Beginning Livestock Farm Business Plan

Cattle + Pasture-Raised Egg Enterprise | Rowan / Davie County, North Carolina

Purpose. Build a small, disciplined livestock business through mentorship, rotational grazing, conservative stocking, and direct local sales, with a long-term goal of farm ownership and a multigenerational family agricultural asset.

Operator Profile

Jesse Drakeford is a beginning farmer and full-time law-enforcement professional who is intentionally entering agriculture through a mentorship-first model. He did not grow up on a farm and does not claim prior livestock-management experience. The plan is to learn under an experienced producer, keep detailed production and financial records, and scale only after demonstrating competence and sustainable pasture performance.

Personal motivation: As a father of three, the long-term objective is to build a productive farm that his children can learn from, participate in, eventually inherit, and potentially pass to the next generation.

Business Concept & Land Requirement

Land target: 40-60 acres total, ideally 30-45+ acres of fenced, productive pasture with reliable water, livestock access, and basic handling/storage infrastructure.

Year 1 cattle: 10-12 healthy, fully weaned stocker calves. This is intentionally below the likely carrying capacity of a well-managed 40-45 acre pasture while the operator learns forage, animal-health, and grazing management.

Year 1 poultry: Approximately 40 laying hens using a secure coop, automatic watering/feeding, and rotational outdoor access.

Management system: Rotational grazing, conservative stocking, pasture rest, water-resource protection, routine animal-health protocols, and written records.

Time commitment: Designed as a part-time operation: approximately 8-15 routine hours per week after setup, with heavier weeks during animal receiving, pasture work, maintenance, and sales.

Year 1 Operating Plan

Enterprise	Starting Scale	Primary Goal	Primary Sales Path
Stocker cattle	10-12 head	Safe weight gain on pasture; learn cattle handling, health and grazing	Regional auction / direct feeder buyer; evaluate freezer beef later
Laying hens	~40 hens	Build recurring weekly farm income and local customer base	Direct egg sales, farm pickup, preorder customers
Pasture	Rotational paddocks	Maintain forage residual and prevent overgrazing	Productive asset; supports future herd expansion

Startup & Working-Capital Plan

Planning ranges are intentionally conservative and will be replaced with verified quotes before animals or equipment are purchased.

Category	Planning Range	Notes
10-12 weaned stocker calves	$15,000-$22,000	Purchase only after health, weight, vaccination and transport documentation are verified.
Cattle freight / receiving / veterinary	$2,000-$4,500	Interstate certificate, transport, receiving supplies and initial health contingency.
Hay, minerals, supplements, routine health	$4,000-$7,000	Depends heavily on forage productivity and winter feed needs.
40-hen layer setup	$4,500-$7,500	Pullets/chicks, secure coop, feeders, automatic water, portable fencing, bedding and feed.
Insurance / repairs / marketing / contingency	$2,000-$4,000	General farm liability, maintenance and unexpected expenses.
Estimated Year 1 capital + working reserve	**$27,500-$45,000**	**Excludes negotiated land lease or purchase payment.**

Revenue & Sales Model

Enterprise	Illustrative Gross	Year 1 Sales Path
10-12 stockers	$20,000-$27,000 at market weight	Regional livestock auction or direct feeder buyer; freezer beef only after experience and processor access.
~40 layers	~$4,150/year at 250 eggs/hen and $5/dozen	Preorder customers, farm pickup and selected local-market relationships.

Year 1 objective: proof of concept and training. Success is measured by animal health, pasture condition, accurate records, reliable sales channels and manageable workload - not maximum short-term profit.

Execution & Risk Controls

Mentorship & training: Work with an experienced cattle producer/landowner mentor; complete relevant NC Cooperative Extension livestock and pasture training; use USDA-NRCS/FSA resources as appropriate.

Stocking & animal health: Start below maximum carrying capacity; verify weights, vaccinations and transport paperwork; expand only after a complete grazing season supports it.

Continuity & agreements: Maintain emergency backup livestock care and use written lease/partnership terms covering livestock, fencing, water, insurance, improvements and any future purchase option.

Three-Year Milestones

Year 1: Complete first stocker cycle; establish layer flock; document costs, weights, grazing and sales; complete formal training.

Year 2: Repeat profitable components; improve pasture utilization; expand only if forage and available labor justify it.

Year 3: Evaluate a larger herd or direct-beef model and pursue long-term land security through lease renewal, purchase option or farm financing.

Long-Term Commitment

The goal is to become a competent livestock producer, secure permanent farmland, and build a farm business that can remain productive across generations. The preferred landowner relationship values accountability, mentorship, careful stewardship and a possible future path to ownership.

Planning references: USDA Agricultural Marketing Service, Weekly North Carolina Cattle and Grain Summary, Nov. 9, 2026; NC FarmLink property and beginning-farmer resources. All prices are planning estimates, not guarantees.