

Sara L. Werckle
Master Gardeners Book Club
August, 2018

Kimball, Kristin. *The Dirty Life: On Farming, Good, and Love*. 2010: Scribner.

A freelance writer moves from Manhattan to create an organic farm in upstate New York.

When she met her future husband, Mark, Kimball was working on a story about young farmers going local and organic. The two eventually fell in love, married and moved to Essex, N.Y., to take stewardship of a 500-acre derelict farm, with dreams of making it into a community-funded agricultural project—not just vegetables, but also grain, dairy, and meat. Following their utopian vision, they began raising draft horses, milked cows by hand, ran a forge and created their own energy and resources. As Kimball chronicles that first year in supple prose, the farm takes on vivid form, with the frustrations balancing the satisfactions and the dark complementing the light. Throughout the book, the author able describes the various trials and tribulations involved in building a sugaring sled, treating the cattle for mites, dealing with flies and rats, and finding the old-fashioned tools required to work with draft horses—at an auction of Amish implements, which “looked like a ZZ Top tribute band convention, all long beards, dark suits, and shades.” The couple often warred with each other. Kimball is a passive-aggressive disputant, Mark a tenacious arguer, but both think they are right. “I had come to the farm with the unarticulated belief that concrete things were for dumb people and abstract things were for smart people,” writes the author. She soon realized, however, that “there’s no better cure for snobbery than a good ass kicking.” Finally, when the harvest comes, “you feel insanely rich, no matter what you own.”