

# **Berkshire Girl Relocated**

- Emma Szalewicz

Moving from the Berkshires to Marblehead was a big change. I plan to name all of the amazing places in the Berkshires. Ioka Valley Farm is in Hancock, Massachusetts, my hometown. Hancock is a ski town, home to the well known Jiminy Peak Resort. Established in 1936 and nestled among the Berkshire and Taconic Hills in the beautiful Hancock Valley is Ioka Valley Farm. The family farm is owned by the second and third generations of the Leab family. Don and Judy Leab, the second generation of the Leab family, run the farm alongside their son Rob, his wife Missy and their 16 and 12 year old kids, Josh and Martha. If you have never been, it is definitely worth the trip and will be a highlight of your Berkshire Adventure.

Ioka Farm is a farm of all seasons. Anytime in the year, you can always visit their animals in the barn. You can see Chewy, Brownie, Max, Marshmallow and the other bunnies, pigs, goats, such as Nellie, and sheep. There is also a herd of cows, chickens, ducks, llamas, and guinea hens. In the fall, the farm hosts pick-your-own pumpkin and Indian corn events and free hayrides. They also have pre-picked pumpkins, squash, and gourds for sale. In the gift shop they have homemade apple cider donuts, pumpkin whoopie pies, caramel apples, cookies, pumpkin accessories, decorations and more. Uncle Don's playground is open, too. It is filled with fun slides and more. In the sugar house, you can learn how Ioka makes all of their delicious maple products, including some of my favorites like maple butter, dark maple syrup, maple coated peanuts, maple lemonade, and maple cotton candy. The Calf-A is the old calf barn that was renovated into a cafe/restaurant and serves great lunch food in the summer and fall and amazing breakfast February through April.

In the winter, there are pick-your-own Christmas tree and pre-cut Christmas tree events, along with a variety of other decorations sold, including handmade wreaths. The first weekend in December is a very special weekend because Santa comes for Breakfast with Santa! Families enjoy pancakes with Ioka's maple syrup while visiting with Santa.

In the early spring, visit Ioka Valley Farm's Sugar House and watch the sap flow from the trees through transparent tubing, into the sugar house, and boiled in the evaporators. You can go talk to a real sugar maker and ask your maple questions. Spend some time enjoying the sweet aroma of the maple sap boiling in the massive evaporators. The Sugar House is open to visitors whenever the farm is boiling, typically mid-February through early April. Meanwhile, taste Ioka's pure Maple Syrup on their delicious homemade pancake, waffle, & french toast meals in the Calf-A. The breakfast is a real "farm eating" experience, complete with choices such as buttermilk, blueberry, pecan, and chocolate chip pancakes, homemade corn muffins, bacon, sausage, homemade applesauce, and the Dream Sandwich. You definitely won't be disappointed when visiting Ioka Valley Farm, especially if you say that Emma Szalewicz sent you!