



Once Upon A Time...

... there was a place called Down Home Ranch, a community where people with Down Syndrome could live out their lives with love and dignity.

Although much progress had been made in the education of children with handicaps or developmental delays, all too often the young adult just out of school faced a future of poverty, unemployment, exploitation and social isolation. Although excellent programs of supported employment and living situations existed, their availability fell far short of meeting the need.

Down Home Ranch was a living community in which all residents— those with mental retardation and those without—performed paid, meaningful work, lived in a family setting, and were encouraged to explore their spiritual relationships and to continue their lifelong education.

The Ranch was founded on the belief that everyone should have opportunities to grow and develop in many ways, and that learning to be productive, reliant, resourceful and reliable is important to these goals. People at The Ranch believed that everyone should have recurring chances to accomplish and to excel.

The goal of Down Home Ranch was to be a community and a home and a happy source of work and income for all who chose to live there—especially those persons with Down Syndrome for whom the Ranch was the home they would otherwise not have.

meat, poultry and dairy products, close to half of all its vegetables, and baked its own bread and rolls. Surplus production was sold locally and provided a modest but fairly reliable income to the ranch.

The greenhouses were a primary source of income, providing several commercial services under the name **Down Home Tropicals**:

- seasonal bedding plants for retail outlets
- tropical plant brokerage and cleaning
- cut-flower production and sales
- production and sales of winter tomatos



Arts and crafts produced at DHR were another source of income. In particular, **The Quilting Project** produced uniquely designed and handcrafted quilts. Another successful endeavor was **Down Home Pottery**, with a noted Austin craftsman providing invaluable assistance in helping set up our potting shop and kiln.

DHR Direct Mail was a project that was a commercial success and provided some “high tech” experience and employment for residents. It did medium size mailings for local businesses—producing lists, labels, copying, folding, stuffing, etc. Direct Mail was also responsible for putting out the *Down Home Newsletter* and *The Catalogue*, the later where DHR products were announced and advertised.

Down Home Ranch was first and foremost a place for persons with Down Syndrome to live and to work, to love and be loved. To laugh, to cry, to grieve, to labor, to play, to sing and dance. Others with physical or mental differences and challenges also became “Ranchers.” The ranch depended very much upon these Down Home Ranchers, and they upon DHR. All Ranchers, as well as DHR staff, shared in the successes and failures of the ranch.

Down Home Ranch was a 125 acre working farm and ranch, and was home to eighty seven children and adults—many of whom had Down Syndrome, some of whom did not. All residents of Down Home Ranch (DHR) were members of the non-profit corporation that owned the land, all had a permanent home there, and all participated to the best of their abilities in the management and operation of the ranch.

Down Home Ranch consisted of a lodge housing the administrative offices, a large kitchen, dining hall, meeting room with fireplace, library, laundry, computer room, three classrooms and a game room. Adjacent to the lodge were clusters of resident cottages, some individually occupied, others shared. A few were family occupied. The DHR Lodge was also used by the local high school and community college for occasional workshops or classes, including many that were offered for members of the DHR community.

On the grounds were a bakery, a woodshop, a garage for auto and farm equipment repair, three working greenhouses, stables and a barn, and various other structures. The Ranch had approximately 25 acres in cultivation for row crops and “intensively grown” organic produce, and had about 7 acres of young fruit orchards. There were several acres of pasture and two stock ponds, stocked with edible game fish. An all weather creek and wooded area served as a park, camping and cook-out area.

The variety of animals on the ranch included horses, cows, cattle, sheep, chickens, rabbits, dogs and cats. DHR residents were responsible for the ongoing care of all livestock and everyone learned to ride and care for horses.

Down Home Ranch sought economic independence through a combination of income-producing activities, all of which were carried out by DHR Ranchers and staff, and so DHR produced most of its own

Ranchers came from across the nation. Not all were equal in ability, strength, or resolve, but each did the best s/he could. Whereas DHR could not serve those with profound physical or mental limitations, many would be surprised to see the challenges to which Ranchers faced and overcame in helping run a 125 acre farm and ranch. There wasn't much "make-work" at DHR.

Utopia, you say?

Did you know that "utopia" means "no-place?" Non-existent. That aptly describes Down Home Ranch: it doesn't exist. It is still a dream, a vision of a future-to-be. Utopia.

But with your help, by becoming a supporter of Down Home Ranch, we will one day be able to end this story in the only way such such fables should end . . .

**. . .and they all lived happily
ever after.**



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Down Home Ranch

An Idea Whose Time Is Coming