



Transfarmation®

Milkweed & Thistle

GRANT REPORT

Reporting Period: November 2023 – May 2025

Amount Granted: \$17,500

Farm Location: Cookville, Texas

Former Farm Type: Broiler farm

Farming Method Tested: Cut-flower production

Recommended for Other Farmers? Yes

Conversion Plans: [Indoor Edible-Flower Production](#)

A \$17,500 Bo Halley Research and Innovation Grant was awarded to Morgan Salis-Deany in November of 2023 for her Milkweed & Thistle project. Morgan is the daughter of Devvie Deany, of [Halley Farm](#), which operated as a poultry farm and cattle ranch for over 40 years. Recognizing that poultry production no longer made financial sense for them, the Halley family repurposed their land as a dog and donkey sanctuary, and also trialed hemp production. In her grant project, Morgan sought to repurpose one of the farm's empty poultry barns to support cut-flower production.





Cattle pasture converted to donkey rescue.



Poultry barn for Morgan's pilot project.



Halley family trialed growing hemp here.

Halley family dog rescue.

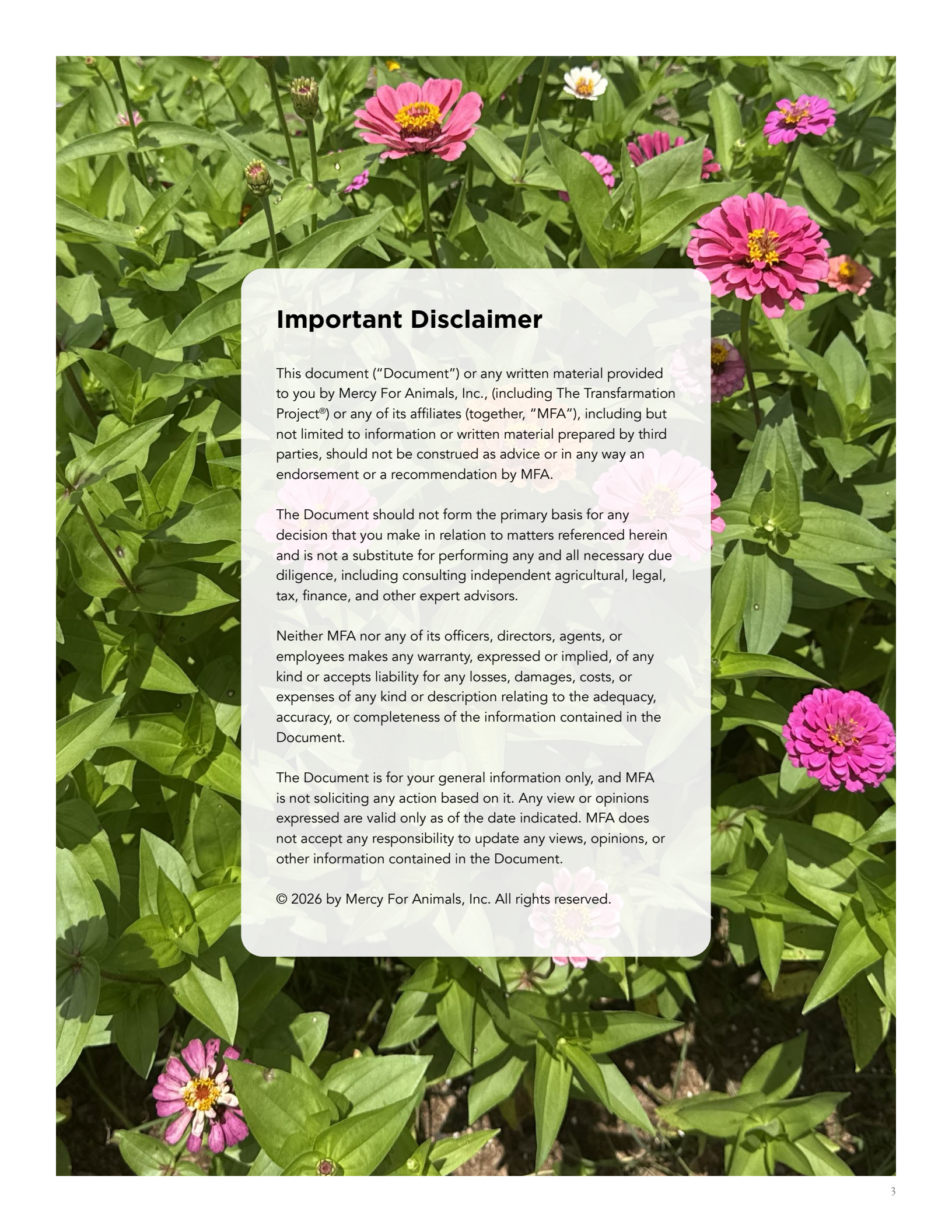
Biggest Learning: This project highlights some of the challenges the next generation of farmers face when committing to leaving factory farming behind while still honoring their family's farm and legacy. Morgan is the third generation of the Halley family, and became more involved on the family farm when her mother, Devvie Deanie, and her uncles decided to transition from poultry to something more financially viable and sustainable. The Halley family began with cultivating hemp and establishing a dog rescue. They reused their former poultry barns to hang and dry harvested hemp. Next, they reworked a former cattle pasture into a donkey rescue. Morgan's vision to repurpose one of the poultry barns for indoor cut-flower production is part of her desire to continue on the family farm for the next generation.

During the course of this project, Morgan realized the scale of her initial pilot project was larger than she anticipated. She ultimately decided to shift to a smaller-scale cut-flower farm on her personal property rather than continuing work at the original location on the family's land. While utilizing the family land and poultry barns is still part of her long-term plan, she was more successful in establishing her business at the new location. While the pivot to a new location isn't what Morgan and Transformation initially envisioned, we look forward to continuing to support the larger farm transition once Morgan's business matures.

Transformation encourages farmers pursuing farm transitions to start small with pilot projects, focusing on learning to grow a new crop or one type of production system. Morgan's move off-site made sense for her situation. Farmers may initially face hurdles in transitioning their barns immediately. Small-scale operations offer more flexibility, for example, to grow one crop in a basement, garage, auxiliary building, or elsewhere on available property using temporary infrastructure such as high tunnels or hoop houses.

This report documents Morgan's efforts to continue her family's legacy of trialing alternative pathways to factory farming, starting with her challenges on the Halley farm and evolving with the possibilities her pivot to her new home may provide.



A vibrant garden scene featuring numerous pink zinnia flowers with bright yellow centers, surrounded by lush green foliage. The flowers are in various stages of bloom, and the background is filled with more green leaves and some white flowers.

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Stages of Transition

Morgan planned to spend the first year of her project getting the cut flower operation up and running. She spent the first year navigating her project on the Halley Farm, with the final six months spent pivoting into production at her new home location in Tyler, Texas.

	Month	Projected Timeline	Actual Timeline
Q1	November 2023 December 2023 January 2024	Prepping poultry house - cleaning, repairing, etc.	Cleaning up, repairing, brainstorming, and planning.
Q2	February 2024 March 2024 April 2024	Purchasing and installing equipment necessary for flower operation.	Continuing cleaning up, repairing, brainstorming, and planning.
Q3	May 2024 June 2024 July 2024	Ordering seeds/bulbs/etc needed. Storing.	Paused to address non-project farm priorities.
Q4	August 2024 September 2024 October 2024	Starting seeds and bulbs in a weatherproof greenhouse space.	Paused to address non-project farm priorities.
Q5	November 2024 December 2024 January 2025	N/A	Pivoted to buildout at her new home location, plumbed water lines, some planting, and some harvesting
Q6	February 2025 March 2025 April 2025	N/A	Production

Morgan spent the first quarter on cleanup, brainstorming, planning, and outreach. She took two classes a week to inform her project, one on mushroom growing and one on farm business. She collected materials to repurpose throughout the quarter. She cleared the brush, dead trees, and trash around their poultry barns to prepare for her project. She contacted soil-testing sources, brought in soil, and collected scrap materials, such as old troughs, to repurpose for planting. She connected with volunteers and friends willing to support her project. She brainstormed water sources and filtration systems for the greenhouse she envisioned. She made a separate bank account specifically for this project. By the end of the quarter, Morgan had prepared her next steps to connect with a flower business consultant and sent videos of her project space in preparation for another consultant to assess and visit her project site.

Morgan reported how challenging it was being the only person working on the project, especially with the heavy manual labor. She talked through her ideas with multiple people in her life to get more opinions and tried to be flexible about when things got done. Overall, Morgan focused on staying open-minded to different ideas, people, and resources, and repurposing materials.

Morgan focused her efforts on just one section of the poultry barn at a time, rather than the entire barn. She expressed her worry about accomplishing enough, but kept telling herself that it is okay to take her time and that she doesn't have to produce right away. Morgan shared, **"I'm learning not to get too ahead of myself or take on more than I can handle while working on this project."**





Interior of one of the Halley's poultry barns

Morgan spent the second quarter on cleanup, brainstorming, and continued planning. She searched for labor to support the demolition and conversion of one of the barns. She spent time planning and reviewing which materials she could reuse and repurpose. Morgan's friends and volunteers cleared the remaining trash, mulched, excavated, and tilled the soil around the chicken houses. She contacted a cut-flower farming consultant to schedule weekly check-ins and a greenhouse consultant to conduct a site visit to assess which poultry barn to use.

Morgan reported that rain was a huge issue throughout the spring. The roads and the project area were prone to flooding, which made site access a challenge and made a muddy mess that was difficult to traverse. They also experienced unexpected power outages, which are common on their farm during the spring.

Morgan consulted with a greenhouse consultant, who visited the site and provided financial quotes and brainstormed ways to repurpose items. The greenhouse consultant also offered guidance on demolition. Morgan was surprised to find she could reuse almost everything in the chicken houses, so long as it was properly sanitized. The consultant confirmed the stability of the structural beams in house number 2 (the middle house in the first row). Morgan laid out a plan to section the house into thirds: the first third for a seed-starting area (climate-controlled), the second third with polycarbonate roofing and open sides, and the third with wildlife netting. Prior to the greenhouse consultant's site visit, Morgan felt uncertain about how to proceed. After the visit, she felt she could confidently start the project. Morgan ended the second quarter with clarity and ready to move the project forward.



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As she attempted to secure labor for the excavating and mulching work, Morgan reminded herself that she could ask for help. Morgan did face challenges securing volunteer labor and noted limited follow-through. However, she reflected that she tried to keep an open mind and not rush things, reporting "I'm focused on one part of the project at a time to avoid burnout, letting things unfold naturally."

In June, during the third quarter, Morgan reported difficulty sourcing labor and equipment for the demolition. She planned to use her and her uncle's labor on this project, but competing priorities with their ongoing farm and rescue responsibilities kept it from moving forward. Morgan experienced high weed pressure around her project space, with persistent weeds that had to be pulled multiple times over a long period. In the height of summer, Morgan paused due to these barriers and other non-project farm priorities.

In the fourth quarter, Morgan concluded that the access area to the poultry barns on the Halley farm would require significant upkeep. The high weed pressure required a more permanent solution. Tall grasses and weeds that had been removed with machinery to provide access to her project space for one of the poultry barns had all come back within about six weeks. It was estimated that a few months of ongoing work, along with improvements in soil quality, were needed to make Morgan's project space usable on a permanent basis.

By this time, Morgan and her partner had purchased a house and a bakeshop about three hours away from the Halley farm near Tyler, Texas. She was still interested in repurposing the chicken house for seeding and growing, but felt there was much more opportunity in her new town for both sales and in-ground flower cultivation. Morgan's partner's family had a boutique in town where she could sell her flowers and products. Morgan felt eager to proceed with her project, as considering a new location removed several major hurdles. Her next steps were reconnecting with the cut-flower consultant, exploring USDA EQIP grant funding for hoop houses, and pursuing conservation easement funding.



Poultry barn entrance at Halley Farm



Morgan's Pilot Project

In the fifth quarter, Morgan moved to her new property and prepared a garden space for cut-flower production. She invested in fencing, tilling the soil, and purchasing seeds, and planned for rainwater catchment on the property. She plumbed a water line from the well to water the crops to supplement rainfall. She fenced in the garden area and set up a partial greenhouse in the shop.

Morgan was connected with resources through her local USDA office in Cherokee County, including a local horticulturist. Through that contact, she found that she could get numerous materials for free, including soil, manure, and mulch. She prepped the soil and had additional soil brought in.

Morgan started some plantings, including gladiolas, roses, lilies, blueberries, yucca, holly, and magnolia trees. She started harvesting roses, but had not made any sales yet. She felt her current location was more conducive to her farm business, given its proximity to a bigger city and markets.

By the sixth quarter, Morgan purchased a greenhouse, gardening building supplies, garden tools, soil amendments, and flower seeds, grafts, and bulbs. Her reporting ended as she began her growing season and started making direct sales to folks for their personal flower needs. Morgan wrapped up her reporting feeling much more optimistic about her new area and was considering partnering with someone to open a flower shop.



Production and Sales

Morgan's project entered the production stage at the conclusion of her grant reporting. Additional data may be collected during follow-up check-ins in the post-R&I reporting period.

Sufficiency of Project Funding

Morgan estimated the total cost of converting a poultry barn to indoor cut-flower production to be roughly \$35,000 to \$40,000. In her grant application, she requested \$15,000 and was granted \$17,500.

She recognized she'll likely need to reinvest any profit back into the farm business and estimated becoming profitable by the second year.

Table 2. Proposed and actual budgets

Proposed Budget		Actual Budget	
Halley Farm Location		Halley Farm Location	
Cleaning/sanitizing of poultry houses	\$1,000	Cleanup & excavation around poultry barn	\$2,210.0
Polycarbonate sheet panels (1st section of greenhouse) - 38 sheets	\$5,472	8'x 10' Greenhouse*	\$500.66
Hi-Hose Greenhouse Watering System	\$542		
Hydroponic Greenhouse Indoor Farming Nutrient Solution pH ec dosing Controller	\$990		
Raised beds (bundle of 16)	\$2,866	Garden Building Materials*	\$1,127.88
Commercial shade structure	\$2,515		
Soil for ground \$2,000 Soil for beds \$1,000 (not including delivery)	\$3,000	Soil & Amendments*	\$1,924.39
6 Mil White Overwintering Film - 35' x 100' \$294.99	\$295	Garden Tools*	\$2,033.37
Pots, trays, etc.	\$350	Pots trays*	\$12.97
Seeds, bulbs, etc.	\$850	Seeds, bulbs, etc.*	\$1,382.74
		Cleanup & Fencing Materials*	\$2,000.00
		Cut-flower Sales & Display *	\$6,343.85
Total Project Cost	\$17,880	Total Project Cost	\$17,535.86

*New Farm Location

Have you received any goods or services in-kind or as a gift?

Morgan reported receiving the following:

- Another farmer in Dangerfield, Texas, gifted 30 grow lights and 60 grow bags. Valued at ~\$5,000-\$9,000.
- 5 friends and volunteers donated \$8,000 worth of excavating and mulching labor around the poultry houses.
- Her neighbors helped till the soil with their tractor.
- A friend of a friend helped Morgan navigate plumbing a waterline from their well for irrigation, saving them the cost of sourcing quotes from plumbers and materials and the time it would take. They paid around \$600 to run the waterline, but estimated the full cost would have been around \$1,500-2,000.
- Her neighbors offered her access to their acreage for her greenhouse and helped with her plant seedlings.



Reflecting on her experience of receiving goods or services in-kind or as a gift, Morgan learned the strength and generosity of community connections, **“It’s helpful to take the opportunity to talk to anyone about your project, even in line at the grocery store. The more you talk and brainstorm with people, the better.”** She was shocked at the number of people interested in helping out.





Farmer Reflections

What would the farmer have done differently?

Morgan reported that she wished she had created her separate business bank account to receive the grant funding sooner. Throughout the project, Morgan noted struggling with competing priorities due to her many responsibilities with her family's nonprofit and farm. She wished she had dedicated time to start to work on the project sooner. Morgan also reported that she wished she had hired someone to help with demolition and other tasks related to the conversion of the poultry barn.

Once she relocated from the Halley Farm to her new home, Morgan reflected that there was nothing that she would have done differently; she felt everything was happening as it was supposed to. At the conclusion of her reporting, Morgan shared she wished she had communicated more often with Transformation about navigating her project. When asked about any advice she would give to farmers considering similar projects, Morgan shared, **"I would recommend starting small with new crops, taking time to plan your layout, and diving into as many resources as possible."**



Farmer Achievements

In the first quarter, Morgan considered her achievements to include taking on the project, being open to taking classes in addition to working full-time, and getting out of her comfort zone and "putting herself out there" to apply for the grant. She reflected, **"I'm proud of myself for making it work; it feels really good."**

In the second quarter, Morgan was proud to be in the process of making her cut-flower business happen. She's proud that she's been open to asking for and receiving help, which enabled her to find volunteers to mulch and do the excavating. Morgan reflected on her project's contribution to the Halley farm transition, **"It's amazing to be able to go for a walk down the road and not smell the chicken houses in production anymore. It is so nice to have fresh air and to be doing something that is giving back."**

After relocating from the Halley farm to her new home, Morgan was really proud of herself for this fresh start on her life and project. She felt that the project was tangible now that she moved it to the new location. **"It's been great to see how everything is unfolding, and to see it come to fruition is really rewarding."**