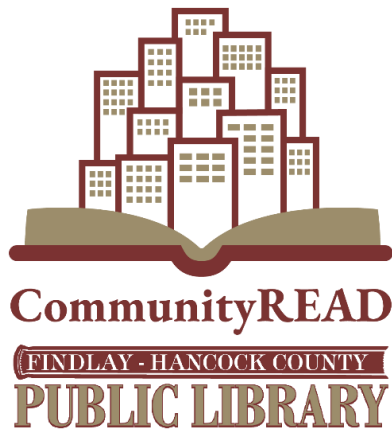


*Gaining Ground* – Discussion Questions



1. Why was Forrest's father initially so against the idea of his son becoming a farmer? How much do you know about farming? How much of what you know is a stereotype?
2. Forrest's first business venture – selling firewood – doesn't quite go as planned. Have you ever tried something new that didn't turn out the way you expected? Did you learn anything from the experience?
3. When Forrest took a bite of a fast food cheeseburger after a year of raising his own cattle, he vowed to never again buy factory-farmed "anonymous" (46) meat. Why did his mindset suddenly shift? What did he mean when he said the meat was "anonymous?"
4. Just getting started, Forrest had a lot of questions (and a lot of uncertainty) about grass-fed beef and raising animals on pasture. But the experienced farmer at the conference told him "You start...simply by starting" (58). Is there anything new that you want to try or start doing? What's holding you back? Would you be brave enough to "just start" if your livelihood depended on it?
5. "That's all well and good, if you're not trying to make a living. Sure, you can try all that natural, organic stuff for a while, but eventually everyone finds out it doesn't work" (81). The experienced farmer Forrest met while catering a party wasn't very excited about Forrest's ideas for using cow manure instead of fertilizer. Why do you think he was so resistant to the idea? If someone suggested that you change the way you do something, what would it take to convince you?
6. "Making the effort to buy locally was just that: an extra effort" (299). To make it easier to buy local food, Forrest put an unstaffed "honesty policy" store in the center of his farm. Do you know where food is grown in your area? Where is your local farmer's market? Who are your local farmers?
7. After several years, new markets, new products, and new helpers, Smith Meadows Free-Range Meat and Eggs finally started to increase its profits and customers. Not only that, but the land began to improve! What factors lead to their success? What lessons did they learn along the way?
8. "Every time we eat, we participate in farming" (ix). Do you think that's true? If so, how do your food choices affect farmers, your health, and the environment? Have you ever felt disconnected from food production, or have you always been aware of the effect your choices had?