

Assess practical realities as well: access to shops, schools, healthcare, transport, municipal services, water, and the actual costs of living off-grid. A cheaper property is not necessarily cheaper to maintain. Rural living often asks us to unlearn certain conveniences and embrace simpler alternatives—including using a fire for warmth or preparing meals without electricity.

Keep the plan simple. Pray over it, refine it, and then act. Above all, answer the next question honestly: How will we sustain ourselves?

2. Count the cost

Jesus' teaching about counting the cost (Luke 14:28) speaks directly to the need for preparation. Relocation has financial implications, and enthusiasm should never prevent us from examining them.

We have met people who began this journey only to return to the city because their resources ran out. Savings alone can disappear quickly when there is no dependable income. Some families wisely continue working in town while gradually building their rural homes. Others find ways to earn from their land or skills soon after moving.

There is no shame in a slower transition. Prepare a realistic budget for land, shelter, water, transport, schooling, food, repairs, tools, and emergencies. Preserve an income stream or a practical plan to develop one. A hasty decision should not be called faith simply because it was made with enthusiasm. Presumption overlooks the very preparation that responsible stewardship requires.

3. Choose land within your means

> "The parents should get as suitable a place as their means will allow. Though the dwelling may be small, yet there should be land in connection with it, that may be cultivated."
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> — Ellen G. White, Manuscript 50, 1903; Country Living, p. 24

The key phrase is "as their means will allow." A common mistake is to desire more land or a larger home than a family can reasonably develop and maintain. Unless you are establishing an institution or another substantial enterprise, a modest property may be enough for a productive garden, a small trade, and the needs of the household.

Private ownership is our personal preference, but it is often the more expensive route. Families have also made peaceful, secure homes in remote villages and on communal land. The decision depends on circumstances, the rights attached to the land, and the opportunities available to your family. Where possible, avoid burdensome debt and choose a scale that allows you to live, not merely to service expenses.

4. Build systems that reduce daily expenses

Our long-term ambition is to live with very little dependence on cash for daily necessities. It is an ambitious goal, and we are still working toward it. The principle is straightforward: every essential need that can be met responsibly at home reduces pressure on the household budget.

Grow a productive family garden

We believe a country home should make generous use of its growing space. Our modest garden has given us cabbage, spinach, garlic, ginger, beetroot, potatoes, carrots, lettuce, cucumbers in different seasons, beans, sorghum, maize, fruit, berries, melons, onions, shallots, and eggplants. We have harvested and preserved produce, reducing what we need to purchase.

The garden is not only a source of food. The money saved can be redirected toward tools, infrastructure, and the gradual development of the property. Start with vegetables suited to your soil, water supply, and climate; learn the seasons; save what you can; and expand steadily.

Use natural resources wisely

Where wood is legally and sustainably available, it can provide heat and support certain cooking and hot-water needs. We gathered stone from a nearby hill and, through the patient work of my husband and a helper, built a beautiful fireplace. Chiselling and shaping the stones took time and effort, but the result was economical and deeply satisfying.

That fireplace has become a place of warmth for our family, visitors, and church gatherings. Natural resources must be used responsibly: preserve trees, maintain ventilation, keep chimneys safe, and never use open flames or fuel-burning equipment in unsuitable enclosed spaces.

Make outdoor cooking part of family life

Coming from the city, outdoor cooking felt both adventurous and demanding. I first enjoyed it as an opportunity to spend time with my daughter. Soon I noticed another benefit: it helped us manage household energy costs.

I asked my resourceful husband to create an outdoor cooking area. With the help of his team—and, we believe, God’s strength and guidance—he built a practical space with a tap and sink for convenient washing up. We now enjoy the fellowship, simplicity, and savings that it brings. As the saying goes, a happy wife makes a happy life!

Heat water with a wood-fired “donkey” geyser

We built an outdoor wood-fired water heater, often called a donkey geyser, to provide hot showers for our family and campers. It lessens our reliance on electricity and gas and has been one of our rewarding, low-cost sustainability projects. As with any heated-water system, safe installation, pressure relief, supervision, and protection from scalding are essential.

A life worth cultivating

In Part Two, we will explore our solar system and the practical steps toward off-grid living. There is still much to learn. Life in the countryside is beautiful, but it has its difficulties. Those challenges can teach patience, resourcefulness, diligence, and gratitude.

Sustainable country living does not always require great wealth or vast acreage. It asks us to work faithfully with our hands and minds, use the resources we have wisely, and make decisions that fit our family’s means. Each improvement—however small—can strengthen a home and reduce unnecessary dependence.

My hope is that our experience encourages you to see what is possible: reduce expenses, deepen family life, and flourish in the place God has provided for you and the generations that follow.

Coming next: Part Two — Solar power and practical off-grid living.